E-Government in Belgium is clearly positioned to deliver user-focused services, as Belgian citizens want the look and feel of a single public sector entity and the provision of integrated e-government services customised to their needs rather than to have to understand the complex division of responsibilities. E-government is recognised as a tool for wider public-sector reform.

Belgium already has internationally recognised examples to show: most importantly the transformation of the social sector administration through e-governance tools, and more recently the link of e-government services to administrative-burden reduction. Future transformation will be enabled by the common electronic identity card (eID) that has been adopted by all governments.

This report shows that the development and provision of the next generation of user-focused services will require the maximisation of synergies between the federal, regional and community governments and local authorities in Belgium.

It addresses the following issues:
• Monitoring of user needs and user satisfaction
• Refocusing of e-government to serve the entire public sector's interests and goals
• Marketing and promotion of e-government
• Concentrating on seamlessness, equity and responsiveness
• Creating a coherent framework for legislative challenges
• Improving the implementation capacity

This report is available in English only. French and Dutch translations of the Assessment and Proposals for Action are available separately.

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FOREWORD

We live in an age in which society is changing at the speed of light. Globalisation opens up minds, offers new perspectives but also creates challenges. People are overwhelmed with innovations and changes. They want to use these in a positive manner in their personal and professional lives and so expect the authorities to provide a suitable framework aimed at ensuring that such innovations have as beneficial an impact as possible on their family lives, professional activities and personal well-being.

In recent years, new technologies, and in particular electronic mail and the Internet, have brought about a real revolution on all fronts. Enterprises and private individuals have adopted these technologies into their day-to-day activities. The authorities have also incorporated them into their internal and administrative practices. More important still, these technologies have been used to improve services to the public and to businesses. This applies to informing the public as well as to communicating with private individuals and enterprises.

Setting up such services, delivering better government through e-government, requires a sound technical infrastructure and an approach based on customer needs in terms of speed, transparency, efficiency and access. Data relating to private matters must be protected. E-government also requires an integrated approach to ensure that citizens do not get lost in a maze of procedures preventing them from accessing the services to which they are entitled.

Having benefited from long experience of public governance and good practice in relation thereto, the OECD is in a good position to use peer reviews to evaluate the state of e-government in its Member countries.

Here are the results for Belgium. This study, and the strengths and weaknesses identified therein, will without doubt become the starting point for the further development of e-government in Belgium. All the authorities concerned will have to face up to this challenge, but they know that they can benefit from the analysis and recommendations of the OECD. E-government can only grow in importance, and this study will constitute a useful tool for its continued development in Belgium.

Chris Hoornaert
Belgian Ambassador to the OECD
## Table of Contents

**Belgium – Assessment and proposals for action** p.5  
### Introduction  
### Background  
### E-Government challenges  
- Systematically monitor user needs and user satisfaction  
- Refocus e-government to serve whole-of-public sector interests and goals  
- Increase marketing and promotion of e-government  
- Improve seamlessness, equity and responsiveness  
- Create a more coherent framework for legislative challenges  
- Improve implementation capacity  

**The OECD peer review methodology** p.19  
### The review process  
- Reports and official documents  
- OECD survey of e-government in Belgium  
- Interviews with government officials  
- Peer review meeting  

Independence, neutrality and verification of inputs  

**Info on E-Government** p.22  
### About E-Government Studies at the OECD  
- OECD e-Government Study of Belgium  
- e-Government at the OECD  
- Contact details
ASSESSMENT AND PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, e-government in OECD countries has often emerged from one of two policy areas: a broader Information Society policy, or a more technically focused public sector ICT policy. In addition, more recent experience has shown that ICT use within the public administration has changed ideas about how tasks are handled or could be handled. Political questions have been raised with regard to division of responsibility among public authorities and levels of government – and political solutions must be found. No longer seen as primarily a technical issue dealt with by ICT professionals, e-government has become a strategic public governance issue supporting and enhancing change in the public sector. In other words, OECD countries are increasingly using e-government as a tool for public sector transformation.

Common priorities for the Belgian governments are to improve the user-focus of e-government by providing higher-quality, seamless e-government services, and to increase user take-up of these services. This is a particular challenge in a federal country, where power is balanced between the centre (the federal level) and the decentralised levels (regional, provincial and/or local levels). Political discussions are sometimes required to determine which of these separate entities has responsibility for specific policy areas and concrete activities.

The Belgian governments asked the OECD to review e-government policy and to make proposals for action on how the governments can specifically improve user centricity and co-ordination issues.

Background

E-Government development in Belgium began to take off at the end of the 1990s. E-Government programmes grew in response to the rapid development of the Internet and increased use of ICT, also seen in other advanced e-government OECD countries. E-Government development has been dispersed throughout the governments, with significant differences in approach, scope and speed due to considerable variations in size of administrations and resources dedicated to e-government.

With respect to full online availability of services for businesses and citizens, Belgium has recently considerably improved its position in international benchmarks. According to the European Commission Benchmark of European Online Public services, Belgium evolved from a fully online availability of 50% in 2006 to 60% in 2007. In a wider European Union comparison of online sophistication of basic public services for businesses, Belgium ranks among the leaders.

User take-up of e-government services in Belgium is a challenge, as in other OECD countries. The most significant barrier to high user take-up in the short term is Belgium’s digital divide. A persistent hard-to-reach 30% of citizens do not see the value in using ICT in the near future. Despite considerable growth in broadband take-up, Belgium has a comparatively low total Internet penetration, ranking 23rd out of 30 OECD countries (see Chapter 2). Statistics reveal significant differences in access, use, and sophistication of usage across regions, age groups, and socio-economic groups.

The Belgian federal state structure, as defined in its Constitution, establishes equality among all governments. There is no hierarchical relationship between Belgian governments – and each government has its own legislative and executive powers in its field of competence, and its own parliament and government to exercise these powers.
Each government in Belgium is setting up e-government programmes, and bodies dedicated to e-government services have been created at each government level. However, these organisations generally have “support” roles and narrow responsibilities. Their services must be requested.

There are varying degrees of political and administrative leadership and support for e-government in the Belgian governments; incentives for public sector institutions to work together to exploit the benefits of e-government are limited. All governments face a similar challenge: to improve collaboration and coordination within their jurisdictions. Mechanisms are required to ensure medium- to long-term commitment to the development of integrated services.

- **At the Federal Government** level overall responsibility for broader public policy goals – such as transformation of the public sector and the Information Society – are spread across three key institutions: the Federal ICT Ministry (Fedict), the Federal Agency for Administrative Simplification, and the Federal Ministry of Economy, SMEs, Self-employed and Energy. Synergies among these institutions are limited and could be improved to allow for clearer ownership of end-to-end business processes. The Copernicus Reform has not led to a complete centralisation of e-government competences in a single federal body, and e-government responsibility is still a part of each federal ministry’s portfolio. Each ministry manages its own e-government budget and strategies. Fedict is still largely perceived as a “back-office” institution, technically supporting other federal-level bodies. It cannot require others to use its e-government applications, but rather has to convince potential customers with the features of its services such as reliability, cost-efficiency, and security.

- In the Flemish Region, e-government and administrative burden reduction are now considered as one integrated policy objective; however, the Better Administrative Policy reform (**Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid** or "BBB reform") has resulted in a fragmentation of the public sector in the Flemish Region. This fragmentation has made it considerably more difficult to achieve the goal of integrated e-government. However, the last couple of years major steps forward were nevertheless made by CORVE, the Flemish E-government body towards this goal, such as the successful development of the MAGDA platform. The necessary capacity to support user-focused e-government development and implementation may still be lacking, especially due to the large number of public institutions at the regional, as well as the local, level.

- The Walloon Region displays strong leadership for user-focused e-government development and implementation. Direct supervision by the Minister President has ensured strong political leadership. The current action plan lays out ambitious, user-centric objectives; it defines a holistic vision of its future administration, taking into account a wide range of related matters such as cost-benefit of e-government for administrative burden reduction, e-inclusion, and the efficient transformation of government.

- The Brussels-Capital Region faces the challenge of reconciling different viewpoints on e-government and related matters within its multiple governance structure: every political actor tends to prioritise personal objectives and budgetary choices. As a result, apparent divergences slow e-government projects and risk lowering their potential impact. Awareness about e-government must be increased, especially as the Region could – because of its high population density and the widespread presence of businesses on its territory – benefit from geographic advantages typical for urban agglomerations.

- Regarding the French Community, the responsibility for the implementation of the e-government strategy is assumed both by ETNIC and the ISA cell of the Ministry based on the strategic plan for e-government and administrative simplification 2005 – 2010. Re-use of
solutions developed by other governments seems to be increasing along with increasingly closer collaboration with the Walloon Region.

- The **German-speaking Community** benefits from adopting and reusing e-government solutions from other governments.

Designated e-government bodies support other entities in delivering e-services – but this collaboration is voluntary, not mandatory. Autonomous development of e-government solutions is prevalent throughout Belgian governments.

Formally, the Inter-governmental Co-operation Agreements define the framework for collaboration and co-ordination among Belgian governments, supporting a common prioritised goal across and within governments: delivering integrated services.

- Co-ordination within governments is ensured by the e-government bodies set up by the federal, regional, and community governments individually.

- Two Inter-governmental Co-operation Agreements for e-government (2001 and 2005) have been signed by the Federal Government and the regional and community governments, cementing formal commitments to e-government co-ordination efforts across governments. A co-operation agreement on administrative simplification was also signed in 2003.

The Inter-governmental Co-operation Agreements aim to compensate for the lack of formal co-ordination structures for vertical and horizontal discussion and management of policy implementation. Such agreements are rare. **E-Government is therefore one of the few policy areas where co-ordination is governed by formal agreements among all governments.**

**E-Government challenges**

Belgium’s governments are gradually realising the potential of ICT to modernise the public sector. Public sector reform has been competing with other policy areas that were high on the Belgian political agenda throughout the past years. Additionally, all Belgian governments have not linked e-government and public sector modernisation, leading to different approaches to public sector transformation:

- **From a political perspective, e-government is not always seen as a high priority in Belgium.** Compared to issues like healthcare and security, e-government is mainly viewed as a “technical” issue, rather than a strategic issue with high impact on the transformation of government that can ensure the delivery of priority policy areas.

- **From the financial perspective, Belgium faces an important fiscal crunch due to its ageing population, high unemployment and difficulties regarding the sustainability of public finances.** Despite considerable governmental efforts, the government debt/GDP ratio was still at 93.3% in 2005, among the highest throughout OECD countries. Reducing spending seemingly clashes with the goals of a classical welfare state. More budget surpluses will need to be generated during the coming years through a combination of sustainable measures (such as spending restraints and effective labour market policies); one-off measures must be avoided. Labour policies are crucial to reduce the relatively high unemployment rate of 7.2%, compared with the OECD average of 6.4%. Of particular concern are older workers and the participation of the younger generation in the active workforce. These needed economic actions are not clearly linked with the e-government as an issue on the political agenda.
Experience in OECD countries has shown that e-government can support government efforts to reduce spending and increase public sector efficiency and performance, as well as long-term policy effectiveness. Currently, financial pressures challenge all governments in Belgium – and all governments are playing a role in the modernisation and consolidation process. Therefore it will be crucial to for all governments to carefully balance future savings and gains generated by e-government with the investment costs of projects in the short run.

While all Belgian governments have created specific strategies and action plans for developing and implementing e-government, each defines the scope and pace for implementation of its e-government programmes. Each Belgian government has identified its own priorities, leading to different e-government outputs and outcomes across the Belgian state structure.

E-Government is now increasingly being included in major policy initiatives concerning administrative simplification and the development of the Information Society:

- **E-Government has mainly been positioned as a technical aspect of government reform.** ICT specialists have emphasised back-office restructuring, and the link between e-government and public sector reform has not been clearly defined. This has led to different approaches, hindering a more holistic view of reform efforts. E-Government can easily be positioned as a key tool for future reforms.

- **Recognition of the potential of ICT as a significant tool for public sector transformation and reform is gradually growing.** For example, the Walloon Region’s e-government body, *EASI-WAL*, is being consulted in ongoing public sector modernisation efforts in the region, based on its success in reducing administrative burdens. Experience in OECD countries has shown that e-government can support governments’ efforts to reduce spending and increase public sector efficiency and performance, and policy effectiveness.

- **The Federal Government has taken primary strategic responsibility for promoting the Information Society to citizens and businesses.** However, the governments’ successful coordinated approach – there is a National Action Plan for eInclusion (2006-2010) — to reducing the digital divide — alongside their individual actions – indicates room for further co-ordination efforts for user-focused e-government.

**Assessments and proposals for action**

Developing a user-focused e-government depends heavily on being aware of the different roles people have when interacting with public authorities and institutions – tax-payers, parents, voters, etc. This is important to consider to ensure that implemented e-government services respond users’ needs, and to simplify users’ interactions with public authorities.

Delivering user-focused e-government services requires the creation of a coherent system of tailored public services that meet user needs – whether users are citizens, businesses, or civil servants. From the point of view of governments, user-focused e-government is a priority and a main concern; for several years, political arguments have stressed ICT’s potential to enable a simpler and more accessible public sector. Goals are internal efficiency and effectiveness gains, as well as external improvements in the quality, accessibility, and customisation of services. A user-focused e-government therefore builds on the following principles:

- **Know users and their needs:** formally and regularly monitor user needs and expectations.
- **Customise services to user needs**: develop e-government services according to needs and expectations and establish multi-channel management strategies to meet customisation challenges.

- **Create the look and feel of one single public sector entity**: simplify, integrate, and standardise front and back offices (e.g. business processes, application navigation structures, databases, etc.) to enable the provision of seamless services from a public sector acting as one entity.

According to the OECD Survey of E-Government in Belgium (see Figure 1.4 on Key objectives for implementing e-government), Belgium is aiming to pursue e-government not as an end in itself, but rather as an enabler for wider public sector development. The survey suggests that e-government – at least at the policy development level – should increasingly focus on enabling administrative burden reduction, and other user-related goals. However, the survey results also indicate that efficiency gains remain the top priority; there is a risk of users coming second, especially when it comes to implementing concrete e-government actions.

OECD interviewees confirmed that the Belgian governments lack understanding of user-focused e-government, and have not focused on participatory e-government initiatives (such as online consultation, e-petitioning). Interviewees were conscious that the Belgian public sector lacks knowledge of user satisfaction with government and the services it provides. They felt, however, that the development of more user-focused services through e-government was a pressing priority across all Belgian governments.

Creating user-friendly e-government services and ensuring user take-up depends on giving users the look and feel of a single public sector entity by providing seamless services customised to user needs without regard to formal competences and responsibilities. The consequences will be front- and back-office integration requiring operational pragmatism and focus from parties across the Belgian public sector. Joining-up governments in the Belgian federal state structure is a question of ensuring a whole-of-public-sector approach.

Successful e-government development providing seamless services depends on whether Belgian governments are successful in achieving maximum synergies from their joint e-government development efforts. Users – whether they are citizens, businesses, or governments themselves – do not care about the structure and division of competencies within the public sector. They want targeted help when necessary. Creating the right environment among Belgian governments, and allowing each to reap the benefits of synergies, is about creating a coherent system of user-tailored public services. An increasing number of OECD countries are looking at ways to deliver “networked”, “joined-up”, or “seamless” government by transforming traditional administrations into collective multi-faceted bodies which interact with citizens, businesses, and government itself as a single entity.

Effective e-government environments that create results for the public sector depend on three main principles:

- **Achieving strong e-government synergies**: establish a common vision and a set of objectives.

- **Sharing resources – “mutualisation”**: agree to the principle of sharing resources and implement a number of building blocks.

- **Pragmatic outcome-focused engagement**: effectively use these building blocks and build the necessary capacities to deliver services.
Governments searching for e-government synergies must strive to comply with these principles to achieve a whole-of-public-sector vision for e-government development and implementation. Users benefit from the provision of a truly integrated and interlinked system of services, and the public sector and its institutions are enabled to reap the full benefits of their investments.

Systematically monitor user needs and user satisfaction

The Federal Government has in 2005 and 2006 monitored user needs through the Fed-e-View/Citizens surveys. The impact of these monitoring activities is not yet obvious, and systematic use of results in the development of governments’ e-government services is not apparent. This leaves each government with a limited knowledge of user needs and how to integrate them into the design and development of e-government services. Even though different Belgian governments have emphasised the importance of a user-focused approach, it appears that analysing and integrating knowledge on users in e-government services is in its infancy and needs to be developed further by all governments.

According to the Fed-e-View/Citizen study on user needs, priorities for Belgian citizens are:

- **Rapidity and flexibility** (in terms of location and time of access). Electronic services are seen as an advantage to Belgian citizens, particularly with respect to the efficiency increases they can bring. However, the convenience of any-time/any-place access must be complemented with the traditional channels currently available to citizens in order to increase the flexibility of the system.

- **User-friendliness of electronic services** is a key to citizens, who are willing to use electronic services if they provide an easier alternative to traditional channels. Digital literacy in general is also an important consideration, as many citizens are unfamiliar with the way to use government electronic services.

- **Personalised services** are crucial if the digital channel is to become popular in Belgium. Belgian citizens are more interested in accessing relevant, personalised services online, rather than learning the complexities of Belgian governments’ competences. In short, they are more concerned with services themselves, as opposed to which government agency is responsible for them.

The limited systematic monitoring and evaluation of user needs and the subsequent channelling of this knowledge into the development of e-government services has left Belgian governments with few possibilities for developing targeted e-government services, leaving each government to drive user-focused development efforts based on their current e-government development stage.

Related to user needs and satisfaction is the close monitoring of the digital divide. Research shows that the uptake of ICT in Belgium is comparatively low, posing a significant challenge.

Periodic surveys show that existing e-services do not provide high levels of user satisfaction to citizens. Of particular concern are:

- Non-interest in e-government services.

- The inability to find relevant information.

The OECD survey supports this perception and suggests room for improvement through the development of a multi-channel delivery strategy and the effective implementation of e-government in back-office processes for the whole public sector.
Proposals for action

- Belgian governments could consider acquiring a systematic basis on knowledge of user needs and channel this knowledge into the design and development of targeted e-government services, with the purpose of making these services more attractive to users and more adapted to their true needs. This would also strengthen communication with users and make them aware of the services and how they can benefit from using them.

- Belgian governments could strengthen their activities to reduce the digital divide by ensuring an efficient Belgian telecommunications market. Supporting programmes might also be implemented to motivate citizens to participate actively in the Belgian Information Society, and to ensure that they achieve the appropriate level of ICT skills and competencies and the necessary confidence in using those skills and competencies.

- Belgian governments could strengthen the strategic and operational links between their administrative simplification and e-government activities. Even though some Belgian governments are in the process of organizing themselves in that direction, the governments must jointly commit to combining these areas in order to achieve higher user awareness and satisfaction. Positioning administrative simplification as a key focal point of e-government activities could eventually result in a simpler and more transparent Belgian public sector.

Refocus e-government to serve whole-of-public sector interests and goals

Public administrations in OECD countries are under increasing pressure to improve efficiency and effectiveness of their services, as well as increase user satisfaction. Belgian governments could consider increasing the priority of harvesting the benefits of e-government investments. The basic philosophy behind e-government services is that demand will increase as applications are rolled out. In other words, e-government services are launched independently from user demands and generate user demands. This approach is difficult in relation to bottom-up thinking, where final products are designed from an end-users’ perspective.

Belgian governments do not yet dispose of the necessary resources to adequately monitor and evaluate e-government projects. Monitoring and evaluation of e-government could broadly cover: impact on public sector efficiency and effectiveness, impact on administrative burden reductions, user take-up, etc. Analysis of user demands and needs, and satisfaction surveys clearly indicate the following:

- Current assessments mainly cover citizens and businesses.

- Little information is available on the needs of governments in government-to-government e-services.

- User demands, needs, and satisfaction are not systematically assessed.

- User-focused e-government development requires bottom-up design of e-government services.

Evaluation of e-government outputs and outcomes by independent research institutes or private sector consultancies are mainly ad hoc and do not necessarily cover all Belgian governments. The lack of a common methodology for evaluation of e-government makes it difficult to compare results among studies.

Ownership of business processes and e-government projects can be fragmented throughout governments, potentially disrupting end-to-end ownership of e-government projects (from project
development to project execution, and actual service delivery and evaluation). E-Government decision makers are distanced from their (end-) users. Different actors tend to plan, implement and measure e-government, and synergies among them do not yet seem to be sufficiently exploited.

### Proposal for action

- In order to more effectively use knowledge about users and their needs, Belgian governments could jointly agree on and implement a common concept for monitoring and evaluation of user needs; this could include how such information can be systematically utilised in the design, development, and implementation of e-government services by each government. As part of a joint concept for monitoring and evaluation, a common “user charter” such as has been developed in the Netherlands could be developed as a tool for dialogue as well as the basis for a framework for monitoring and evaluation activities. Such a charter could become the foundation for a broader value-based discussion among e-government responsibles within the public sector as a whole.

### Increase marketing and promotion of e-government

Communication of e-government benefits is limited, both within administrations and externally towards users. OECD interviews indicated that benefits of a user-focused approach to e-government service provision have not yet been illustrated sufficiently.

Citizen involvement requires accessibility, transparency, responsiveness and accountability on the part of the government – and a desire or demand to participate on the part of the citizen. OECD interviewees confirmed that the Belgian approach is missing a broader understanding of user-focused e-government, and that participatory e-government initiatives (such as online consultation, e-petitioning) have often remained unrealised. Interviewees were therefore conscious of the Belgian public sector’s relatively low level of knowledge about user satisfaction with governments and services. They felt that development of more user-focused e-government services was a pressing priority throughout all Belgian governments.

Belgian governments have developed only limited channels of communication for implementing electronic participatory initiatives in order to engage citizens in policy development and implementation.

Belgian governments need a joint communications and marketing activity towards e-government users, especially citizens. All Belgian governments are experiencing low take-up of services, and citizens have limited knowledge of e-government services.
Proposals for action

- Belgian governments could consider strengthening activities with regards to electronic participatory initiatives as an incentive to provide an e-government service which could engage citizens and contribute to increased user take-up of other e-government services. A participatory approach could also be an alternative and more sustainable communication channel for politically engaged citizens, and a way for governments to broaden the possibility of informed dialogue with citizens.

- A joint and co-ordinated e-government communications and marketing effort by all Belgian governments could help increase awareness within the Belgian population and motivate potential users to use e-government services by all the Belgian governments. Likewise, a targeted e-government communications and marketing effort could be considered within each of the Belgian governments to ensure that common e-government visions, strategies, and values are effectively communicated in the public administrations themselves.

Improve seamlessness, equity and responsiveness

Belgian governments have successfully developed their own e-government strategies, with limited or no co-operation. Belgium’s federal governance structure demands careful planning for coordination within and between governments to avoid duplication of work and ensure coherence of e-government activities. Sharing good practices and concrete pilot programmes to identify “lessons learned” provides informed background for consensus and a coherent view of e-government development and its impact.

The governments generally develop e-government solutions without prior consultation with stakeholders and other governments, and afterwards provide these solutions to other potential users. This leads to the risk of incoherence in approaches, incompatibility and (semantic, organisational, and technical) interoperability, and redundancy of e-government building blocks. Efficiency losses are highly likely Belgium-wide. Enabling re-use of readily available components does not necessarily satisfy governments and cannot replace bottom-up sharing of application and experiences.

Belgian governments’ search for e-government synergies is formally exercised through the Inter-governmental Co-operation Agreements, which define the framework for co-ordination among Belgian governments. The Co-operation Agreements are narrow and mainly focused on technical co-operation for back-office integration, so broader public sector development has been undertaken individually within each government and its respective parts of the Belgian public sector. This limitation on formal co-ordination may keep the Belgian e-government landscape fragmented and incoherent, with limited possibilities of achieving in-depth synergies and proper integration of e-government into broader public sector transformation policies.

The operational weaknesses of the Inter-governmental Co-operation Agreements have forced Belgian e-government actors to find effective ways of circumventing the formal institutional frameworks of silo-based competences. This includes the apparently effective “grey zones” of informal meetings and get-togethers, which provide common ground for operational leadership and allow for informal consultations and negotiations among actors that are essential in the process of reaching consensus on joint projects and programmes.

The organisation of institutional responsibilities for ICT security policy is challenging in Belgium – it is spread over a number of authorities at the federal level, with limited apparent
coherence and co-operation, and no focal point for national policy development and implementation. As ICT security covers society-wide issues, clear leadership for policy collaboration and co-ordination across the Federal Government is necessary. As ICT security measures (technical, managerial, or organisational) are only as strong as the weakest link in the public sector, it is necessary to strengthen the co-ordination of both policy development and operational implementation across all Belgian governments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposals for action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgian governments could consider strengthening synergies based on a common vision and a set of common strategic goals. Operational e-government co-operation has been proven within specific projects and specific areas/sectors; there is a need to discuss, decide, and implement e-government pragmatically with the minimum political idealism to move towards a whole-of-public-sector approach and away from the current compartmental approach, as sometimes experienced today.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgian governments should provide users with e-services with a common look and feel. The political desire for customisation of e-government services should be considered at the presentation level only, and functionalities shared across the public sector. This will achieve a common look and feel towards users without regard to formal competences among the governments. Shared generic services among all governments could achieve the necessary economies of scale.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-operation should be enhanced at the programme level and must extend beyond the current Inter-governmental Co-operation Agreements to practical, rather than formal, issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter-governmental projects and programmes should be clearly defined. Areas with obvious common public sector value must be agreed upon, prioritised, developed, and implemented. Such areas are:</td>
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<tr>
<td>− eID services and applications.</td>
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<td>− A common public sector ICT security policy framework.</td>
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<td>− A shared governance model for authentic databases.</td>
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<td>− Shared applications and components.</td>
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<tr>
<td>− A common practical approach to information and data sharing respecting European legal frameworks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>As Belgian governments are focusing on mainly technical back-office issues (per the formal co-ordination agreement), it is necessary to improve the effectiveness and the outcomes of the formal co-ordination agreement. Belgian governments could also consider whether a jointly agreed and pragmatic approach to e-government in general could be extended to cover front-office integration; this would enable each government to deliver fully integrated, standardised, and seamless services which differ at the presentation level based on each government’s strategic goals for individualisation.</td>
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Create a more coherent framework for legislative challenges

To create end-to-end services, legislative/regulatory challenges need to be addressed across levels of government. OECD interviews confirmed that Belgian governments have made a deliberate, strategic choice to pass laws to support e-government goals and intentions on an as-needed and step-by-
step basis. All governments appear to have adopted a pragmatic and rather operational, project- or sector-focused attitude towards e-government legislation.

Each Belgian government updates its legislative framework according to its own priorities. OECD interviews suggest that the timeframes put in place by the European Union Directives have influenced these decisions. Overall, however, all Belgian governments put their respective legal frameworks into place at the speed and in the order which they see fit, leading to asymmetric legal and regulatory frameworks for the development and implementation of end-to-end e-services. This fragmented environment poses a challenge for user-focused, integrated e-government and seems to hinder the development of e-government front-office applications that effectively convey the image of integrated e-government services to Belgian users.

There is a need to find synergies among the legislative/regulatory frameworks across administrative boundaries. The capacity to harmonize European Union directives and approaches of the Belgian governments is a significant challenge to the development of user-focused, seamless services.

Given the role of information and data sharing in the development of e-government solutions for efficient and user-focused government, privacy legislation and regulation is particularly sensitive. OECD interviews revealed disconnects between existing privacy legislation and regulation, and efforts to implement information and data sharing; these issues must be resolved across governments. Increasing information and data exchange across organisational boundaries has intensified debate among stakeholders on issues of privacy and the protection of sensitive data. The electronic ID card (eID) has increased the importance of these matters, and the potential use of eID in e-government applications is likely to further foster the privacy debate in the near future.

**Proposals for action**

- A broad, common understanding of the legal and regulatory framework for e-government development, implementation and use must be established across the governments to support end-to-end services. This can be achieved in many ways, but it should begin with proactive and service-oriented engagement and dialogue between the relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

- The capacity to harmonise different governments’ approaches when each government separately is trying to transpose and implement European Union directives should be reviewed. The directives have proven to be a useful tool to create a binding legal framework for e-government – but differences in the transposition and implementation of these directives by the different governments might create barriers for a seamless user experience.

- The social security sector in Belgium conceived a concept which both respects the need for privacy protection and creates an operational system providing efficient and effective information and data sharing among public authorities Belgium-wide. The Crossroads Bank for Social Security experience is transferable. However, stakeholders need to be convinced about the benefits of the basic principles of data management, ownership and exchange – as institutions like the Crossroads Bank for Social Security can exercise significant legal power over their operations.

**Improve implementation capacity**

E-Government implementation frameworks must allow each government to develop e-services for its respective constituencies while making use of synergy mechanisms whenever appropriate. It is up to each Belgian government to define the scope and pace of e-government implementation. The Inter-governmental Co-operation Agreements from 2001 and 2005 are a first step towards more coherent e-
government implementation, and could address the apparent inequalities in e-government maturity across governments.

Regardless of their size, local authorities in Belgium are experiencing the same opportunities and challenges for e-government services. These three specific issues are:

1. Implementation of e-government at the local level remains challenging due to human and financial resource issues.
2. The perceived need for e-government at the local level is low.
3. Take-up of e-government at the local level must be increased.

Regional governments and a small number of regional associations of municipalities support local authorities and inter-municipal co-operation and alignment, while respecting municipal autonomy.

The municipalities are currently supported in their e-government efforts by the regional/community governments and, to a lesser extent, the Federal Government. However, there are concerns about local capacity to deliver and implement e-government. The concept of sharing resources ("mutualisation") is increasingly used by municipalities to achieve economies of scale for e-government investments, to maximise their joint buying power towards e-government solution providers, and to strengthen their bargaining position with other e-government actors.

E-Government is financed on project-based, short-term funds rather than programme-based funds covering multi-year perspectives. The concept of “mutualisation” to address budgetary challenges at the local level and also between governments has been increasing; this represents an opportunity for the development of more sustainable programme solutions in the future. Further, OECD interviews indicate a project management culture with limited systematic usage of business case analyses, monitoring, project evaluations, and prioritisation of choices. E-Government implementation is taking place in this context.

Effective measurement of e-government progress requires basic indicators; this may include evaluation of costs and benefits, as well as other qualitative and quantitative indicators describing progress towards stated policy goals. Newly introduced management tools that support different government activities (e.g. quality management tools, human resource performance management systems, e-government monitoring methodologies) are not designed to exploit synergies among policies.

Although centrally imposed e-government synergies cannot exist in Belgium, a common business case methodology could be beneficial. All independent and equal actors must be convinced about the added value of working together. Thus, both trust and accountability across governments are issues.

Financial incentives and public sector efficiency do not seem to be sufficient to improve collaboration and co-operation. Due to the fragmentation of the Belgian e-government landscape, there is no whole-of-public-sector view of e-government investments and harvesting efficiency and effectiveness gains. All governments are currently struggling to develop relevant concepts of economic analysis underlying their e-government investments. The business case for closer co-operation has to clearly map out the financial and non-financial benefits, allowing different governments to streamline their efforts in developing and implementing such methodologies to coherently assess financial and non-financial e-government indicators.
Implementation of e-government is further constrained by the limited number of ICT-skilled human resources in the Belgian public sector. The link between competency frameworks and performance management is crucial in the field of e-government, where an increasing proportion of civil servants are hired on a contractual basis through arms-length organisations.

The private sector is mainly involved in e-government activities on a project-by-project basis around outsourced services. The framework for private sector co-operation – used throughout all governments – seems non-systematic and limited. Each government keeps its power of procurement, capabilities, and power of negotiation with ICT providers. This does not necessarily lead to optimal purchases from the public sector point of view. Public-private partnerships are limited among the governments, and no commonly agreed policies exist.

### Proposals for action

- **There is also a need to ensure a holistic and depoliticised approach to e-government providing fully integrated services based on common public sector standards.** The cross-cutting nature of e-government development and the need to focus on operational implementation requires a whole-of-public-sector perspective and approach. Therefore, it is urgent to ensure that the necessary and sufficient development of common public sector e-government components (“building blocks”) and services can take place.

- **An institutional or “virtual organisational” framework of an “arms-length” public body (as, for example, in The Netherlands)10 is a possible solution.** Such a physical or virtual body – jointly created, financed, and mandated by all Belgian governments – could act as an operational e-government development, implementation, and shared services centre focused on providing generic e-government services and components to the public sector as a whole.

- **Municipal-level service delivery issues – like equity of services, local capacity to develop and implement e-government services, and oversight and support – could be given special attention.** Belgian governments will need to find a delivery model that is efficient, transparent and participatory, and matches political goals while being responsive to changing user needs.

- **Joint funding mechanisms and operational practices need to be further developed both within and among Belgian governments.** These mechanisms could be of particular relevance for common e-government services and applications using shared public sector e-government building blocks, as well as joint e-government programmes and future shared seamless services.

- **The business case for closer collaboration and co-operation has to clearly map out financial and non-financial benefits, as different governments could streamline their efforts in developing and implementing such methodologies to coherently assess financial and non-financial indicators of e-government.** E-Government activities should be regularly evaluated in order to allow for re-alignment of projects and activities.

- **Building capacity to deliver and implement e-government in the public sector will require careful review of the project management culture, with the systematic use of business case analyses, monitoring, project evaluations, and prioritisation of choices, as well as the development of skills and competencies.**

- **Belgian governments could improve the usage of skills and competencies in the private and voluntary sectors and optimise the buying power of the public sector through a jointly agreed common policy on outsourcing and the use of public-private partnerships.** A coherent framework for partnerships with the private and voluntary sectors could improve the overall capacity of the public sector as a whole.
Notes


THE OECD PEER REVIEW METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this peer review was developed by the OECD over the period from 2002 to 2004. The methodology is based on the OECD framework for examining e-government that was developed in *The e-Government Imperative* (OECD, 2003), and takes into account the work that went into the OECD publication *e-Government for Better Government* (OECD, 2005). The methodology was tested in a pilot peer review of e-government in Finland, which led to the publication of the report *OECD e-Government Studies: Finland* (OECD, 2003). In 2004, the OECD E-Government Project adopted the OECD methodology for its peer reviews, following the protocols laid out in *Peer Review: An OECD Tool for Co-operation and Change* (OECD, 2003). Using this analytical framework, the OECD has conducted reviews of Mexico (2005), Norway (2005), Denmark (2006), Hungary (2007), and The Netherlands (2007), and Turkey (2007).

The development of the OECD e-government peer review methodology is an ongoing process, but the general framework will be preserved to allow for comparability among countries. In the development of the methodology, the OECD has kept in mind that:

- The OECD should assign great importance to statistical rigour and quality when measuring and describing variables.
- Comparable descriptive characteristics of variables are necessary for building an international classification of e-government experiences.
- The OECD E-Government Project should compare its approach to those of other OECD directorates, and collect lessons learned for future reference and sharing.

The review process

The Belgium study is primarily qualitative in nature, presenting a combination of observations, analysis and judgements gleaned from reports and official documents, survey responses, and interviews.

The study has four main inputs:

- Reports and official documents.
- The OECD e-government survey.
- Interviews with government officials.
- Peer review meeting with OECD countries.

Reports and official documents

The study drew upon a wide range of documents across governments, sectors and functions, which provided insight into the way that public management and e-government policies, strategies and initiatives are planned, co-ordinated and implemented in Belgium. Information was also drawn from recent relevant reports and reviews of Belgium from the OECD and other international organisations, consulting firms, and other sources. The study also drew on academic research and journal articles on public management reform, e-government, and the Information Society in Belgium. This approach was based on the notion that e-government cannot be addressed in isolation, but should be observed from a wider public management perspective.
OECD survey of e-government in Belgium

The OECD survey of e-government was originally developed in 2002 and revised in 2003 based on the experience of the country study of Finland. A revised version of the survey was presented to the OECD Steering Group on the Complementary Areas of Work on E-Government at a meeting in Paris in December 2003. Comments from the Steering Group were incorporated into the final version of the survey. The survey has been adapted to reflect the institutional and administrative framework, and multi-government structure in Belgium.

In December 2006/January 2007, the OECD conducted the survey. The survey was targeted at officials with responsibilities relevant to e-government, who were asked to present their organisations’ responses to the survey, rather than respond in their capacity as individuals. The survey sample was jointly selected by the OECD and the Steering Group representing all Belgian governments.

Interviews with government officials

The review team conducted two sets of interviews with Belgian government officials and other agencies and groups. All interviews were scheduled by Fedict, with the approval from the OECD. The mix of organisations and interviewees was selected to show a broad and representative insight into the main issues and problems regarding e-government in Belgium.

The first set of interviews, which took place on 3-5 October 2006, involved exploratory discussions designed to help the OECD understand the key elements of e-government in Belgium. The OECD team met with 16 senior officials and their staffs. These exploratory interviews were intended to assist the OECD in developing an understanding of areas that merited further research.

The second set of interviews took place on 21-26 January 2007. These in-depth interviews were carried out by four members of the OECD Secretariat and three peer reviewers from OECD member governments: Mr. John F. Kootstra (The Netherlands), Mr. Yvan Lauzon (Quebec, Canada), and Mrs. Hanna Muralt Müller (Switzerland). The interview team undertook 24 interviews and moderated four focus groups. Interviewees included Belgium government officials and stakeholders from all types and levels of government, academia, relevant interest groups, ICT industry associations, and citizen representatives.

All interviews, which were strictly confidential, followed a structured set of questions, covering each of the main themes of the report. The interviews focused on the issues that could not be captured through the online survey.

Peer review meeting

In the assessment phase of an OECD peer review, the main findings of the review are discussed in a plenary meeting of the body responsible for the review. The examiners lead the discussion, but the whole body is encouraged to participate extensively. Following discussions, and in some case negotiations, among the members of the body – including the reviewed country – the final report is adopted or noted by the whole body. Generally, approval of the final report is by consensus, unless the procedures of the particular peer review specify otherwise (see Peer Review: An OECD Tool for Co-operation and Change, OECD, 2003).

The OECD Peer Review of E-Government in Belgium has been presented to, and discussed by members of the OECD’s Network of Senior E-Government Officials in October 2007 in Paris. Country delegates have had an opportunity to use their own expertise in e-government to provide insightful
commentary on the review. This discussion was intended to provide important input for the finalisation of the report.

Independence, neutrality and verification of inputs

Within a framework agreed with the Steering Group, the OECD conducted this study with its own staff and independent peer reviewers. The study was conducted with guidance and financing from Belgian governments, which did not bias the study or influence the final conclusions in any way.

The report was drafted by the OECD Secretariat with the input of the three peer reviewers from The Netherlands, Switzerland, and Quebec, Canada. The OECD regularly briefed the Belgian Steering Group for the review on its progress. The text benefited from fact-checking, considerations and feedback by the Steering Group; it also verified the survey results and interviews findings.
ABOUT E-GOVERNMENT STUDIES AT THE OECD

The OECD e-Government Study of Belgium

The review of e-government policy in Belgium was requested by Belgium in 2006. The e-government peer review of Belgium, at the demand of the steering group (composed by representatives from the Federal Government, the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, the German Community, and the French Community) has focused on two key challenges: (1) better co-ordination and (2) more user-focused e-government.

The OECD peer review methodology is structured around the notion of a policy cycle in which e-government goals, strategies and initiatives are developed and diffused by the federal, regional and community governments, and individual e-government projects are initiated and implemented by different agencies of these governments. The methodology has been expanded and amended for this review to address the specific issues and additional complexities involved in assessing e-government in a federal country.

This study was completed under the leadership of Christian Vergez and Yih-Jeou Wang, the review was managed and written by Gwendolyn Carpenter and Barbara Lörincz, who were assisted by Jean-François Leruste (survey and statistics), Jamal Shahin (writing and research) and Melissa Peerless (writing, research and editing). Special thanks are given to the three peer reviewers: John Kootstra (the Netherlands), Yvan Lauzon (Quebec, Canada) and Hanna Muralt-Müller (Switzerland).

E-Government at the OECD

Launched in 2001, the OECD E-Government Project explores how governments can best exploit information and communication technologies (ICTs) to embed good governance principles and achieve public policy goals. The Project produces reports on best practices and develops frameworks for addressing issues such as cost/benefit analysis, e-services and take-up. It also carries out country peer reviews on e-government. These reviews place e-government in a national context, and help identify the strengths and weaknesses of national e-government programmes.

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Belgium already has internationally recognised examples to show: most importantly the transformation of the social sector administration through e-governance tools, and more recently the link of e-government services to administrative-burden reduction. Future transformation will be enabled by the common electronic identity card (eID) that has been adopted by all governments.

This report shows that the development and provision of the next generation of user-focused services will require the maximisation of synergies between the federal, regional and community governments and local authorities in Belgium.

It addresses the following issues:
• Monitoring of user needs and user satisfaction
• Refocusing of e-government to serve the entire public sector’s interests and goals
• Marketing and promotion of e-government
• Concentrating on seamlessness, equity and responsiveness
• Creating a coherent framework for legislative challenges
• Improving the implementation capacity

This report is available in English only. French and Dutch translations of the Assessment and Proposals for Action are available separately.

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