

49. Uptake of e-government services

Citizens and businesses increasingly prefer and use digital channels to interact with governments. The online provision of public services increases access and provides greater convenience for users, while reducing costs for all involved, including governments. For these reasons, governments around the world invest significant resources in the delivery of online services, particularly in the current context of fiscal austerity when they are trying to do more with less. Ensuring the cost-effectiveness of these investments relies heavily on the uptake of e-government services by citizens and businesses.

Citizens' use of online services has increased in recent years in all OECD member countries monitored by the European Commission while businesses' use has grown in most of them except Greece, Iceland and Norway. Businesses are still taking better advantage of e-government services than citizens (on average, almost double the amount of citizens' use). The relatively higher uptake of online services by businesses may be explained by the fact that in most OECD countries at least three-quarters of businesses with ten or more employees are connected to high-speed broadband, and that many government programmes either provide incentives for businesses to interact with them electronically, or make the use of digital communications mandatory for them for certain transactions.

Citizens' uptake of e-government services remains lower than expected even in the best-performing countries. In general, older people and persons living in rural areas are less likely to utilise the Internet to interact with government. Data show that Ireland, Denmark and Slovenia had the highest increases in the past five years in individuals' e-government usage, with the Nordic countries maintaining leading positions in usage. In contrast, individuals in Italy and Turkey show the lowest increases in usage.

Because access to the Internet is a prerequisite for the use of online services, a key driver for e-government uptake is the penetration of broadband infrastructure, but it is not the only one. In fact, despite growing levels of broadband penetration (over 50% of OECD households have high-speed broadband connections), the usage of online services has not improved much over time. One possible explanation is that vulnerable segments of society are unable to utilise digital channels due to lack of awareness or IT skills. Another is that the online services offered are not always responsive to individuals' needs. Even for countries with high levels of e-government sophistication, understanding and addressing user needs, and expanding the possibilities for interacting with governments is pivotal to reach the desired levels of uptake.

National strategies foresee a mix of measures to increase the use of public services online. Many countries are exploring new venues and multiple channels for accessing online services, e.g. post offices in the United Kingdom, public libraries in the United States, digital television in Portugal, or banks and pharmacies in Italy. The continued expansion and improvement of broadband and wireless infrastructure, as well as the extension of e-government services to mobile platforms (m-government) could help

increase the reach of e-government services. Furthermore, enhancing the use of online services requires the creation of incentives for citizens and business to embrace more e-government services (respecting the principle of equity in access), and the development of a marketing strategy to raise awareness of services and information digitally provided by governments.

Methodology and definitions

The indicators on citizen and business uptake of e-government services are based on data collected by Eurostat (for OECD member countries who are also members of the EU) and the OECD Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry (for the remaining OECD members). Both sources utilise the same indicators and questionnaire tools. The data are part of Eurostat's *Information Society Statistics Database* and the OECD's *ICT Database* which evaluate the share of citizens and businesses using the Internet to interact with public authorities. The e-government uptake by citizens' indicator measures the percentage of individuals (aged 16-74) who have used the Internet to interact with public authorities in the three months preceding the survey. Data are collected through Eurostat's annual *Community Survey on ICT Usage in Households and by Individuals*. The e-government uptake by business' indicator measures the percentage of enterprises using the Internet to interact with public authorities (only businesses with ten or more employees are included in the survey). Data are collected by national statistical offices based on Eurostat's annual *Model Survey on ICT Usage and E-Commerce in Businesses*.

Further reading

OECD (2009), *Rethinking e-Government Services: User-Centred Approaches*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

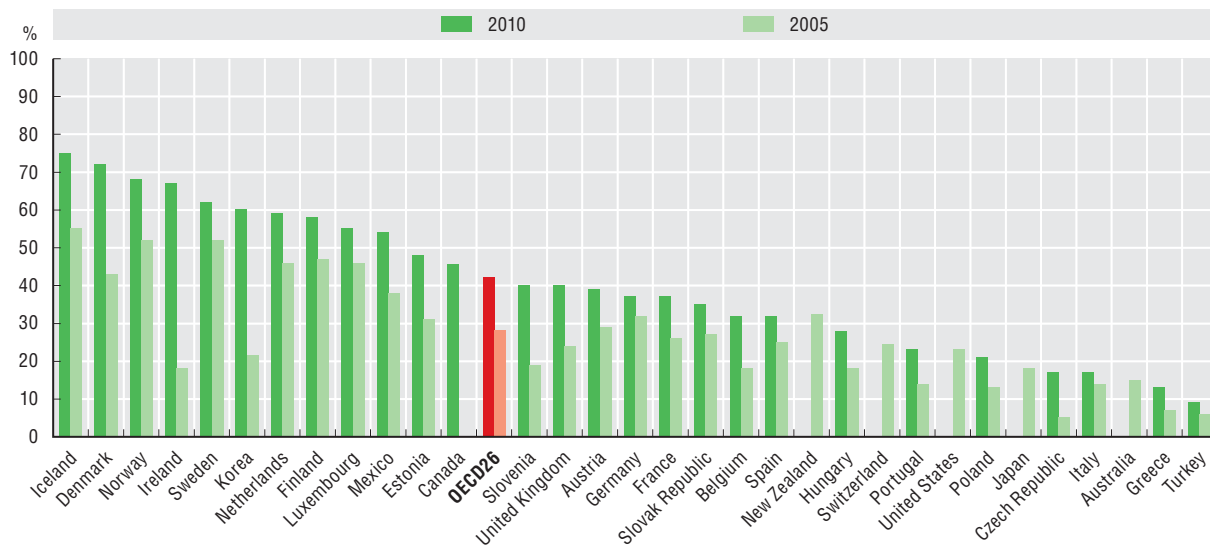
OECD (2010), *Denmark: Efficient e-Government for Smarter Public Service Delivery*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Figure notes

49.1: 2005 data for Denmark, Germany, Spain and France refer to 2006; 2010 data for Iceland refer to 2009; 2005 data for Canada refer to 2007; 2005 data for New Zealand refer to 2006; 2005 data for Switzerland refer to 2004; 2005 data for Australia and the United States refer to 2003. 2010 data refer to 2007 in Mexico. 2010 data are unavailable for Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United States, Japan and Australia and these countries are not included in the average.

49.2: 2005 data for Mexico refer to 2003. 2005 data for France, Luxembourg and Iceland refer to 2006; 2005 data for Turkey refer to 2007; 2010 data for Belgium, Luxembourg, and Finland refer to 2009; 2010 data for Korea refer to 2007. 2010 data unavailable for Mexico and Switzerland.

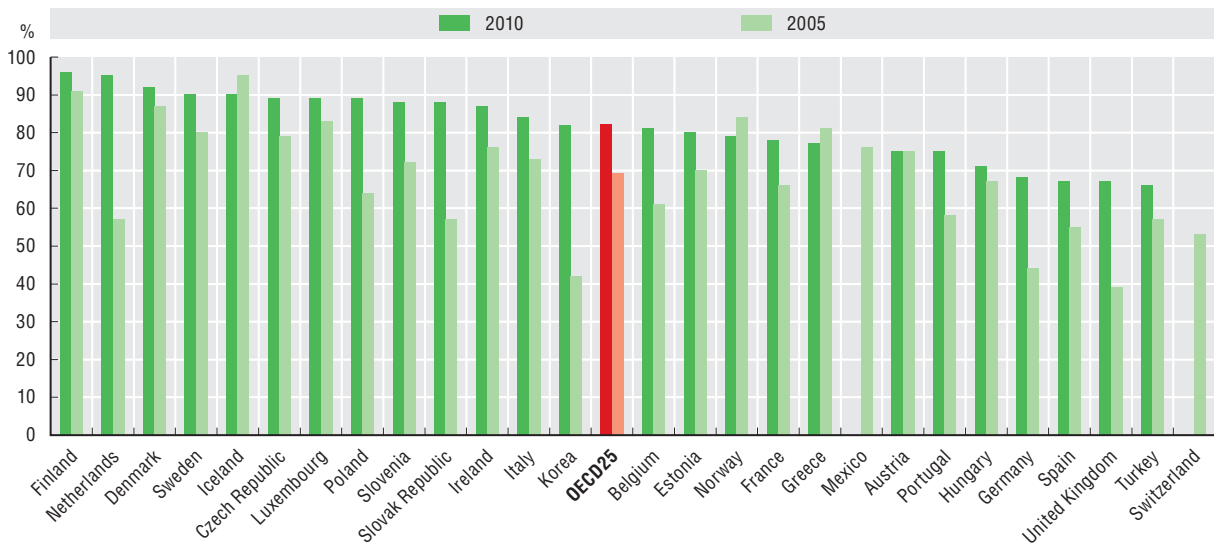
49.1 Percentage of citizens using the Internet to interact with public authorities (2005 and 2010)



Source: Eurostat, Information Society Statistics Database and OECD, ICT Database and Korean Survey by Ministry of Public Administration and Security on ICT usage.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932391298>

49.2 Percentage of businesses using the Internet to interact with public authorities (2005 and 2010)



Source: Eurostat, Information Society Statistics Database and OECD, ICT Database and Korean Survey by Ministry of Public Administration and Security on ICT usage.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932391317>



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