

# The modern state: reforms in Germany`s public sector

## I. Introduction

Prime Minister,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Administrative modernization is one of the greatest challenges in the digital age. We all experience it every day: Digitization has become a driving force in our lives, both at work and at home. Public administration too must keep up with this trend and take advantage of the opportunities it offers.

Obviously, this is not always easy in a federal system like Germany's. Our country's strong foundation, grounded in the long administrative tradition of the federal states, may be the envy of the world; but for modernization in practice, the diversity that comes with a federal system demands custom solutions.

This can be illustrated with a very recent example: In digitizing the asylum process, we learned that three things above all are crucial for advancing digitization in public administration:

1. We must utilize existing components more effectively.
2. We need centralized databases.
3. We must intensify federal cooperation with state and local public administration.

A number of federal, state and local agencies are involved in the process of registering asylum seekers. Each agency usually has its own IT applications which are focused on its own tasks and are rarely interconnected. In the past, this meant that, in the registration process, the same data often had to be collected several times by different agencies.

Now, asylum seekers can be registered using a new, standardized procedure. Their data will be entered in a central database, where they can be accessed by all authorized participants in the process. Fingerprints will be used to verify identity. The new procedures will be available nationwide from about June of this year. They will significantly reduce the time and effort needed to process asylum applications. So digitizing the asylum process showed us that federal, state and local public administration must work together to manage this task successfully. The question is, how can we repeat this achievement in other areas of public administration?

Transparency, efficiency, responsiveness to public needs – these are the goals to which public administration in Germany is committed. Digitization is an important tool for achieving these goals. This became obvious during the process of digitizing the asylum process. There are also a number of other federal projects and measures which have boosted modernization.

So I would like to take this opportunity to present developments in Germany today from the federal perspective: What have we achieved so far, where have we run into problems and what is the best way to solve them?

I am also interested in hearing about your practical experience with progress and barriers to administrative modernization in New Zealand. I am sure we can learn from each other.

## II. The government programme “Digital Administration 2020”

Ladies and gentlemen,

Public administration in Germany has undergone a continuous process of modernization: In the new Federal Republic in the 1950s and ‘60s, the main priority was upholding the rule of law. In the early 1970s, the model was the ability to plan processes. This phase was followed by privatization and deregulation in the late 1980s and early ‘90s.

Today, modernization means above all digitization:

As new technologies (social media, mobile apps, the cloud) become more and more integral to daily life, individuals and businesses expect government agencies to offer digital services.

The challenge for government is not only to introduce digital technologies in the public sector; it is also to make greater use of these technologies in its efforts to modernize. Resources, workflows, operations, methodologies and framework conditions must be adapted to keep up with the rapid changes and with those already using digital technologies.

In the process, public agencies must respond to the expectations, needs and demands of their clients. This transformation requires consistent and strategic planning of measures to promote the use of digital technologies in all areas and at all levels of public administration.

This is not a trivial matter in a federal system, which is typically marked by strict specialization as well as an institutional and geographical division of tasks.

With its programme “Digital Administration 2020”, the Federal Government has created a suitable framework for modernizing the public administration. The programme shows how the E-Government Act can be put into practice successfully. For our efforts at federal level to succeed, however, the federal states must adopt their own e-government legislation.

The programme focuses on easy and secure digital access to public administration for businesses and individuals, and on service-oriented (competent, simple, fast, friendly), comprehensive and seamless administrative procedures.

If individuals and businesses can get information and submit applications online, that saves time and money. Digital technology helps avoid duplicate efforts, thereby reducing the workload for all involved.

### *Projects*

For this reason, the Federal Government has launched a number of important projects aimed at standardizing and connecting processes and dividing up the necessary tasks.

- We want to translate federal laws into standardized descriptions of benefits, forms and processes and thereby create interoperable services.
- The e-legislation project is laying the conceptual groundwork for a law-making process that is digital from start to finish, from the first draft to promulgation.
- Public procurement, especially procedures for awarding public contracts, is being thoroughly optimized, standardized, digitized and, where appropriate, consolidated.
- Integrated electronic invoice processing creates transparency and cuts costs through standardization and consolidation.
- The e-file (E-Akte) project aims at helping agencies standardize processes and procedures across ministries. This is accompanied by building up a uniform basic service called E-Akte/DMS.
- An important goal of modernizing and digitizing is reducing bureaucracy. The watchword in the EU is “once only”. And we are also working to make sure that individuals and businesses need to enter their data only once, can submit the forms related to a particular life event to a single office and no longer have to go in person.
- Getting rid of unnecessary requirements to submit documents in paper form should help. As a first step, we will cut about 20 per cent of all federal requirements to submit documents in paper form. So in these cases, e-mail or other electronic means will suffice to inform, report, apply or notify.

- To make administrative action more transparent and understandable, activities in the area of Open Data will be expanded. Open Government measures to increase participation, innovation and integrity are also being implemented or planned.

Public administration should not close itself off, but rather make its knowledge available to the public. Administrative data published as Open Data make it possible to develop apps that make daily life easier.

Today, 17,000 datasets can be accessed at [Govdata.de](http://Govdata.de). That is pretty impressive for a website that was just launched in early 2015. But there are also shortcomings. The EU estimates the economic potential at 120 billion euros – but achieving this potential will only be possible when data are universally available.

The success of the Govdata.de website and all of the other projects largely depends on cooperation among federal, state and local public administration. To arrive at the right solutions across all levels of public administration, the IT Planning Council was created, which brings together CIOs from federal and state public administration to adopt the necessary joint strategies and measures.

Within the framework of the “Digital Administration and Public IT” platform, part of the National IT Summit, and of the IT Planning Council’s working group on attractive e-government, led by the city-state of Berlin, we are intensively discussing how to further improve

the public's use and acceptance of e-government in the coming years.

### *Single government service number 115*

The introduction of the single government service telephone number 115 shows that we are on the right track. Seven years ago, the Federation and a few pioneering state and local governments introduced this service: a single, easy-to-remember telephone number for answers to all questions related to public administration, with the plan to provide this service throughout Germany. The service was intended to end the annoying need to search for whom to contact in what public agency: Call 115, and you'll never get a wrong number. In the meantime, on an entirely voluntary basis, more and more public administrations have added this service, which now reaches roughly 31 million people in Germany.

The 115 service is an outstanding example of e-government that meets real needs. It is also a model for modern, service-oriented public administration, consisting of a large quantity of IT-standardized information prepared according to defined principles and a complex technical infrastructure that is centrally accessible. Federal, state and local public administrations use, manage and add to this infrastructure together, across the boundaries of federalism and the division of responsibilities.

Introducing the 115 number can also go hand in hand with administrative reorganization. It frees staff at the expert level from having to respond to general enquiries. The 115 number offers an easy point of access for integrating additional services. Many local authorities are

taking the 115 idea further. In addition to answering questions from the public, more services and processes can be integrated, such as IT applications to make appointments, register motor vehicles, apply for social housing or report potholes or illegal rubbish dumping over the phone.

### III. Asylum procedure and central portal

Ladies and gentlemen,

When it comes to managing the influx of refugees, the importance and usefulness of closer cooperation between the Federation and the federal states on digital matters is clear. The project to digitize the asylum process is a pioneering effort by the Federation and the federal states.

Now we must apply this experience to other areas. The structure and content of e-government services must be oriented on their usefulness for individuals and businesses as well as the public administration. Here, we believe the administration portals are the right approach. State and local public administrations already offer information and services via central digital access points. The Federation is also planning a similar portal offering access to all its administrative services.

Our idea is to apply the federal structure to all public administration portals. The aim should be smart links between the federal, state and local portals. One important component of all administration portals must be the provision of basic services.



The Federation and federal states have already worked together successfully on this in the IT Planning Council and have set the most important parameters for establishing what we are calling service accounts. These service accounts will make it possible for businesses and individuals to identify themselves to the public administration easily and securely, at various levels of trust. They will be able to verify their identity using a single account for all administrative services at federal, state and local level.

Now the special challenge is to create smart links between all service accounts nationwide. As the next step, the federal states of Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia will provide a prototype technical solution for interoperable service accounts.

To make sure that they are more useful for businesses and individuals, we will design our administration portals to reflect user needs and create non-hierarchical, smart links between them. Our goal is to provide users with quick and easy access to all information and services offered by federal, state and local public administration, no matter which government portal they choose. I am certain that all portals will benefit from being thoroughly interconnected via smart links.

#### IV. IT security

The digital revolution is fundamentally changing the way government, business and society work. But the new opportunities come with growing dependence on IT-supported processes and systems,

making it more and more important for IT systems and cyberspace to be available and secure.

We can already predict that digital vulnerability will increase in all areas of our lives and activities. This will become one of the central challenges for society in the coming years. Ensuring IT security is part of providing vital services and helps make our country a more attractive place to do business.

For public administration, this means above all ensuring its ability to function and protecting data and information.

Cyber security is also crucial for the foundation of trust needed for free self-expression and a functioning digital economy.

Already four years ago, the Federal Government's cyber security strategy laid the groundwork for a large number of measures that are helping to improve security in cyberspace.

The Federal Government's Digital Agenda pursues these strategic goals further. Created in 2011, the National Cyber Security Council is a high-ranking body to coordinate strategy between government and industry, while the National Cyber Response Centre serves as a platform for government agencies to share strategic and operational information.

The IT Security Act entered into force on 25 July 2015. Under this law, operators of critical infrastructure in seven sectors, including en-

ergy, information and communications technology, and the food and water supply, must meet minimum standards for IT security and must report significant IT security incidents to the Federal Office for Information Security (BSI).

The BSI will then analyse all the information it receives and forward it to all critical infrastructure operators, so that they can take action to protect their infrastructures before they are attacked as well. The IT Security Act calls for cooperation between government authorities and operators of critical infrastructure.

So it is necessary not only to take numerous individual measures; the Federal Government's goal is above all to be prepared strategically and for the long term. The Federal Ministry of the Interior is currently working on a new federal cyber security strategy which will address the cyber security architecture in Germany and the legal framework for ensuring IT security, among other things.

## V. Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your attention. To sum up,

1. Despite its federal structure, Germany is making good progress on administrative modernization. Digitization plays a key role, and we must take advantage of what it offers.
2. Digitizing public administration can succeed only if federal, state and local public administrations work together on joint solutions.

3. The digitization of the asylum process shows that we can manage this task even under enormous deadline pressure. I am confident that we have learned from this example and that we will be able to create a nationally standardized, overarching portal for administrative services organized according to users' needs.