

CHAPTER 5

E-Governance in Cyprus

The Government of Cyprus has made considerable progress in planning and implementing e-governance/e-government. As the website of its Department of Information Technology Services (DITS) explains:

The mission of the Department is to provide high quality Information Technology Systems and Services to the Government and Citizens. Information technology within the public sector will:

- *Provide timely revenue collection*
- *Provide more information to the Cyprus Government for better decision making*
- *Increase productivity*
- *Provide high quality services to the public.*⁴⁵

This chapter will outline the government's e-governance plans and the challenges it faces, on the basis of material taken from the government's website and interviews with officials.

The DITS is responsible for ensuring that the full potential of information technology is harnessed to support government policies and objectives. It was formed in 1980, as the Data Processing Services Department, and in 1997 was renamed the Department of Information Technology Services.⁴⁶ The department was formed as part of the implementation of the Public Service Reform Plan and functions under the Ministry of Finance.

The vision of the DITS⁴⁷

The department's vision is to create an efficient and effective public service which will be able to provide high quality services to the public, where possible without the need to visit any government department.

Its objectives are to:⁴⁸

- Provide high quality services to the public and private sectors;
- Enforce an effective legal framework, including an improvement in the collection of government revenues;
- Plan and control the government's activities more efficiently;
- Improve the productivity of the public service;

- Minimise the costs of operating the government service;
- Increase government revenues through the introduction of new revenue-earning services or the expansion of existing ones;
- Harmonise with the EU.

Organisational structure⁴⁹

The department consists of the Infrastructure Projects Division, the Information Systems Division, the Procurement Division and the European Union and Personnel Development Section.

The main responsibilities and operations of each division or section are described below:

Infrastructure Projects Division

- Promotes infrastructure projects (office automation system, government data network, government internet node, etc.)
- Develops websites for all government ministries and departments
- Provides technical support

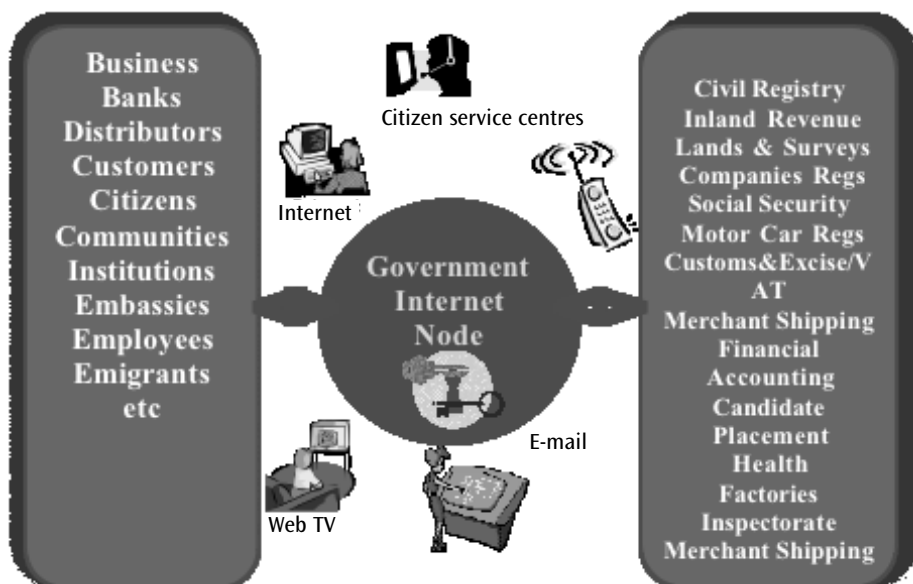
Information Systems Division

- Manages the Government Computerisation Plan (GCP) (infrastructure projects are excluded)
- Delivers information systems, via tenders or/and in-house development
- Provides operational support for all the information systems that are implemented in the various government ministries and departments
- Conducts requirement/scoping studies for government ministries and departments and provides them with the necessary hardware, software and services

Procurement Division

- Prepares tender documents
- Prepares technical requirements for the acquisition of hardware, software, turnkey solution systems and services
- Evaluates tenders
- Prepares and signs contracts on behalf of the government for the acquisition of hardware, software, turnkey solution systems and services

Figure 5.1. Department of Information Technology Services



- Represents the Director of the DITS at meetings of the Tender Board of the Ministry of Finance, the Central Committee of Changes, etc.

European Union and Personnel Development Section

- Manages EU issues
- Promotes and organises the education and training of DITS personnel
- Follows up the implementation of the GCP and prepares periodic and ad hoc project progress reports
- Prepares the annual budget report for all civil service IT projects
- Maintains and updates the department's standards
- Prepares preliminary studies and information system strategy studies
- Administers the government data model
- Promotes the creation of government data warehousing

The Cyprus Government computerisation master plan⁵⁰

In 1987 a strategic study was carried out to examine the government's information needs and to identify candidates for computerisation. In March 1989, the Council of

Ministers approved the GCP based on the recommendations of the strategic study.

In 1998, the Council of Ministers approved a revised version of the GCP. Rapid technological changes, more demanding users and EU directives necessitated the revision of the plan to include new infrastructure and strategic projects, and the adjustment of the national information services strategy to the new technological environment.

The GCP is not static and depends on the latest technological advances, political decisions, IT needs of ministries, departments and services, needs of the general public and EU directives.

E-government aims and objectives⁵¹

The GCP aims to:

- Provide turnkey solutions (strategic systems) for government ministries, departments and services;
- Create the infrastructure for the interconnectivity of all the systems through the government data network.

The GCP aims to achieve:

- ***One computer terminal per desk:*** All civil servants will have a computer terminal at their desk, which will provide access to the various government information systems and databases they need to perform their duties.
- ***A paperless working environment:*** Through the office automation system, all formal documentation will be processed in electronic form. Filing procedures and the transmission of information between the various ministries, departments and services will be done electronically and thus simplified.
- ***Global communications:*** Each civil servant will be able to communicate with other civil servants in any other government office, including overseas offices, via their computer terminal. They will have access to the internet for global communication and to all publicly available information and services.
- ***Providing services via the web or through other electronic channels – e-government:*** E-government will be promoted in order to offer high quality online services to the public, via the web or through other electronic channels, thus creating dynamic, user-centred government.
- ***Data integration and consistency:*** With the interconnectivity of the various systems, data integration and consistency will be achieved.
- ***The harmonisation of the information systems of the Cyprus Government with EU information systems.***

E-government planning⁵²

The GCP is to be completed in three phases:

Phase A includes the implementation of the GCP application projects. Most of these information systems have been completed and are in full production.

Phase B includes the development of the infrastructure projects in order to achieve the interconnectivity of the various information systems. These projects have been completed and they are now at the roll-out stage.

Phase C includes:

- The interconnectivity of information systems over the government data network;
- The provision of internet services in the public sector which will allow civil servants to communicate within the government (through the intranet), with external users or vice versa (via the extranet);
- The office automation system roll-out in all ministries, departments and services;
- The development of web-enabled systems based on the EU action plan in order to provide high quality online services to the public. Existing information systems are to be redesigned and enhanced so that they will also be available to the public via the web;
- The development of government data warehousing;
- The creation of the e-government infrastructure which includes:
 - the government portal, through which the public will have access to various government information and services from a single point of entry, based on the life-event cycle
 - the Government Gateway, which will provide security, authentication, encryption and decryption services

Completed strategic projects⁵³

1. Computerisation of the Social Insurance Department (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance)

To develop a computerised system for the Social Insurance Department, covering registration of employers and insured persons, collections of contributions, proceedings against defaulters, adjudication and payment of benefits, and the production of statistics and reports.

2. Computerised integrated land information system (Ministry of the Interior)

To develop and implement a computerised system to support the operations of the Department of Land and Surveys. The system will integrate two components: a spatial

legal/fiscal component and a spatial digital cadastral database/survey database (GIS). The system will support the establishment of a National Land Information Centre capable of exchanging data with other government departments, local authorities and public utilities.

3. Office automation system

To provide an automated system within the Ministry of Finance and the DITS that will support enterprise-wide document management services and the control of work-groups and workflow.

4. Computerisation of the Road Transport Department (Ministry of Communications and Works)

To develop and implement a computerised system to support the operations of road transport, the police, and customs and excise in relation to vehicles, drivers, driving licences and vehicle inspection.

5. New tax administration system (Ministry of Finance)

To develop a computerised system for the Inland Revenue Department, including the administration of tax returns and the issue of assessments. The system has improved the quality of services provided to the public, as well as reducing delays in tax assessment and collection.

6. Companies registration system (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism)

To provide an automated system for the Companies Section and Partnership and Business Names Section of the Department of the Registrar of Companies and Official Receiver.

7. Millennium safeguard

The hardware and software of all systems were upgraded, adjusted or replaced to secure compatibility with the year 2000.

8. Candidate placement system (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance)

To provide a computerised system to support the Candidate Placement Section of the Department of Labour, covering registration of candidates and vacancies, matching candidates with vacancies, monitoring interviews and the provision of statistics.

9. Factory inspectorate system (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance)

To provide a computerised system to support the major activities within each functional area of the Factory Inspectorate Section and to decentralise and simplify related activities, leading to a more productive and efficient environment.

10. Computerisation of the Social Welfare Services Department (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance)

To provide a computerised system for the Social Welfare Services Department covering case histories, personnel records and institution profiles, prioritisation and

scheduling of social workers, reports and statistics, public assistance assessment and payment, programme budgets and payments tracking.

11. Civil registration system (Ministry of the Interior)

To computerise the civil registration functions of the Ministry of the Interior, including the issue of birth and death certificates, ID cards and refugee booklets, passports and travel documents, and electoral booklets, as well as the management of elections, compilation of statistics and reports, and maintenance of a central civil registry database.

12. Government data network

The government data network is a broadband network based on ATM/frame relay technology over which all government systems will be interconnected so that they can exchange information utilising web workflow technologies.

13. Customs and excise system (THESEAS) (Ministry of Finance)

THESEAS is the first e-government application in Cyprus. It is also the first fully integrated web-enabled customs system in Europe. The system is currently in production and is fully in line with EU requirements. THESEAS is designed to enable traders to connect to the system via the internet for the electronic submission of cargo and import operations. It also supports electronic payment of customs duties through the banks.

14. Computerisation of the Co-operative Development Department (Co-operative Societies Supervision and Development Authority)

Provides a computerised system that maintains monthly and yearly statistical data societies in relation to their members, employees, committee members, loans, general assemblies, arbitrations and liquidations.

15. The precision alternative (Ministry of Health)

To provide a computerised system to support the management of patients and related records in all hospitals and rural health centres. The system covers in-patients, out-patients, waiting lists, diagnostic activities, equipment and stock management, personnel and duty rostering, accounting, costing and statistics.

16. Government internet node

The aim of the project is to provide an interface between government information systems and the internet. It will provide the hardware platform for a government access node to the internet to allow civil servants to communicate with external users and access information and other systems; it will also allow external entities to communicate with the government and to obtain selected services. The node will provide technical support to government users and define relevant standards and procedures.

17. Merchant shipping System (MARCOS) (Ministry of Communications and Works)

To provide an integrated and automated system that will enable the Department of Merchant Shipping to carry out all its responsibilities, including the provision of services to its customers, to the same or higher standards as other flag-state administrations.

18. Integrated financial and management accounting system (Treasury Department)

The aim of the project is to provide a central accounting system for use by the Treasury Department with online links to all government departments to facilitate a common integrated approach to central accounting functions. It provides improved services to all parties involved and better management, control and monitoring of the government's financial activities.

Current strategic projects⁵⁴

1. IS strategy study (Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment)

To identify the requirements for implementing various computerised systems to support the operations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment. They include a water pricing system and an integrated administration and control system.

2. Courts administration system (judicial)

To provide a computerised system to support the administration of the courts of the Republic of Cyprus. The system will cover the planning and scheduling of court hearings, tracking and monitoring of cases, recording and tracking of court decisions, and the production of statistics and reports.

3. Legal information system (judicial)

A web-enabled system that gives access to all judgments, laws, regulations and other legal material to judges, lawyers, government officers, other external entities and the public.

Questions and answers on electronic governance⁵⁵

1. What are the main objectives of your government's plans on e-governance (service delivery, administrative, public involvement, etc.)?

- *To deliver information and services to citizens and businesses more effectively, cheaply and conveniently*
- *To assist in the integration and collaboration of data and information systems within and between government organisations*

- *To improve the processes within and between government organisations, leading to lower costs and improvement of services*
 - *To increase transparency and lighten administrative burdens, both for citizens and businesses*
 - *To enhance democratic procedures and involve citizens in decision-making*
2. What are the priorities among these objectives? Is there a sequence of objectives, and which are receiving the most attention?
- *The e-governance Action Plan strives to achieve all the above objectives, with particular emphasis on delivering information and services to citizens and businesses more effectively, cheaply and conveniently*
3. What benefits does your government anticipate will result from enhanced e-governance? Is the process driven by government or the wider society?

Anticipated benefits:

- *Increasing public sector productivity*
- *Efficiency, transparency and quality of service within administrations, and between administrations and citizens*

The process is mainly driven by government; however, objectives set are in compliance with the objectives of the i2010 initiative for a European information society, and in line with the competitiveness and efficiency targets set in the Lisbon Strategy.

4. Which of your government's e-governance objectives has proved to be the biggest challenge (the most costly, time-consuming, complicated or disruptive)?

The biggest challenge is to improve the processes within and between government organisations, leading to lower costs and improvement of services, i.e. the re-engineering and simplification of processes has been the biggest challenge as, most of the time, a complete transformation of organisational structures and change in people's attitudes are required.

5. What are the biggest implementation challenges in achieving enhanced e-governance (suppliers, installation, training, testing, etc.)?

The challenges have mostly been organisational, rather than technical, as follows:

- *Organisational changes required to implement e-government services fast and effectively, e.g. business process redesign needed prior to the implementation of any e-government initiative*

- *Mindset/staff attitude changes were required to implement e-government services effectively and to maintain sustainability, i.e. develop strategies and change management processes that focus on changing deeply ingrained behaviours*
 - *Acquisition of the different skills (not only ICT skills) which are needed by managers and staff at all levels to govern and manage change*
6. How does implementation compare with your government's official plan on e-governance? Have any of the timelines, milestones or priorities been adjusted as experience accumulates?

Accumulated experience from the implementation of e-government projects has helped us to adjust our initial plan, especially with regard to putting more emphasis on organisational transformation aspects and on better promoting the new e-services launched, so as to increase awareness of e-government services offered, as well as to increase public trust. A good example of this is the road transport web-enabled system, whereby the new e-services were successfully promoted and as a result were used by citizens. It is worth noting that the EU report regarding the 6th measurement web-based survey on electronic public services, which was carried out for the European Commission by Capgemini shows Cyprus among the top four European countries offering car registration e-services. (This report was released in June 2006.)

7. How have the political stakeholders (general public, politicians, bureaucrats, special interest groups, etc.) responded to the prospect of increasing e-governance? Has there been any resistance, and who are the biggest users?

Most stakeholders have responded positively to the prospect of increasing e-governance, with the exception of some resistance posed by staff to changing the 'way they have been doing things over the last years'. However, change management initiatives are promoted that focus on cultural issues and closely associate public employees as full partners of the change process, so as to get them on board and ensure that the e-government project is successfully implemented.

The general public has responded positively to the prospect of increasing e-governance. However, the Cyprus Government adopts a multi-channel approach whereby options are provided to citizens with regard to service delivery channels. As a result, over the past year, three one-stop-shops or citizens' service centres have been set up, offering a series of services from one point of contact, in parallel to e-government projects providing services online.

8. How is support within your government mobilised in support of enhanced e-governance (planning committees, response to feedback, etc.)?

Key IT infrastructure and strategic projects are included in a revised version of the Cyprus

Government Computerisation Plan, which has been approved by the Council of Ministers. The plan includes, among other elements:

- The development of web-enabled systems based on the EU Action Plan to provide high quality online services to the public. Existing information systems are redesigned and enhanced so that they will also be available to the public via the web.
- The creation of the e-government infrastructure which includes:
 - The government portal (www.cyprus.gov.cy), through which the public has access to various government information and services from a single point of entry, based on the life-event cycle
 - The Government Gateway, which will provide security, authentication, encryption and decryption services

Any new IT project, including e-government projects, is submitted to the Executive Board for Computerisation to gain approval and support prior to its initiation.

The Cyprus Government is also now considering setting up specific administrative structures and mechanisms for ensuring the successful implementation of information society initiatives, i.e. creating a permanent advisory committee and other committees. This proposal has been elaborated in order to enhance strategic policy-making and co-ordination in the area of information society, including e-government, given the fact that information society-related initiatives are of an encompassing, cross-ministry nature and, in most cases, are unnecessarily fragmented.

9. Have all the anticipated benefits from e-governance actually been realised? Were costs lowered, efforts co-ordinated, productivity raised, etc.?

Some benefits from e-governance have already become apparent, e.g. efforts are now more co-ordinated and fewer staff are required in the front office. There has also been an improvement in the flow of information and communication in the departments that have implemented e-government projects and employees are now more ICT aware.

More benefits are expected to be realised in the long term. However, it should be noted that the outcomes of e-government projects, in terms of value for money, public value and the overall contribution to good governance, are usually difficult to assess.

10. Have there been any detriments or drawbacks from enhanced e-governance? Were there occasions when costs exceeded benefits, was complexity ever increased or was training or technology too expensive?

None.

11. What important lessons have been learned from the process of enhancing e-governance? For example, is more money, planning or time needed?

The important lesson learned from the process of enhancing e-governance is that most failures of e-government projects are not technical failures, but organisational. As a result, to ensure successful implementation of e-government projects, one needs to place strong emphasis on:

- *Strong leadership at different levels to provide a strategic vision*
- *Gaining management and user commitment*
- *Putting in place effective project co-ordination and change management processes*
- *Re-skilling personnel, to anticipate the changes that accompany e-government initiatives and the new roles to be adopted*