

## Quality of public services in information society in 2010

*Has the quality of public services improved and giving people the run-around stopped?*

Report of the National Audit Office to the Riigikogu  
Tallinn, 2 November 2010

### Summary of audit results

The National Audit Office carried out a follow-up audit to analyse whether or not using public services electronically is easy and convenient for people and whether or not service providers are prepared to offer services electronically without demanding needless approvals and documents. The services offered by the state and local authorities were included in the audit sample.

The National Audit Office analysed the quality of public services in information society for the first time in 2007. The audit indicated that the quality of public services required in information society is not always guaranteed, because there were no common quality requirements for public services or centralised supervision. After the audit, the National Audit Office prepared the set of quality requirements for public services or the e-State Charter in cooperation with e-service developers, politicians, representatives of civil society and specialists.

Use of information technology in society has spread considerably in the three years since the audit of 2007. The survey conducted by TNS Emor in January 2010 indicated that 76% of people aged 16-74 or approximately 777,000 persons use the Internet, and 90% of Internet users do it at least once a week. Use of the ID card, which can be used to identify persons remotely and to sign documents digitally, has also grown. The data of the Certification Centre show that 1,087,256 people held valid ID cards as of 17 January 2010, and 28% of them use the electronic services accessible with the ID card. This means that an increasing number of people consume or want to consume public services online to save time and money.

The National Audit Office found that irrespective of a few positive changes, the quality of provision of public services in information society has not improved significantly in comparison to 2007. Information about the services is still difficult to find on websites and people who use public services must still submit unjustified documents, proof of facts or go to administrative agencies in person. A positive example is registration of a person's place of residence, which has become considerably easier and user-friendlier than in 2007 as a result of the development of the state portal.

The problems found in the course of the audit were similar in state agencies and local government agencies (hereinafter LGs), but the situation in the provision of public services is rather different. State agencies have generally managed to guarantee the availability of sufficient information about services and their provision, and they do offer most services also electronically. LGs, however, often don't even publish information about the services they provide on their websites. LGs do not offer all the services in the sample electronically.

The National Audit Office believes that the quality of public services could be improved through the appointment of a coordinator of the development of public services and a person responsible therefor, establishing quality requirements that consider user-friendliness and exercising supervision over them. Several legal acts must also be updated in order to make the provision of public services electronically possible. The audit highlighted the problems that neither state agencies nor LGs have been able to resolve in three years:

- accessibility of information has not improved significantly in comparison to 2007. Information that is up-to-date and necessary for use of the services is often missing from the websites of LGs. Even if information does exist, it may be illogically structures and difficult to find;
- it is impossible for people who navigate the websites of administrative agencies to understand the manner in which public services are offered and what channels are used to provide them. It was also not explained how different channels can be used for consumption of services, e.g. how to fill in application forms and how to send the forms or one's data to an agency in order to apply for a service;
- various services can still not be used electronically, so people have to visit agencies in person in order to resolve their problems. Use of services with the widely used ID card is often limited, i.e. people still have to visit agencies in person at some point;
- people have to submit data that already exists in national databases to agencies if they wish to consume public services. Agencies generally do not use web forms pre-populated with the data held in various registers to make the use of services more convenient.

### Responses of auditees

The **Minister of Economic Affairs and Communications** takes all the recommendations made by the National Audit Office in the audit seriously. However, the response does not show whether the Ministry plans to make changes in its activities as a result of the recommendations made by the National Audit Office. The Minister said that the procurement 'Expansion of Opportunities for Participation and Involvement in the State's Decision-making Processes Using the Options Offered by Information and Communication Technology (e-Democracy)' organised at the initiative of the Ministry, which also covers the creation of the 'Good e-Service Statute' quality sign of the National Audit Office-s e-services standard 'Everyone's Rights in the e-State', will resolve a number of problems.

The Ministry believes that improving awareness as an instrument is more important than exercising supervision over public service providers. Improvement of awareness was launched within the scope of the annual action plans of the 'Increasing Awareness in Information Society' programme. Test training sessions in the 'Smart e-State' format started in 2010 and they include 53 training sessions, seminars and information events.

Neither the Minister of Economic Affairs nor the Minister of Regional Affairs supported the National Audit Office's recommendation to appoint a coordinator of public services in information society.

The **Minister of Economic Affairs and Communications** agreed to participate in a broader discussion of the development of public services in information society with the State Chancellery, the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of the Interior. The **Minister of Regional Affairs** noted in his response that he is planning to deal with the improvement of the quality of public services only in his area of government, i.e. in local authorities. The most important projects that will help to achieve this are the LG service portal and the processing environment of local authorities.

The **Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund** specified the facts given in article 48 of the report and noted that an x-path solutions was going to be completed soon, which will connect the information system of the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund with the register of persons liable for service in the Defence Forces.

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