

Modern Registries: The Foundation of Digital Public Administrations

CURRENT SITUATION

Effective e-government services such as paperless applications for parental benefits or launching a business on a single day can only be offered if we have modern registries – this is not yet possible with current German registries. The more than 200 registries administered by federal, state and local governments do not provide electronic access unless stipulated otherwise by special legal provision. Moreover, political governance and technical developments, concerning registries, are fragmented and scattered across numerous institutions.

For those reasons, the potential application of registries for public service provision is severely limited and the quality of data varies considerably. Without the harmonisation and connection of registries, e-government components such as the electronic identity card and the central administration portal cannot deliver their full potential. Potential savings¹ of more than €6.3 billion per year for the top 35 public services for citizens and the top 30 public services for companies cannot be realised. The requirements of the Online Access Act (OZG), which entered into force this year, would not be met.

WHAT BENEFITS ARISE FROM MODERN REGISTRIES?

Simple, digitally accessible, linkable, and high-quality data makes it easier for users and expands the application of registries. There are three goals with high priority:

- **Digitalise public services.** There is no effective e-government system in Germany yet. The transmission of information to public administrations is still difficult for individuals and companies. The Online Access Act is designed to change this. Modernising registries would make a decisive contribution to the implementation of its requirements. A full digitalisation of the top 35 public services for citizens would save 47% of the time currently required for visits to authorities (about 84 million hours per year). Companies could save up to 54% (1 billion EUR) of the expenses for their top 30 public services. With approximately 64 million hours saved, administrations would have about 60% more time to invest in more worthwhile tasks.
- **Improve data for official decisions and statistics.** Digital access to reliable data reduces the potential for mistakes made by administrations and

¹ For details, see "Mehr Leistung für Bürger und Unternehmen: Verwaltung digitalisieren. Register modernisieren.", published by the National Regulatory Control Council: www.normenkontrollrat.bund.de/Webs/NKR/Content/DE/Pressemitteilungen/2017-10-06-nkr-gutachten-2017.html

for false information deliberately provided by individuals or companies. In addition, modern registries form an efficient foundation for analyses that support policy-makers and administrations in their strategic and operational planning. Official statistics also benefit from the reliable linking and comprehensive availability of data. The cost of a future registry-based census could be up to 87% less than that of the last census (potentially about €580 million per census).

- **Facilitate access to official data for industry.** Companies already use data from registries (such as information about companies and real estate as well as geodata and resident registration data). Although this is legally possible, in practice it is not widely used. Simple digital access to this information is still not always possible – here, too, a modernisation of registries would have considerable benefits.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES FOR GERMANY?

In the years ahead, registry modernisation in Germany should focus on the following three topics:

- **Standardised digital access.** Important registries (such as those for residents, births, marriages, deaths, trade, and property) must be easily accessible digitally by the relevant users and data must be made available via secure and centralised communications infrastructure so that individuals and companies only have to enter basic data once (i.e. name, date of birth, address, owner). In addition, authorities could create practical solutions for the exchange of necessary information for individual administrative services (such as paperless applications for parental benefit). This requires statutory foundations and suitable IT infrastructure.
- **Clear allocation and linking of data.** Authorities can only access data from registers automatically when data is clearly connected to individuals and companies. This requires unique identification numbers. These, however, must meet the strict stipulations of German data privacy regulations. For this reason, a SourcePIN system like in Austria is advisable. A central SourcePIN register authority (that could, in Germany, be the responsibility of the Federal Commissioner for Data Protection) would assign and administer unambiguous identification numbers from which authority-specific codes are derived for use in certain registries. This means that the unambiguous identification number would only be known to the SourcePIN register authority, which itself would have no access to the data. Individuals and companies could agree to the transmission of a temporarily valid key code to link their data if processes require an exchange of data between registries. This would not only guarantee data privacy, since there is full transparency of access to person-related information, but it would also improve it.
- **Central agency for the modernisation of registries.** A central agency for the modernisation of registries would pool the professional resources of authorities across all levels and ministries and would coordinate the players. It

would effectively implement the ideas of political steering committees (such as the IT Planning Council), take responsibility for the architecture and standards of registries, coordinate modernisation projects affecting all authorities, and support administrations in the effective use of registry data. Also, it could support the creation of new registries to close information gaps (such as a registry of buildings and housing).

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IN THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE PERIOD?

If registry modernisation is to succeed, policy makers will have to establish the necessary political and legislative foundations. To this end, the objectives of registry modernisation must be included in the coalition agreement and the government programme, and a registry modernisation act must be passed as quickly as possible.

Registry modernisation would then have to be implemented administratively. This will require the swift establishment of a central agency that will, at short notice, launch and advance important initiatives, such as a programme for the wide availability of basic data.

In order to harness the potential of modern registries, e-government infrastructure must also be expanded (i.e. improved digital identification and signatures; a user-friendly nationwide administration portal). Authorities and municipalities must be actively supported in the use of this infrastructure.

Steps must quickly be taken at the beginning of the coming legislative period so that we can achieve tangible progress in the next four years.