

ICT as a Tool to Provide better Access to Public Information: The Case of Mexico

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IFAI

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- The most relevant component for the implementation of the Federal Law for Transparency & Access to Information (**LAI**) in Mexico has been the use of Information & Communication Technologies (**ICT**)
- LAI clearly establishes that *anyone* can request information from the Mexican government, whether or not you are a citizen of Mexico
- Three major information tools were developed to facilitate the exercise of these new information rights

- Federal Institute for Access to Public Information (**IFAI**): independent body charged with regulating, monitoring and enforcing the application of the LAI
- Executive Branch: 240 agencies, 2.8 million public servants, and 95% of the federal budget (state and local governments not included)
- Applicants can complain to the IFAI, who determines whether or not the initial agency response was appropriate; when applicable, IFAI mandates the disclosure of the information
- No need for lawyers or advanced technical knowledge

Information Request System - SISI

www.sisi.org.mx

- ❑ SISI makes possible to anyone to:
 - Request information from the Federal Government
 - Follow-up on the request
 - Retrieve the agency's response
 - File an appeal if the response is unsatisfactory
- ❑ Anyone can file an information request from anywhere, any time

- 15 million Mexicans have access to the Internet (15.3% of the total population of 105 million)
- June 2003 - October 2007: 250,000 information requests (95 % processed electronically)
- Substantial activities of the federal agencies: 8.7%
- Procurement and contracts: 7.8%
- Information on procedures for citizens: 5.7%
- Paychecks and salaries: 4.3%

Requests Statistics

Requests, responses, and complaints to IFAI, October 2007

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	TOTAL
ELECTRONIC REQUESTS	22,488	35,055	47,874	57,739	75,777	238,933
MANUAL REQUESTS	1,609	2,677	2,253	2,474	2,075	11,088
TOTAL REQUESTS	24,097	37,732	50,127	60,213	77,852	250,021
ELECTRONIC RESPONSES	19,831	31,744	42,673	51,169	65,356	210,773
OTHER MEANS (responses)	1,445	2,369	1,925	1,929	1,596	9,264
TOTAL RESPONSES	21,276	34,113	44,598	53,098	66,952	220,037
APPEALS FILED TO THE IFAI	635	1,431	2,639	3,533	3,977	12,215

Información Mexicana - Infomex

www.infomex.org.mx

- ❑ SISI's technology is transferred to local Governments
- ❑ Infomex received in 2005 a grant from the World Bank
- ❑ It makes possible the adaptation of the system to local legislation

- A recent Constitutional extends the scope of the right to information: all local governments have to adopt ICT as tools to provide access to government records
- The main future goal is to implement Infomex in as many state and local governments as possible
- Currently, Mexico City and Chihuahua governments are using Infomex or are in the process of implementing the program. Infomex transfer to the states of Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Baja California and Nuevo León are underway

ZOOM - www.ifai.org.mx

- ❑ Advanced web-based search mechanism
- ❑ User-friendly: by keyword, date, or agency
- ❑ Anyone can consult the system of public information
 - Requests submitted to the Federal Executive Branch
 - Responses from Government Agencies
 - Complaints filed, IFAI's rulings and disclosed information

Transparency Website

portaltransparencia.gob.mx

- It is a web system that organizes, systematizes and homogenizes the presentation of information across agencies
- The web portal allows the user access to the majority of Executive Branch disclosure requirements in one single location
- Users are no longer required to consult each agency's individual website

- More than 3 million visits in 5 months of operation: 15,000 searches per day average
- 25% searches to the directory of public officials; 17% to salaries and benefits; 15 % to procurement and contracts; and 6% to authorizations, licenses and concessions

Main results: Trust

- ❑ ICT make possible to citizens to use their new information rights without having to travel to Mexico City or rely on an inefficient postal service: it greatly reduces transaction costs
- ❑ Many citizens distrust or even fear public authorities. SISI-Infomex provides users with a considerable “protection” against the perceived power imbalance between the government and the citizenry
- ❑ SISI-Infomex increases citizen confidence in requesting information

Main results: IFAI's perspective

- ❑ The use of electronic systems facilitates monitoring of agency compliance and reduces the cost of supervision
- ❑ IFAI can easily monitor trends and identify roadblocks to access, and quickly intervene to address problems as they arise
- ❑ ICT simplify and improve the IFAI's ability to supervise and enforce effectively and efficiently

Main results in bureaucratic culture

- ❑ The use of electronic systems facilitates monitoring of agency compliance and reduces the cost of supervision
- ❑ Dwelling on questions of *who* is requesting information and *why* is now eliminated
- ❑ No longer acceptable for government officials to deny access for fear of the motivation behind the request
- ❑ Reduces the tendency to provide information on a discretionary basis
- ❑ Bureaucracy views disclosure of information in a new, less threatening light

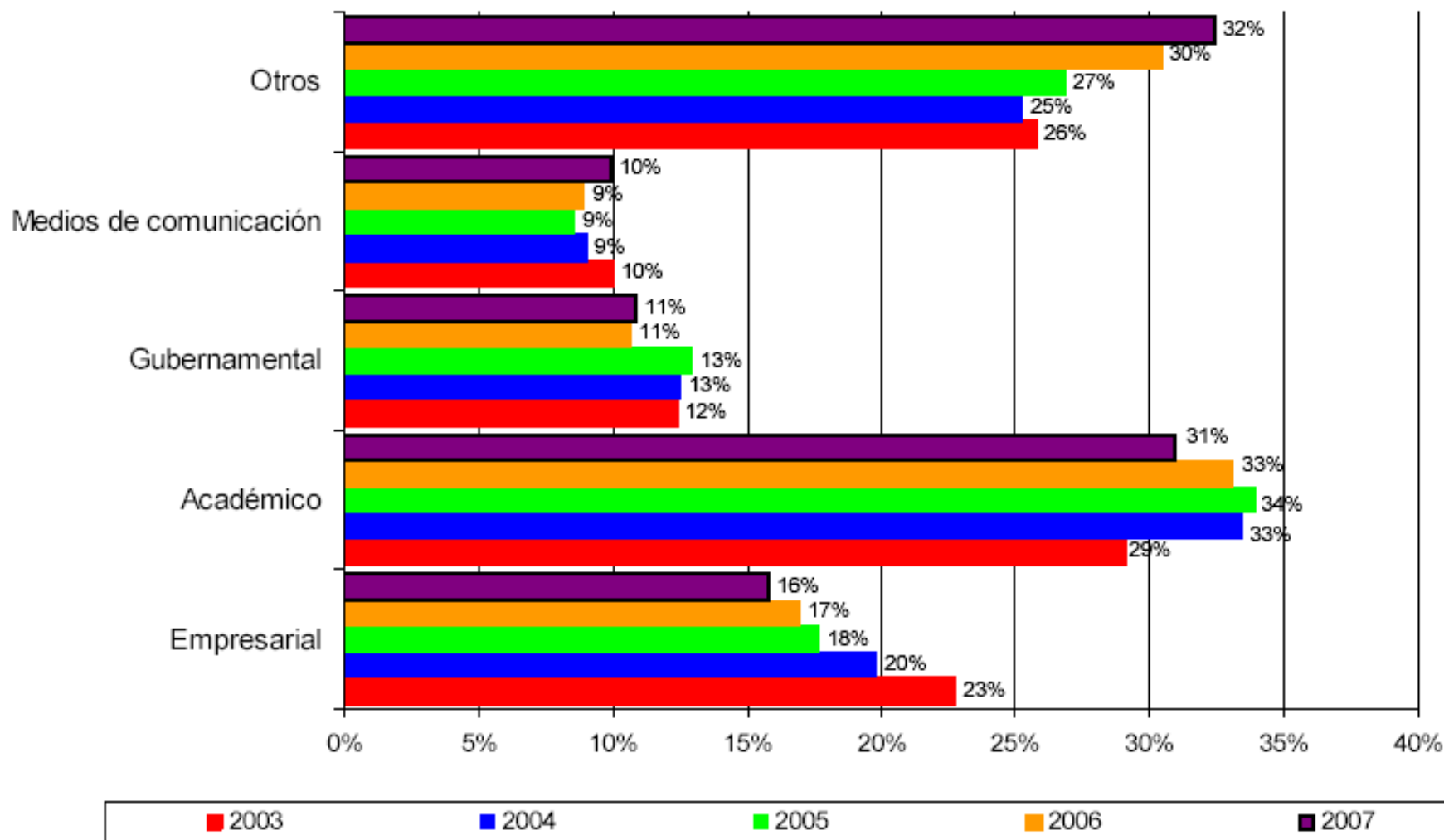
Who uses it ?

- ❑ Practically anonymous requests grants confidence to applicants. But an accurate profile of users is hard to get: 65% of users have spontaneously provided profile
- ❑ Available profile: the average applicant is a young metropolitan male, with an income and education higher than the national average: 64% are male, 55% live in the Metropolitan area of Mexico City, 54% are 20 - 34 years old
- ❑ 32%: academic sector; 18%: business sector, 12%: bureaucrats; 9% journalists

Requesters Professional Profile

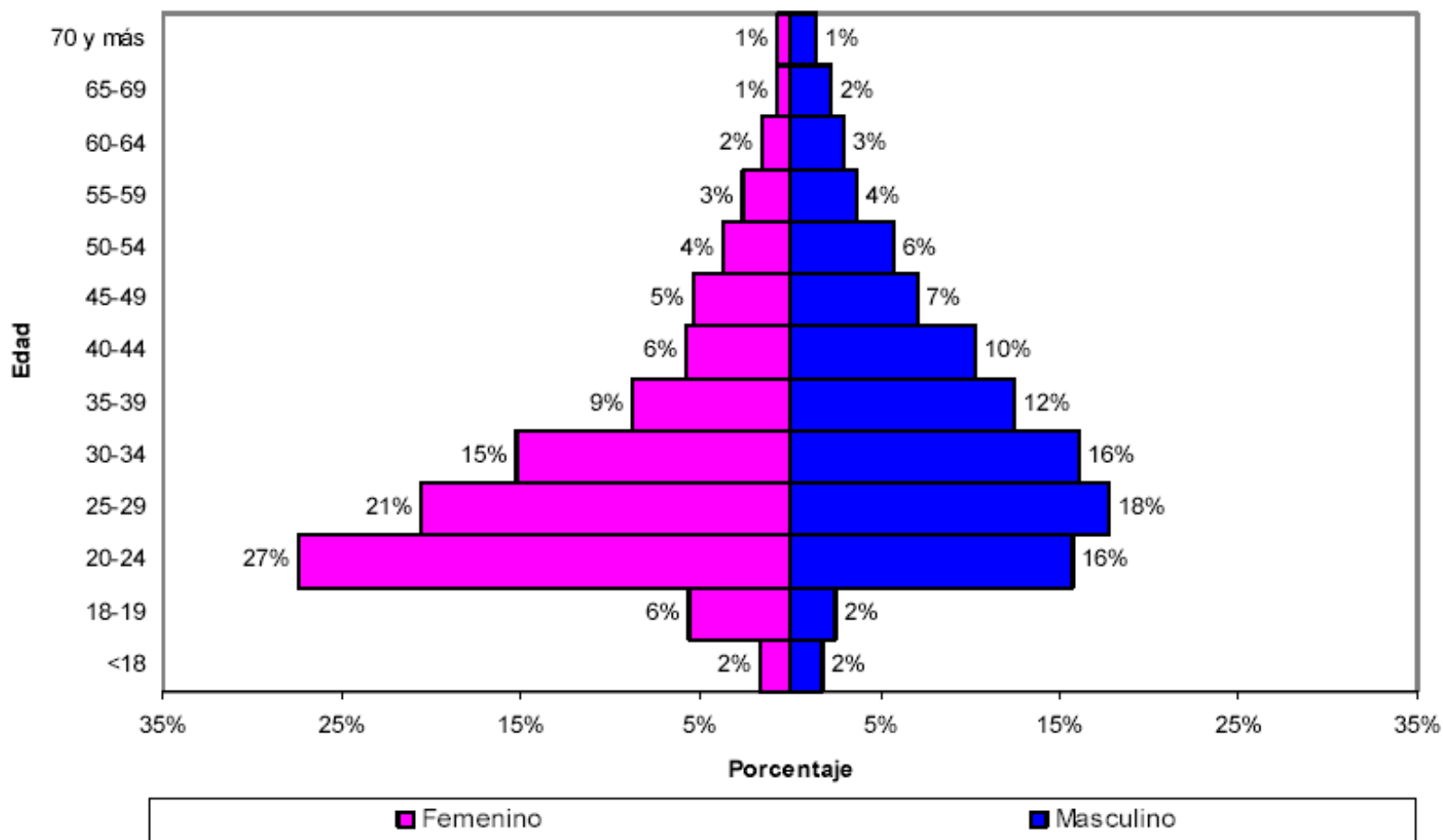
OCUPACIÓN REPORTADA DE LOS SOLICITANTES DE INFORMACIÓN

Al 31 de agosto de 2007



EDAD POR GÉNERO REPORTADO DE LOS SOLICITANTES DE INFORMACIÓN

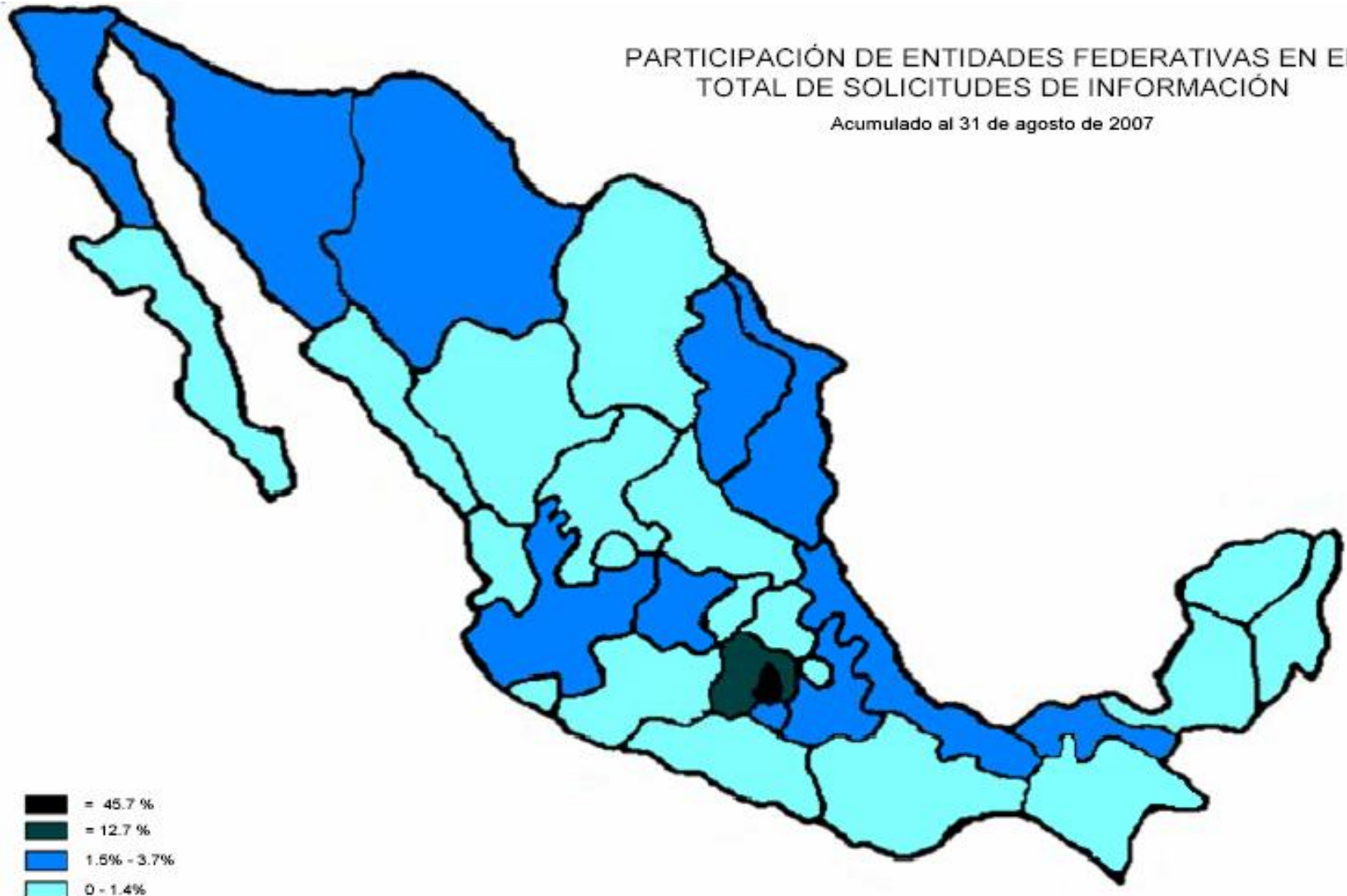
Al 31 de agosto de 2007



Requests - Regional Concentration

PARTICIPACIÓN DE ENTIDADES FEDERATIVAS EN EL
TOTAL DE SOLICITUDES DE INFORMACIÓN

Acumulado al 31 de agosto de 2007



Concentration of demand

- ❑ June 2003 - August 2007: there were only 92,000 SISI users and only five thousand accounted for 50% of the requests
- ❑ 450 users made 25% of the total number of requests
- ❑ 170 users made 17% of the total
- ❑ This means that less than 13,000 users have made almost two thirds of the total number of the requests at the federal level

User Concentration

October 2007

Ranks	Number of users	Total requests	
1 request	68,306	68,306	28.2%
2 requests	11,745	23,490	9.7%
3 - 5 requests	7,671	27,807	11.5%
6 - 10 requests	2,585	19,136	7.9%
11 - 20 requests	1,317	19,327	8.0%
21 - 50 requests	786	24,362	10.1%
51 - 100 requests	274	18,785	7.8%
101 - 200 requests	102	14,643	6.1%
201 - 300 requests	36	8,682	3.6%
301 - 400 requests	16	5,274	2.2%
401 and over	16	11,981	5.0%

Lessons & Impacts

- ❑ SISI greatly reduces the transaction costs for government agencies in this process
- ❑ ZOOM and Portal-Transparencia, by making it easier for interested parties to consult previously released public information, also reduces labor costs on government agencies to implement LAI
- ❑ Information requests have shed light on a large number of government operations previously shrouded in secrecy

Impacts

- ❑ Disclosure of records related to the decision-making process that resulted in the privatization of the banking system
- ❑ Disclosure of files related to federal investigations into crimes committed during the “dirty war”
- ❑ Disclosure from the Treasury Ministry of public funds managed as private trust funds (fideicomisos públicos)
- ❑ Publicity of government transfers to labor unions (teachers & petroleum workers unions)
- ❑ Formulas for the calculation of official economic projections

Impacts

- ❑ If requestors were required to identify themselves to the agency, or physically enter the government office to get the information requested, fear of reappraisals could have prevented them from submitting the request in the first place
- ❑ ICT has been the central strength behind information disclosure
- ❑ Mandatory rulings, independence and authority of IFAI have been significant too.

Weaknesses

- ❑ Complexity of ICT and its usability for a wide audience with differing levels of experience using computers and the Internet
- ❑ ICT for access to public information are currently limited to the Federal Government and a couple of States of the Union
- ❑ SISI does not make possible to verify the *quality* and *relevance* of the information provided by agencies
- ❑ Concentration of the demand undermines the positive effects of the right to know in Mexico

Challenge

- ❑ Encourage demand on the part of strategic social actors (investigative journalists, specialized civil society groups, businessmen)
- ❑ *Proyecto Comunidades*: seeks to identify the best strategy for dissemination of the right to know within marginalized social groups
- ❑ After two years of activities, results indicate that these groups can be empowered by requested information, but a necessary condition is that their efforts be accompanied by a grass-root organization which they can trust

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Commissioner

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Access to Public Information
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