

# The ISA programme

Overcoming eBarriers to European public services



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**'The current economic situation is not good. Public administrations are obliged to do more with less. Interoperability, reuse and sharing are beneficial, they will produce savings, but at the same time they require initial investment. We need to solve this paradox. We cannot be short-sighted. We should think about the future.'**

**Francisco García Morán,**  
Director General of the European  
Commission's Informatics  
Directorate-General (DG DIGIT)



<http://ec.europa.eu/isa/>

# The ISA programme

ISA (Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations), is a European Union programme (implemented by the Commission) contributing to a European Union free from electronic barriers at national borders. The ISA programme facilitates electronic cross-border and cross-sector interaction between European public administrations.

## Why interoperability?

Europe's ninth eGovernment Benchmark Measurement<sup>(1)</sup> published recently shows clearly that more people across the EU now have access to public services online. The average availability of online public services in the EU went up from 69 % in 2009 to 82 % in 2010. This electronic access is also essential to support the European Single Market, which enables citizens and businesses to move, work, travel, and study freely within the EU.

Putting more government services online helps cut costs for public administrations and reduces red tape for businesses and citizens. The next step is now to ensure the electronic collaboration between public administrations across borders, e.g. to settle efficiently the formalities associated with the movement of citizens and businesses. When establishing electronic collaboration, public administrations should consider expanding it Europe wide as services developed as 'stand-alone' solutions at regional or national level – or based on bilateral agreement – risk the emergence of eBarriers. Such fragmentation and lack of interoperability across the Union would impede the smooth functioning of the Single Market.

The ISA programme addresses the need for electronic cross-border public services by facilitating efficient and effective collaboration between European public administrations. ISA promotes the establishment of common approaches and solutions to enable electronic collaboration and to contribute to the implementation of community policies and activities. The ISA programme also promotes sharing and reuse of common tools and services – thus reducing costs and time to market.

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1 *Digitizing Public Services in Europe: Putting ambition into action – 9th Benchmark Measurement* ([http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/newsroom/cf/document.cfm?action=display&doc\\_id=747](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/document.cfm?action=display&doc_id=747)).

# Achieving European Consensus – The ISA context

The ISA programme operates within the larger framework of recent EU-level digital policies and strategies.

ISA contributes to the implementation of the **Digital Agenda for Europe**, one of the seven flagship initiatives in the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – which supports wider deployment and more effective use of digital technologies.

ISA also supports a number of actions defined in the **eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015** such as the reuse of public sector information, eProcurement, eID management, eParticipation and implementation of the **European Interoperability Framework (EIF)** – see p. 5.

A number of **Ministerial declarations** in the past decade reinforced cross-border interoperability as an EU policy objective. During the 2009 Malmö ministerial meeting, for example, EU Member States recognised that eGovernment emphasises the importance of privacy, data protection and security, and agreed to align national interoperability frameworks with applicable European frameworks to reinforce collaboration.

ISA also complements the **Information Communication Technologies Policy Support Programme (ICT-PSP)** of the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP), by bringing solutions tested under ICT-PSP to operational maturity. ICT-PSP is stimulating a wider uptake of innovative information and communication technology (ICT) services and the exploitation of digital content across Europe by citizens, governments and businesses.

ISA also addresses the need for interoperability across Europe as part of the **European Interoperability Strategy (EIS)** – see p. 5. Together, the EIS and the EIF are the basis for future activities to improve interoperability for delivering European public services.

## **European Interoperability Strategy (EIS)**

The ISA programme is implemented under the EIS, which is directly steered by the Member State representatives. The Strategy sets out a common, coherent approach to interoperability to assist European public service delivery by coordinating activities at EU and Member State levels. Specifically, the EIS provides guidance and prioritises concrete actions to address interoperability problems that hamper cooperation between European public administrations across borders and across sectors for the delivery of public services.

## **European Interoperability Framework (EIF)**

The EIF is an agreed approach to interoperability for organisations collaborating to provide joint delivery of public services. The Framework provides guidance on definition, design and implementation of such European public services. The EIF:

- specifies common elements such as vocabulary, concepts, principles, policies, guidelines and standards;
- guides public administrations in their work to provide European public services to businesses and citizens; and
- complements/ties together national interoperability frameworks at European level.

# From vision to practice – The ISA programme

## The ISA vision

The objective of the ISA programme is to facilitate efficient and effective electronic cross-border and cross-sectoral interaction between public administrations across Europe supported by interoperable electronic public services. For this purpose ISA is also focused on enabling European public administrations to share and reuse existing successful eGovernment solutions for the benefit of citizens and businesses. The result will be flexible and interlinked information technology (IT) systems that allow smooth implementation of EU policies and activities.

## Putting the vision into practice

ISA is achieving its vision through the provision of an architectural framework for the seamless exchange of information between IT systems of Member States and by developing guidelines and methodologies for cross-border ICT-based solutions.

The five-year programme is also fostering the development of generic tools and services that can be used by all public administrations, with an emphasis on the:

- development, operation and improvement of common services;
- establishment, provision and improvement of reusable generic tools; and
- industrialisation of existing infrastructure service components and tools for generalised reuse.

ISA is further encouraging the pooling of relevant resources across the Member States through coordination, and the exchange of experiences and good practices.

ISA is governed by a number of key principles:



## The beneficiaries

Direct beneficiaries of the ISA programme include:

- National public administrations;
- Regional and local administrations; and
- European Commission services.

Indirectly, all European businesses and citizens will profit from a more efficient delivery of public services.

# Actions supported by the ISA programme

The ISA programme supports actions clustered around specific areas that have to be addressed to enable successful implementation of the ISA objectives:

## Trusted information exchange

While seamless data exchange is becoming ever more important in Europe, there is a need for agreements and guidance in this area at both European Commission and Member State level to ensure that information is exchanged in a secure and trustworthy manner.

This cluster deals with the IT solutions required to exchange information cross-border, typically in sector-specific projects.

## Interoperability architecture

The interoperability architecture cluster aims to align already available cross-border and cross-sector IT infrastructures and provides guidelines for future development. Creating an interoperability architecture cannot be done overnight. It requires solid, long-term planning and communication.

This cluster addresses a broad range of activities, including:

- agreeing common architecture guidelines;
- creating the architecture itself and supporting its maintenance; and
- identifying and developing common building blocks – reusable generic tools and common services.

## Assessment of ICT implications of new EU legislation

Nowadays, almost all implementation of new EU legislation requires the support of IT systems. Consideration of ICT implications early in the drafting procedure of new legislation will ensure its timely implementation and offers the possibility of reusing and adapting existing solutions as much as possible.

## Accompanying measures

Accompanying measures support the success of the other cluster actions. Typically, these are horizontal measures. Raising awareness is one of the key tasks, as well as ensuring the recognition of interoperability as a cornerstone for building public services. The accompanying measures will ensure collaboration and communication amongst the stakeholders.

Actions in this cluster also address the sharing of best practice and supporting communities. This will be done by providing the necessary tools, platforms, campaigns and support.

### USER INSIGHTS

#### ISA Action 2.4: Data communication network service – sTesta

‘The connection of our national and regional administrative network (Red SARA) with sTESTA channels the traffic together with cross-border services under the condition of technical and economic rationality. sTESTA allows our departments and government entities to save on the costs of ad hoc independent links with other European administrations. sTESTA is used in at least 21 services, by 16 entities and in 18 sectorial areas. Four of these services correspond to multilateral initiatives of interest to Spain in the field of interior, justice and social security. Furthermore, sTESTA is used as a reference for the Red SARA network regarding policies, technological options, infrastructure, services, and security measures.’

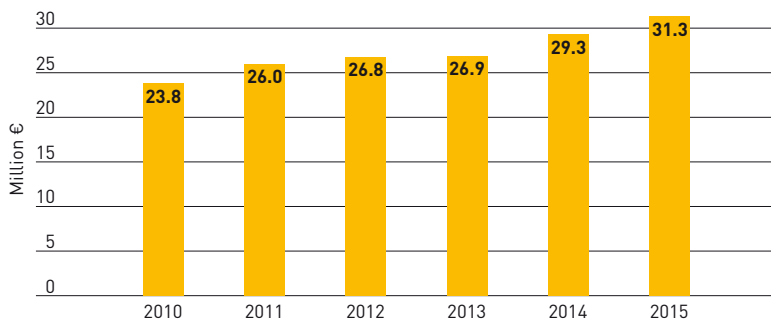
*Miguel A. Amutio,  
Ministry of Territorial Policy and Public Administration, Spain,  
miguel.amutio@mpmt.es*

# Programme implementation

The European Commission is assisted in the implementation of the programme by the ISA committee, which represents the Member States. Furthermore, a coordination group, nominated by the ISA committee, ensures continuity and consistency at working level. Expert groups provide guidance on specific Work Programme actions.

## The budget

The total originally foreseen 2010-2015 budget is EUR 164.1 million, allocated annually to actions decided upon for that year and published under the annually revised Work Programme.



## Life cycle of ISA actions

1. Annual request to Member States and Commission services for action proposals.
2. Discussion of proposed actions by the ISA committee.
3. If the committee is favourable: inclusion of action in the Work Programme.
4. Implementation by the Commission in cooperation with Member States.

### USER INSIGHTS

#### ISA Action 2.5: CIRCABC – Communication and Information Resource Centre for Administrations, Businesses and Citizens

‘In 2010, the Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union recommended CIRCABC to the EUROFISC group, which deals with administrative cooperation and combating fraud in the field of value added tax. The EUROFISC group was in need of a collaborative workspace tool in a secure environment that would allow for an exchange of restricted information between Member States. After CIRCABC acceptance, an implementation plan was set up, determining interest groups, user access profiles, workspace structures, customisation, training and other specific requirements. All tasks were executed between users’ representatives and our unit. Since the beginning of 2011, CIRCABC has been heavily in use and has met with great satisfaction from all users. Despite some difficulties in the beginning, we consider CIRBABC to be an excellent collaborative tool with good service support.’

*Augusto Firmo,  
Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union,  
augusto.firmo@ec.europa.eu*

# ISA key facts – FAQs

## **What is interoperability?**

In the ISA context, facilitation of cross-border and cross-sector information exchange, taking into account legal, organisational, semantic and technical aspects.

## **What is the ISA programme?**

ISA supports and facilitates cross-border electronic collaboration between public administrations for efficient delivery of cross-border electronic public services while ensuring the availability, interoperability, reuse and sharing of common solutions.

## **What is the difference between the Digital Agenda and ISA?**

The Digital Agenda helps every European go digital. It outlines what needs to be done to help EU citizens to profit from the digital economy. ISA contributes to the Digital Agenda by dealing specifically with interoperability, reuse and sharing between European public administrations.

## **What is eGovernment?**

Public administrations offering services online and exchanging information electronically with each other and businesses/citizens.

## **Is ISA about eGovernment?**

Yes. ISA, by supporting and facilitating cross-border electronic collaboration between public administrations, covers eGovernment activities between public administrations.

## **What is the difference between ISA and the eGovernment action plan?**

ISA is a support programme that funds actions which are implemented by the European Commission. The eGovernment action plan points out areas in which common actions are needed by Member States, sets goals and gives time frames to reach these goals. Member States implement the necessary actions within their own countries. The Commission monitors this process and provides expertise and benchmark data so Member States can assess progress in comparison with their own performance and that of other Member States.

European Commission

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