

Ageing in digital societies: enablers and barriers to older persons exercising their social rights

Poland

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1 Legal and policy framework

1.1 National legislation on digital public administration

In Poland, the right to equal access to public services undergoing digitalisation is recognised in the Act on electronic delivery.¹ The Act was adopted in order to ensure the dominant share of electronic document workflow in administration and business transactions. The implementation of the electronic delivery system will take place in separate stages. For example, local government units are to start delivering correspondence using the electronic delivery service since 1 January 2024, while courts and law enforcement authorities are to implement the electronic delivery since 1 October 2029. The Act also provides the so-called hybrid delivery, which is dedicated to digitally excluded people (however, it lacks reference to particular groups of digitally excluded people). "Hybrid delivery" involves the conversion of an electronic document issued by a public entity into a letter delivery in order to deliver the document in a traditional, paper form. The conversion is to be carried out in an automated manner, ensuring the protection of postal secrecy at every stage of the service.

1.2 National policy, strategy or action plan on the digitalisation of public services or digital inclusion

In Poland, there is no specific national policy that would strictly refer to the digitization of public services. However, the equal access to public services undergoing digitalisation is recognised in a draft programme adopted by the Council of Ministers on 5 January 2022.² The draft programme has been prepared in connection with the allocation of European Funds for Digital Development in years 2021-2027 and is a continuation of the governmental programme called the Digital Poland 2014-2020

The current draft programme adopted by the Council of Ministers mentions persons vulnerable to digital exclusion due to their age, health conditions and disabilities. Moreover, as indicated in the document, in order to achieve sustainable social and economic development it is required to ensure that women and men enjoy equal participation in all spheres of social life - regardless of their ethnic origin, age, health condition, efficiency, residence, economic status, parental status, religion or worldview, psychosexual orientation, etc.

¹ Poland, [Act on electronic delivery](#) (*Ustawa o doręczeniach elektronicznych*), 18 November 2020.

² Poland, Council of Ministers, [European Funds for Digital Development 2021-2027. Draft programme adopted by the Council of Ministers on 5 January 2022](#) (*Fundusze Europejskie na Rozwój Cyfrowy 2021-2027. Projekt Programu przyjęty przez RM 5 stycznia 2022 r.*), 5 January 2022.

The priority indicated in the document is to design digitized public services in a universal manner. Therefore, every citizen should have an equal access to public services. These solutions are to meet the needs of all users and ensure their equal access to the services offered, e.g. through properly designed interfaces (clear, intuitive and simple). As indicated in the programme, its implementation is to be carried out in accordance with the principles of equality within the meaning of European Union and national law.

1.3 National recovery and resilience plans covering the digitalisation of public services

In Poland, the National Recovery Plan (*Krajowy Plan Odbudowy, KPO*)³ set out solutions aimed at improving the access to public services, as well as promotes inclusion. The Plan aims at supporting people exposed to digital exclusion, generally in the use of new technologies and the Internet, including the use of digitized public services. The support is to be implemented by organizing special training courses on the use of new technologies for people at risk of digital exclusion. Public administration workers will also be trained in order to improve the quality of digital public services. The main assumption of the Plan is also to expand the scope of public services that can be settled online. These solutions are intended to improve the accessibility of digitized public services for people at risk of digital exclusion. The Plan addresses the following groups at risk of digital exclusion: educators and teachers of kindergartens, schools, students and parents using remote learning, young people entering adulthood, employees and children from orphanages, disabled people and their caretakers, seniors, women and children from single mothers' facilities.

2 Programmes and practices aimed at ensuring equal access to public services in the digital age

Digital Development Clubs (DDCs) (*Kluby Rozwoju Cyfrowego*)⁴

Implementing body: Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

Duration of the programme: The pilot of the programme is expected to start in 2022, and then the programme will be continued over the coming years.

Target: Older persons, rural population and other groups at risk of digital exclusion.

³ Poland, National Recovery and Resilience-Building Plan (*Krajowy Plan Odbudowy i Zwiększania Odporności*), 30 April 2022. <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/2572ae63-c981-4ea9-a734-689c429985cf>

⁴ Poland, Chancellery of the Prime Minister, [Kluby Rozwoju Cyfrowego – prostujemy nieprawdziwe informacje!](#), 29 October 2021.

Scope: In the pilot phase, the program will cover 64 selected communes (*gminy*, the smallest local government units) across the country. Ultimately, there will be one Digital Development Club in each commune in Poland (around 2500 clubs).

Objectives and outputs: DDCs are supposed to be places of digital education and familiarization with new technologies for people at risk of digital exclusion. They will be created on the basis of libraries, media libraries, community centers and universities of the third age which already exist in Polish communes. Courses will be conducted by the so-called educators – workers employed at DDCs as animators of the development of digital competences in local communities. DDCs will be equipped with the necessary hardware and software, with the use of which educators will be able to practically help interested persons to improve their digital competences. The main goal of the programme is to familiarize local communities with the possibilities of using the Internet (including social networks), online communication, and the use of digitized public services.

Monitoring and evaluation bodies: N/A.

3 Research and data focused on equal access to public services in the digital age

As informed by the bureau of the Commissioner for Human Rights,⁵ all complaints received by the Ombudsman are registered separately based on a criterion of the protected feature and the complaint's thematic scope. In 2021, the bureau registered 19 complaints concerning unequal treatment or discrimination based on age, and 17 complaints related to access to public goods or services. Following the analysis of both categories performed by the bureau, the total number of cases in which the applicant alleged discriminatory treatment in the access to generally understood public services due to their advanced age amounted to 2 complaints in 2021.

Moreover, experiences of discrimination and unequal access to public services (undergoing or having completed digital transformation) with respect to older persons have been researched into in recent years. The following two are examples of such research studies, commissioned by national institutions.

1. "E-administration from the Internet users perspective"⁶ – a national research commissioned by the Ministry of Digitalisation in 2016.

According to the research conducted in 2016, 62,5% of seniors used public administration services via the Internet. 90% of senior respondents using public administration services via the Internet successfully dealt with their cases; 7% of respondents have failed to solve their cases, 3% were waiting for a decision. The

⁵ Poland, The Commissioner for Human Rights, Response to the HFHR's FOI request of 22 April 2022, 5 May 2022.

⁶ Poland, Ministry of Digitalisation, [E-administration from the Internet users perspective](#) (*E-administracja w oczach internautów*), July 2016.

research did not highlight differences between the experiences of women and men.

The research was conducted using the CAWI method. The total number of respondents in the main sample is 4,801; there were 856 seniors among respondents (understood as people aged 55 or more). Due to the fact that the research was conducted among Internet users, its results should not be generalized to the entire population of the country.

2. "Information society in Poland in 2020"⁷ – a national research conducted by the Central Statistical Office (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny, GUS*).

According to the national research for 2020, 17.9% of people aged 60–74 (in the last 12 months preceding the survey) used public administration services via the Internet. Among people aged 16–59, almost half of the respondents used public administration services via the Internet. The research did not highlight differences between the experiences of women and men.

The unit of an observation in the research was a household with at least one person aged 16-74. The research was conducted through telephone and direct interviews, as well as with the use of an Internet survey. The total number of households in the main sample is 8,100.

⁷ Poland, Central Statistical Office, [Information society in Poland in 2020](#) (*Spółeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce w 2020 r.*), 16 December 2020.



4 State of digitalisation of selected public services

		Selected public services relevant for older persons			
		Access to health records	Public statutory pensions	Social benefits	E-prescriptions for patients
Stage of digitalisation	Not digitalised (Y/N)	N	N	Y	N
	Information is available online (Y/N)	Y	Y	N	Y
	Transactions are possible online (Y/N)	Y	N	N	Y
Recognition of groups at risk of digital exclusion	Service specific regulation recognises barriers to digital inclusion / vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Y/N).	N	Y	N	N
	If yes , please list the barriers and groups that are mentioned.	-	- older persons – digital exclusion (lack of digital skills) - visually impaired and blind persons	-	-
Multichannel access options	Telephone service (Y/N) If yes , please describe what kind of personalised services it provides.	Y - telephone consultants provide general information on the use of this service. This telephone service has only informative role.	Y - telephone consultants provide general information on the public statutory pensions. This telephone service has only informative role.	N	Y - telephone consultants provide general information on the use of this service. This telephone service has only informative role.
	Physical administrative access points (Y/N). If yes , please specify the level of availability (local, regional, national), the opening days and hours.	N	Y - regional information desks of the Social Insurance Institution are open from Monday to Friday, usually from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.	Y Poviat (county) family support centres and gmina (commune) or municipal centres for social benefits – open Monday to Friday, usually from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.	N

			- regional departments of the Social Insurance Institution (at least 10 in each voivodship) are opened from Monday to Friday, usually from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.		
	Specific locations that facilitate offline access to the service (Y/N) If yes , indicate the location(s). Please describe what kind of support is provided.	N	N	N	N
	Specific locations that facilitate online access to the service (Y/N). If yes , indicate the location(s). Please describe what kind of support is provided.	N	N	N	N
	Other – please indicate any other access channels to the service.	Each entity providing health services is obliged to provide the patient with his health record. Through the national website, patients can download their health record, if the provider of medical services has published it online.	National Insurance Institution offers e- visits (video calls), during which visually impaired and blind people, as well as older persons, can settle their cases.	Application for social benefits can be made either: - in person - by post	Through the national website, patients can apply for the prescription and download it at home without the need to visit a doctor. Patients can also obtain a traditional prescription issued by a doctor at a typical doctor's appointment. Some prescriptions can also be issued by pharmacists.

<p>Other forms of support for online use</p>	<p>Please indicate any other form of support to facilitate the use of the online service for older persons such as easy-to-read versions, different language versions, etc.</p>	<p>- the online service is also available in Ukrainian</p>	<p>- the online service is also available in easy-to-read version</p> <p>- the online service is also available in Ukrainian and English</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>- the online service is also available in Ukrainian</p>
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