Sharing and dissemination of environmental information

Country maturity report: Belarus

Executive summary

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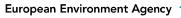
This report was produced by PricewaterhouseCoopers as part of the project for developing a roadmap and identify feasible and practical means for integrating environmental information in national e-governance/open data processes and platforms. This action is done in the context of the EU-funded ENI SEIS II East project 2016-2020. The report was built in 2018 and updated throughout 2019, including a review in March 2019 after the first regional meeting in Kiev, and the second review after the roundtable in June 2019. The report has been reviewed by public authorities in Belarus in December 2019.

This report contains information obtained or derived from a variety of publicly available sources described within the report in more detail and does not intend to be a comprehensive analysis of environmental information, open data and e-government in the country but a collection of the main elements shaping the national environmental information landscape.

Executive summary

The methodology followed to prepare this report is based on the 2018 and 2019 European Union reports on open data maturity in Europe, with some adjustments made to accommodate the specific situation of Eastern Partnership countries as well as the focus on environmental information.

The report was prepared and updated between 2018 and 2020 as part of the EU-funded project - Implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System principles and practices in the Eastern Partnership countries (ENI SEIS II East) project. National input in preparation of the report was ensured through broad dialogue and consultation with various public authorities and other stakeholders in Belarus, in particular those related to the environment and statistics. In addition, experts across various policy domains, including IT and e-government, have been involved through participation in national and regional events. These activities allowed an exchange of views on the future of e-government and open data in the cross-cutting domain of the environment in Belarus. As a result, the document presents an overview of the national e-government framework, the maturity level of open data and dissemination of environmental information in Belarus. The analysis covered:

- a review of the policy framework to examine the directions and practical arrangements set out for environmental information dissemination using open data and e-government solutions;
- review of the legal framework to determine the existing legal requirements that define the areas of e-government, open data and environmental data and information dissemination;
- assessment of the technological solutions to determine the existing technical capabilities and improvements that need to be implemented in future.

Based on the above, the document proposes a roadmap that includes measures focused on the development of e-government and open data frameworks, which would greatly support the environmental domain. The road map is designed to be a living document throughout the implementation process and a benchmark to assess progress at various stages of development.

E-government

During the past five years in Belarus, the e-government policy framework was established, by setting out objectives up to 2022. The e-government strategic directions are defined by the Strategy for the Development of Informatisation for 2016-2022 and the State Programme for the Development of the Digital Economy and Information Society for 2016–2020. These documents set up an action plan and define measures to be implemented for improving infrastructure for e-government services.

The overall e-government development in Belarus is led and coordinated by the Ministry of Communication and Informatisation, which is responsible for progress in this area. Nevertheless, the e-government legal framework should be further developed by clearly identifying the

responsibilities of all stakeholders at national and local levels as well as the procedures for coordination and monitoring of the e-government development.

Furthermore, it is strongly recommended that Belarus establishes a legal interoperability framework and defines procedures and standards for the gradual exchange of data and information held by public authorities.

Since 2019 the National Automated Information System (NAIS)[1] has been used. It was designed to integrate national information resources, implement administrative procedures in electronic format and electronic services through the Unified Portal of E-Services. Currently, there is a wide range of thematic and sectorial national information systems which are integrated with NAIS, except for environment.[2] It is recommended to further develop NAIS and the Unified Portal of E-services and include the environmental domain as well as to improve the data exchange and access to information for the public and businesses.

Open data

The policy and the legal frameworks in the area of open data require further development to raise at a comparable level with other EaP countries and harness economic, social and environmental benefits, including reduced costs for public administration. In this respect, Belarus could consider developing an open data policy, defining the main principles of open data management and the priority datasets to be published. In addition, the public authorities could strongly benefit from clearly defined responsibilities and procedures for open data management and dissemination.

Nevertheless, the country made progress in open data infrastructure and developed a software solution for open data. The Open Data Portal developed in 2018 was further updated in 2020. There is still limited progress in the population of the portal with new datasets, as currently the Open Data Portal contains approximately 100 datasets with only six of them related to the environmental domain.

To stimulate the open data initiative, the Ministry of Communication and Informatisation is currently developing a draft governmental resolution with the goal of promoting open data usage and supporting the development of applications based on open data. In addition, the resolution aims to encourage the public authorities to actively use the Open Data Portal in order to make the data and information available[3]. The resolution is planned to be adopted in 2020, and due to its high relevance, the fast implementation is strongly recommended.

Environmental information sharing and dissemination

The existing legislation cover the general obligation to disseminate environmental information. In 2007, the Law on Environment Protection was updated to specify the types and the sources of environmental information, as well as the conditions for access to environmental information. However, it is recommended to further develop and adopt more detailed procedures for data management and dissemination.

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[1] https://portal.gov.by
[2] See example of Trembita information system of Ukraine for further ideas of development
[3] https://www.mpt.gov.by/sites/default/files/poyasnitelnaya_zapiska.doc

The environment information is spread among many environmental portals and there is no single web access point, which would allow the public to easily access all web platforms hosting environmental information.

The most comprehensive framework for managing environmental information is the National Environmental Monitoring System (NEMS) coordinated by the Main Information and Analytical Centre of the National Environmental Monitoring System (under auspices of BELHYDROMET). It is recommended to enhance the interoperability of existing platforms in the area of environment by introducing application programming interfaces (APIs), protocols and procedures for data exchange. Building on NAIS can be a practical solution under the present conditions.

Suggested recommendations

Following an analysis of the current situation, the proposed roadmap outlines key areas for future development in the field of e-government, open data and dissemination of environmental information, and provides concrete measures for improvement. Additionally, to facilitate the implementation of the roadmap, several examples and practical recommendations are provided in the report 'Open data and e-government good practices for fostering environmental information sharing and dissemination'.

As a general remark, the success and rapid advancement of the country in this challenging domain remain strongly dependent on clear priority-setting, multidisciplinary teamwork and regular monitoring of progress. Furthermore, once progress is made in one or several areas proposed for consideration, readjustments and amendments to the roadmap will be needed to keep it relevant and focused on the key priorities for the country.

The measures recommended for Belarus in the context of the roadmap have been grouped into the following categories: policy-related, legal and technical measures. They cover the following issues:

- Policy measures: covering, among others, the adoption of an open data policy;
- Legal measures: addressing, among others, the adoption of international standards for interoperability and metadata description, defining procedures for open data preparation, regular update, quality assurance/quality control and dissemination;
- Technical measures: referring, among others, the development of an integrated information system and the setting up of a single access point for environmental information, updating licencing terms and conditions, preparation of metadata description and enhancing the multilingual aspect of web portals and websites in the area of the environment.

All the measures need to be seen as strongly interacting with and interdependent of each other and the impact of their gradual implementation closely monitored, as it may bring systemic changes across the whole data and information chain.

It is also strongly recommended that a multidisciplinary team should be set up to address and oversee the implementation of all the above-mentioned measures. Belarus has good experience by developing the NEMS framework in setting up cross-sectoral teams operating horizontally. This experience should be continued and applied in the field of open data and environmental information.

Based on the findings of the report three specific recommendations should be considered as a priority for Belarus: raising awareness among public officials on the benefits of open data, linking the existing environmental information systems and keeping the environmental information regularly updated.

In practice, these recommendations could be achieved by implementing relevant actions set out in the roadmap and summarised below:

- Specific policy measures, to promote and harness the benefits of open data, recognise the environmental domain as a priority for open data, including priority datasets;
- Specific legal measures, which could define open data policy as well as dedicated roles and responsibilities for public authorities in open data management procedures and processes, as well as preparing detailed methodological guidelines for open data preparation cycle;
- Specific technical measures, targeting capacity-building and awareness-raising activities to improve the understanding of public authorities on how to technically prepare and maintain open data as well as developing integrations and APIs for existing environmental information systems.

The present report depicts the current status of e-government, open data and environmental information management and dissemination in Belarus. Given the exponential development of this area and its recognition as a top policy priority for the near future, a regular update and assessment of the situation and progress achieved is strongly recommended.