

Latvia: E-IDs as a Universal Means of Identification

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The Story

Stemming from a national initiative, the Social network profile self-service verification by use of national eID was launched in 2015, as a public-private partnership to stimulate the use of eID in Latvia. Indeed, it was developed by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia (VARAM) in conjunction with the biggest national social network in Latvia, www.draugiem.lv.

Other partners include the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP) and the State Joint-Stock Company "Latvia State Radio and Television Centre" (LVRTC), the latter being in charge of the integration of the national eID card verification system into the social network platform.

The key objective of the project was to promote the use and uptake of eID cards, increase the availability e-identity use in public administration, implement new digital solutions as well as raise awareness about trusted digital identity. This is in line with the Information Society Development Guidelines 2014-2020 and its core principles of openness, availability of content and interfaces.

The Challenges

While the political driver of the project was to promote and increase the uptake of eID, the main challenge was to promote the on-boarding procedure and the usage of user friendly eID cards.

A number of risks were also identified at the outset of the project, such as:

- **Developing a system which is too complicated for users:** as such, the project focused on making the system as user-friendly as possible.
- **The lack of third party entities which will use this verification system in other services:** in this context, third party entities were approached by the project team to secure buy in and adoption. Successful examples include the access to the private portal www.manabalss.lv, a platform of civic initiatives and Jūrmala City Hospital, where citizens can register.

The Approach

Several steps were carried out:

- The verification solution was developed.
- The information about the eID card and the ways it can be used was drafted: over 200,000 citizens searched for information about the verification system.

- Service providers, who might integrate the new functionality within their services, were contacted in order to promote the use of the verification system in other services.

The project was developed in an iterative and agile manner.

The solution was developed within the e-government integrated informative campaign – ‘The State is on the Internet’.

The Surprises

This project contributes to the strengthening of e-democracy and citizen engagement in policy planning, as well as engaged Latvian inhabitants living abroad in the country's development. This is particularly important, since approximately 370 thousand people from Latvia are permanently living abroad.

It appears to be the first project in the world where identity verification on a social network was done automatically by using the national eID card.

The Benefits

The benefits of the project were the following:

- Awareness of the options of an eID card and the use thereof is increased.
- User training in the computer preparation on the use of e-services and e-signature.
- Wider use of the eID card also in private sector services.
- Existing free tool for developers to develop other e-solutions.
- Promotion of e-security – safe and verified personal profiles (actual users with actual data) and a trustworthy environment.

The Learnings

Several learnings emerged from the project:

- **Integration of a governmental solution into private sector services** as a strong enhancer and driver for the use and adoption of the eID card.
- **Contribution by the private sector** to the promotion and use of governmental e-services, by sharing information, and preparing the ground for further use of governmental e-services and e-signature.
- **Refinement and testing of e-solutions:** in order to ensure compatibility with private sector solutions improvements are made on both sides, and extra testing is performed along with a user survey.

The availability of the verification platform on mobile phones would have been implemented in retrospect. A Cloud based nation identification project is currently being implemented.

The Case for Replication

The project demonstrates the following replicable features:

- Use of an **open platform** which is available to all.
- The approach of using **social networks** could be validated in multinational social networks in context of eIDAS.