

Availability and Effectiveness of Electronic Services in Latvia

This article reflects the main results of a study called "The Availability and Effectiveness of Electronic Services in Latvia." The aim was to study the accessibility of E-services that are offered by state and government institutions and to determine an indicator concerning their effectiveness. The data can be used to elaborate recommendations to improve the availability and efficiency of E-services.

The study was conducted in 2005 by the secretariat of the Latvian minister with special portfolio for E-governance and SIA "ADATI." The survey was conducted via telephone interviews of 1,116 respondents in all of Latvia, as well as 95 direct interviews of respondents.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondents were selected on the basis of the following socio-demographic indicators: Age, gender, place of residence, education and employment. 70.5% of respondents were women, and 29.5% were men. The age distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Age of respondents

Age	Number	%
15-24	123	11.0
25-34	130	11.6
35-44	210	18.8
45-54	217	19.4
55-64	229	20.5
65-69	207	18.5
Total	1,116	100.0

In terms of place of residence, 28.2% of respondents were from Riga, while the other 71.8% live in other major Latvian towns and rural districts. The education level of respondents is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Education of respondents

	Number	%
Elementary education	114	10.2
Secondary education	307	27.5
Secondary specialised ed.	378	33.9
Higher education	308	27.6
Known level	1,107	99.2
Unknown level	9	0.8
Total	1,116	100.0

SERVICES OFFERED BY THE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The intensity of using services

This indicator shows how important state and local government services are to local residents. The survey looked at services as such, without focusing on the channel via which the services are received. The main examples cited by local residents included declaration of one's

place of residence, receiving subsidies, receiving building permits, etc.

Most (82.9%) of respondents from the telephone interviews said that they make use of state or local government services.

The group which uses services most intensively are people aged 35-54 (89% said that they make use of the services). Those least likely to use such services are the elderly (65-69) – only 70.1%. Respondents with a higher education use services more often (86.6%) than do people with an elementary (80.5%) and secondary (80.3%) education.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Respondents were given a list of information sources with the aim of finding out how people get information about the services which they need. Three sources were proposed – direct contacts at the institution from which services or information about services should be received, telephone contacts, which are quicker and more convenient, and Internet pages, which provide for virtual presence.

Most respondents said that they visit the institution in question (687 respondents, 61.6%). 45.5% of respondents use the phone, and 28.4% say that they use the Internet for this purpose.

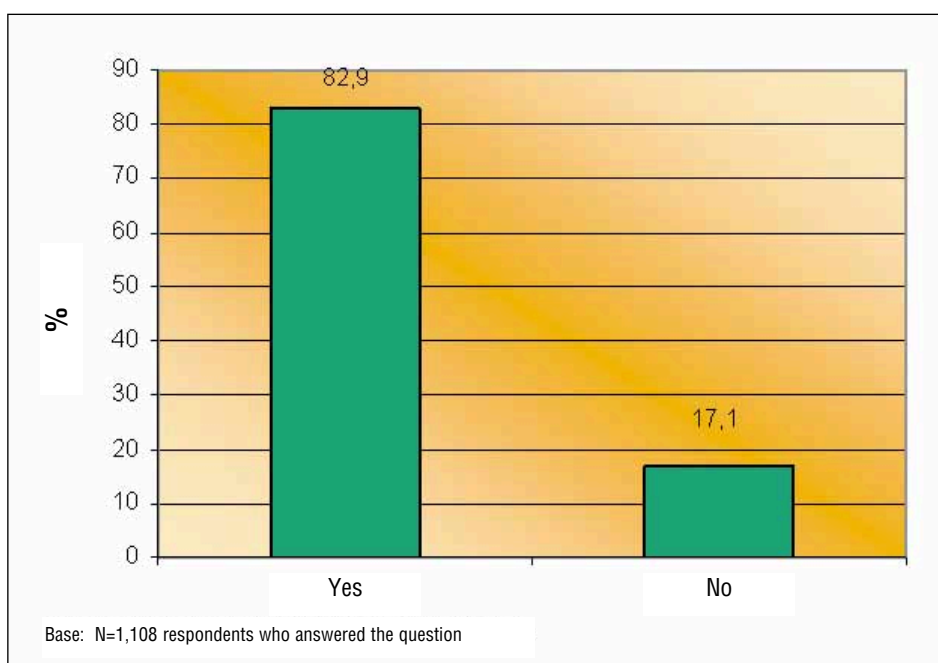


Figure 1. Do you use state and local government services?

Table 3. Where do people find information about state and local government services?

	Direct contact (% of all respondents)	Telephone (% of all respondents)	Internet (% of all respondents)
Unemployed people	65.8	47	18.8
Pensioners	60.7	37	2.7
Students/schoolchildren	59.2	42.9	56.1
Self-employed people	81.3	56.3	18.8
Businesspeople, upper level managers	45.5	63.6	63.6
Employees in private sector	57.6	51.5	37.7
Employees in public sector	62.5	46.5	38.1
Total	61.6	45.5	28.4
Number of responses	687	508	317

This is an interesting distribution. Unemployed people and pensioners are least likely to use Internet pages (18.8% and 2.7% of respondents respectively). Students and businesspeople are most likely to use the Internet (56.1% and 63.6%). Self-employed people prefer direct contacts (81.3%) to the Internet (18.8%). Employees of the private and the public sector use direct contacts, but they are more likely than others to use Internet pages (37.7% and 38.1% respectively).

TIME NEEDED TO RECEIVE SERVICES

Respondents were asked to state how long, on average, it takes to receive services from state or local government institutions. Four answers were proposed, and one had to be chosen. Here it must be remembered that there are different kinds of services, and it takes several weeks, for instance, to receive a building permit. Overall trends, however, indicate the amount of time which local residents tend to spend in receiving various services.

31.5% of respondents (Figure 2) said that they can receive services in an hour or less, 29.7% believe that it can be accomplished in one day's time, and 18.8%, on average, spend more than one day but less than one week.

ELECTRONIC SERVICES

Respondents were asked to consider 20 services which the EU has said must be provided electronically so as to promote the development of

the Information Society. For private individuals these include:

- Filling out income declarations;
- Services related to finding work (state services);
- Social insurance services (unemployment payments, child care subsidies, payments for medical expenses, scholarships for students, etc.);
- Electronic applications for documents (passports, information, etc.);
- Electronic registration of automobiles;
- Electronic filing of building applications;
- Electronic filing of documents with the police;
- Electronic access to public libraries (card catalogues, search opportunities);
- Various electronic information;
- Electronic applications to institutions of higher education;
- Electronic reports on change of place of residence or address;

- Health-related services (asking for a doctor's visit electronically, receiving consultations).

For legal entities, these are the services that are available:

- Electronic filing of social tax declarations;
- Electronic filing of individual income tax declarations;
- Electronic filing of value added tax declarations;
- Electronic registration of a new company;
- Electronic filing of reports to the Central Statistical Board;
- Electronic filing of customs declarations;
- Electronic filing of environment-related permits (evaluation of environmental effect, for instance);
- Electronic filing of state procurement applications.

USE OF E-SERVICES

When respondents were asked about their use of E-services, 29.4% said that they have used at least one service, 14.3% said that they have used just one service, 8% — that they had used two, and 4.3% — that they had used three services.

Electronic access to public libraries is used most often – 18.6% of respondents said that they had done so. Only 0.99% of respondents, by comparison, had filed electronic documents with the police – that's the service which has been used least often. This suggests that in many places in Latvia, this service is not available in the first place.

The study also showed differences

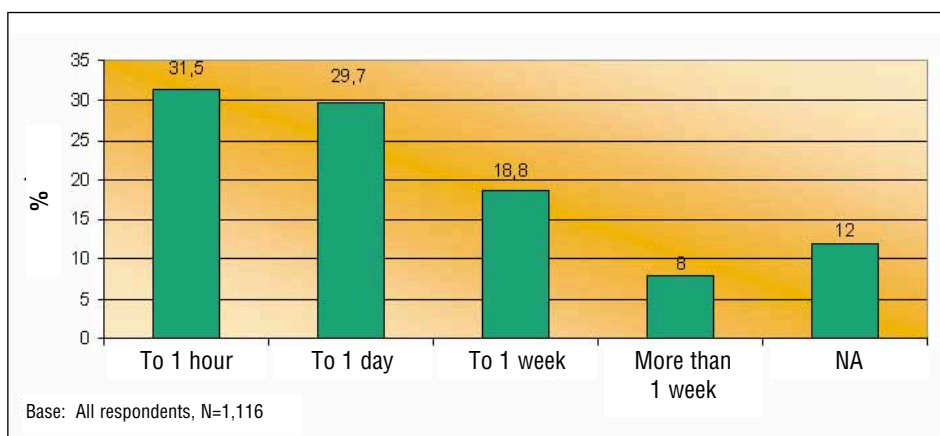


Figure 2. The amount of time needed to receive state or local government services

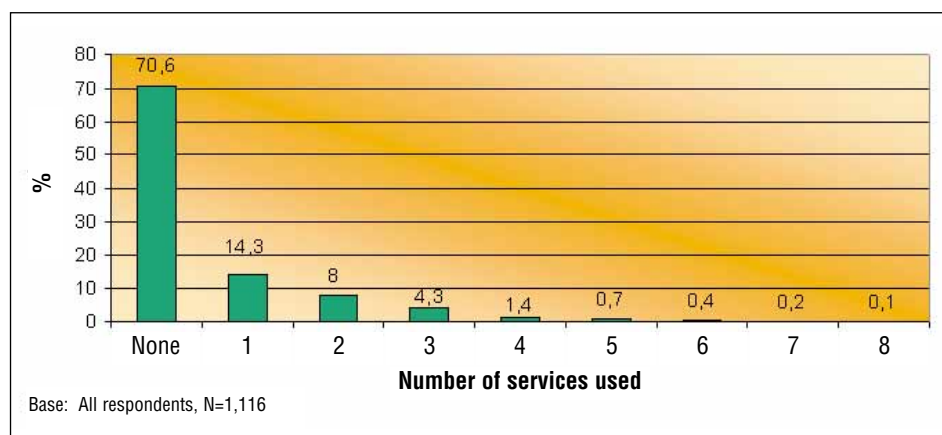


Figure 3. The number of E-services used

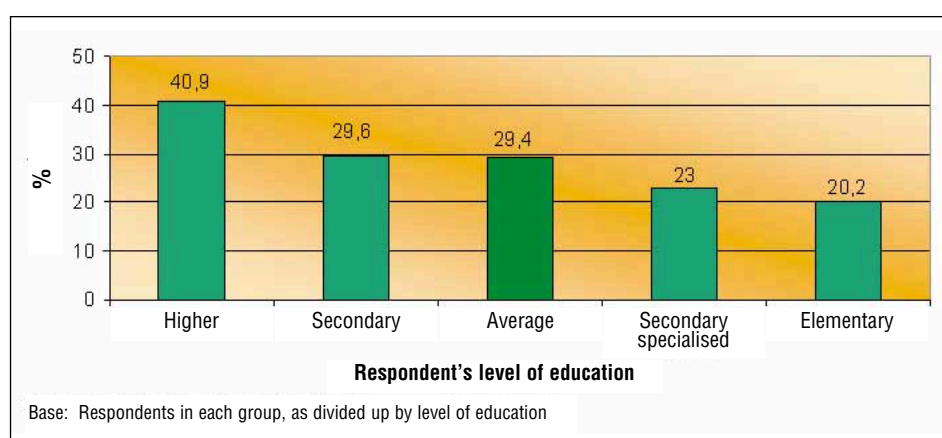


Figure 4. Respondents who have used at least one E-service (by level of education)

in the intensity of E-services use on the basis of the respondent's level of education. People with a higher education are most likely to use E-services (40.9% of respondents in that group said that they do so), while only 20.2% of those with an elementary education said that they have used at least one service.

There were also variations in the use of E-services in terms of the age of respondents. Young people are most likely to have used such services (57.7% of respondents in the group), while people in the 55-64 and 65-69 age groups were least likely to have done so (17.5% and 10.6% respectively).

THE NEED FOR E-SERVICES

Respondents indicated a high level of demand for electronic services – 77.2% of respondents said that at least one of the services that were

vice), followed by people with a higher education (85.7%). In terms of employment, students and schoolchildren said most often that they need at least one of the services that were listed (91.8%).

Those with the fewest demands for E-services are the elderly (in the 65-69 cohort, 52.7% said that they would like to receive at least one service) and those with an elementary education (72.8%). In terms of employment, pensioners are those who are least likely to seek out E-services (53.4%).

In greatest demand in this group are library services, of which 81% of respondents spoke. The ability to file social insurance documents (76.8%), to receive electronic reports (76.1%) and to declare one's place of residence (75%) were close behind. In this age group, only 61.2% of respondents said that they would like to file documents with the police electronically.

EVALUATION OF SPECIFIC E-SERVICES IN LATVIA

Electronic filing of income declarations

Here respondents were asked whether they would like to file income declarations electronically:

- 913, or 81.8% of all 1,116 respondents answered this question;
- 39.8% had information about this service, and 20.6% had already used it;
- Of all respondents who had information about the service, 8.3% had used it;

listed is necessary, while 20% said that all 12 of the services are needed (Figure 6).

Young people said most often that they need E-services (among those aged 15 to 24, 92.7% of respondents said that they need at least one ser-

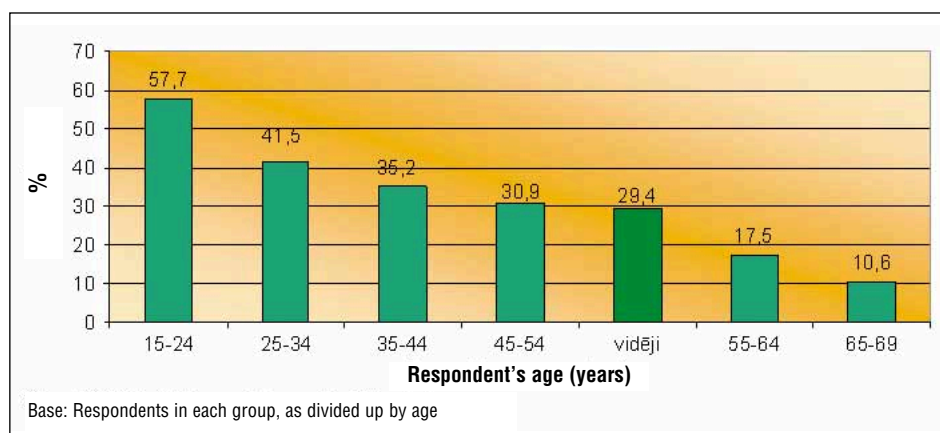


Figure 5. Respondents who have used at least one E-service (by age)

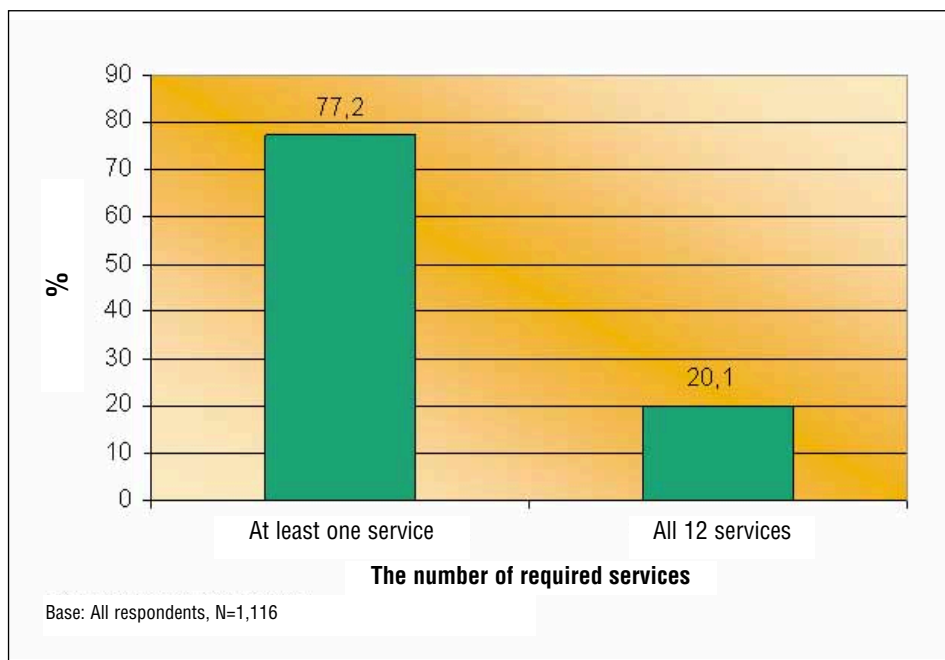


Figure 6. The need for electronic services

- Among the respondents who had no information about the ability to file income declarations electronically, 78.4% said that this should be made possible;

- 80.2% of those who had not used the service said that it is needed;

- This allows us to draw two conclusions. First of all, people are looking toward the future and plan to use the service at some point. Second, the ability of people to file income declarations electronically is not yet sufficiently effective;

- The age group in which there was the most information about the income declaration service was the 45-54, where 47.3% said that they have information;

- Young people had the least information (26.3%), which is probably because people in this age group don't need such services yet.

Electronic job-related services

Here respondents were asked about job-related services which are offered by state and local government institutions:

- 910, or 81.5% of the 1,116 respondents answered this question;

- 44.1% answered that they have information about this service, and

15.8% saying that they have used it;

- 7% of all respondents who have information have also used the service;

- 78.5% of those who do not have information about the service say that it is necessary;

- 82.2% of those who have not used it say that it is necessary;

- Here we must remember that this is a service that is only necessary for job seekers, and the high level of positive responses to the question

about whether the service is needed suggests that respondents want job opportunities to be presented to job-seekers as conveniently and extensively as possible;

- In all age groups up to 44, respondents had more information about the job-seeking service than the average among all respondents;

- The lowest level of information was found in the 55-64 age group (39.1%). That is the group of people who are of pre-retirement age, and in Latvia they are at the risk of social alienation;

- Those most likely to use the service were unemployed people (27.7%) and students (21.1%). Both groups were most likely to say that the service is needed (82.1% and 90.2% respectively among those who do not have information about the service or have not used it);

- 66.5% of pensioners who have no information about the service say that it is necessary.

Electronic social insurance services

Here respondents were asked about the availability of social insurance services in electronic form:

- 910 of respondents, or 81.5%, responded to the question;

- 44.6% had information about the service, and 23.6% had already used it;

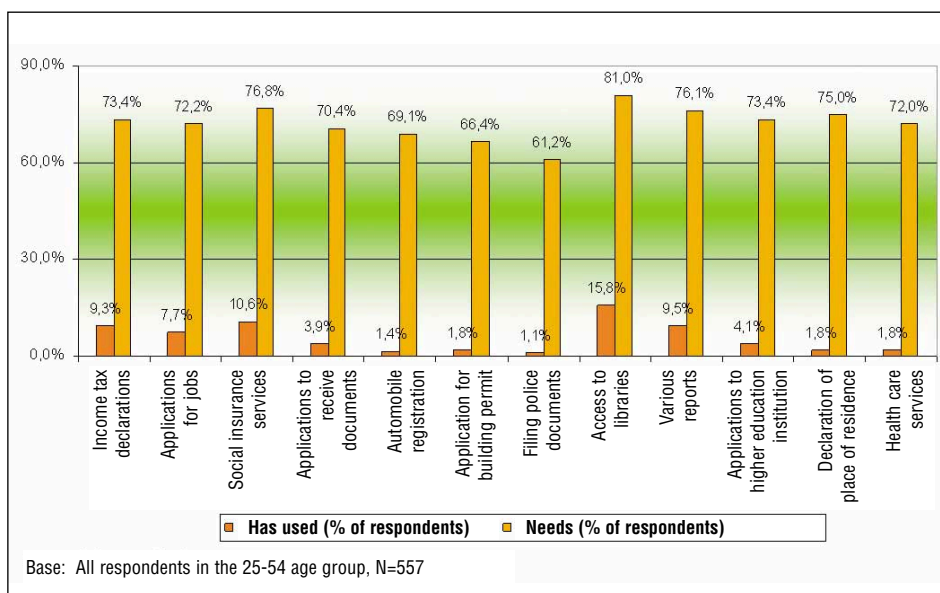


Figure 7. Need for E-services in the 25-54 age group

- 10.6% of all respondents with information about the service;
- 83.6% of those who don't have information and have never used social insurance services electronically think that there is a need for them;
- The age group in which there is the most information about social insurance services is the 35-44 (56.2%);
- The least information is among the 55-64 age group (39.7%). It is key to provide information to the latter group, however, because the need for social insurance services is greater for older than for younger people;
- The service is used most by unemployed people (45.3%) and students (32.4%);
- Pensioners, who should theoretically have a great need for social insurance services, do not use their electronic form very much at all, even though pensions as such are one form of electronic services;
- Students and private sector employees were most likely to say that the service is needed (94.9% and 87.8%);
- Pensioners were least likely to think so (70.6%, as opposed to a total average of 83.6%).

Electronic applications for documents

Here respondents were asked whether they should be able to file electronic requests for various documents:

- This question was answered by 909 of the 1,116 respondents or 81.5%;
- 29.2% had information about it, and 11.7% (3.4% of all who had information) had used it;
- Among those who have never used the service and didn't know about it, 74.2% said that it is necessary;
- This service is used most often by younger people – 22.9% in the 17-24 cohort, as opposed to the overall average of 11.7%;
- Older people use the service less, which is probably because they have less of a need for documents from state or local government institutions;

- The overall lack of respondents who use the service can be attributed to the fact that electronic signature services are not available in Latvia – something that is of key importance for this service;

- Those who work in the private sector, businesspeople and unemployed people were most likely to say that the service is needed (83.5%, 81.8% and 80.5% respectively).

Electronic automobile registration

Here respondents were asked whether they would like to file automobile registration documents with the Road Traffic Safety Directorate in electronic form:

- 81.5%, or 909 of 1,116 respondents answered this question;
- Only 18.8% had information about it;
- Only 1.7% of those who answered the question had actually filed documents electronically;
- Among those who did not have information about have never used the service, 74.9% say that it is necessary, as do 83.4% of those who have never used it.

There were no major demographic differences in these responses, with 15-20% of respondents in each group responding yes. Only 15 respondents said that they have filed automobile registration documents electronically, which suggests that the service is unpopular or not very accessible. This means that it is not possible to say which groups use it more or less often.

Electronic filing of building applications

Here respondents were asked about filing electronic applications to receive building permits or to receive approval for building projects:

- This question was answered by 905, or 81.1% of the 1,116 respondents;
- 15.9% had information about it, and 7.9% (1.3% of respondents with information) had actually filed such documents electronically;
- Among those with no information, 70.1% feel that the service is necessary;

- The greatest proportions of those who have information about the service were found in Ventspils and Rīga (18.4% and 17.2%) of respondents in all;

- The same was true of fully 23% of respondents in the Latgale region of Latvia;

- The least information was found among respondents in Rēzekne (5.3%), Jūrmala (12.8%) and the region of Vidzeme (13.8%).

Only 12 respondents reported having used the service, which means that electronic applications for building permits can be submitted very seldom, indeed.

Electronic filing of documents with the police

Here respondents were asked about filing electronic documents with the police authorities:

- A total of 907, or 81.3% of 1,116 respondents answered this question;
- 13.9% had information about the service;
- Only 0.99% had used it;
- Among those with no information, 68.4% think that the service is necessary.

As just nine respondents had ever filed police documents electronically, one can conclude that the service is either unavailable or people simply don't use it.

Electronic access to public libraries

Here respondents were asked about electronic access to library card catalogues and the like:

- 907, or 81.3% of respondents answered this question;
- 48.4% saying that they are aware of it, and 38.3% reporting having used it;
- 18.6% of respondents who answered this question have used this service;
- Fully 87.2% of those with no information about electronic library services say that they are needed;
- This indicates that this is the best known service of those that were considered here. The greatest numbers of people have used it and say that it is necessary;
- People with a higher education

were most likely to say they have information about library services of this type (60.4%), those with an elementary education were least likely to say so (41.3%).

Asking for various reports electronically

Here respondents were asked about receiving electronic versions of various reports from state and local government institutions – filing applications electronically and then receiving the information electronically or by mail:

- This question was answered by 907, or 81.3% of all respondents;
- 33.2% were aware of the service, and 25.4% (8.5% of all respondents who had information) have used it;
- 81.8% of those with no information said that the service is needed;
- The younger the respondent, the more likely he or she is to have used the service – in all age groups up to 54, more people said that they have used the service than said that they have not;
- In the 15-24 age group, the number of people who have used the service was around eight times higher than was the case among those in the 65-69 cohort (39.5% as opposed to 4.8%);
- It is clear that education has much to do with how people responded to this question – 85.5% of those with a higher education and only 73.9% of those with an elementary education said that it is necessary;
- The high level of need may have to do with the fact that people often need documents from the government, and it is important for them to save time in the process.

Electronic filing of change-of-address reports

Here people were asked whether they would like to file change-of-address notifications electronically when they move house:

- Responses were given by 907 (81.3%) of respondents;
- 20% answered that they have information about the service, and 8.2% of that 20% reporting that they have used it;

- 1.7% of respondents who had information about the service reporting that they have used it;

- Of those who have no information, 80.4% think that the service is necessary.

Electronic health care services

Here people were asked about different E-Health services including private initiatives, for example registering to the doctor:

- 906, or 81.2% of the 1,116 respondents answered this question;
- 15.9% had information, and 14.9% had used the service;
- 2.4% of those who had information had used the service;
- Among those with no information, 78.9% feel that the service is necessary;
- As is the case in other areas, people with a higher education were more likely to say that the service is needed (83.4%) than were people with an elementary education (72.7%).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ELECTRONIC SERVICES

Another goal of the study was to assess the effectiveness of E-services. Respondents were asked about five different factors which impact upon this. Respondents were asked to provide a rating of 1 to 4 in response to the following claims:

- I can receive E-services quickly enough;
- Access to E-services is sufficient;
- It is convenient to use E-services;
- I have adequate skills that are needed to use E-services;
- When I receive E-services I am mostly satisfied with them.

The average rating was calculated for each of the indicators, and

Table 4. The effectiveness of E-services

	Average evaluation
Speed	3.34
Access	3.16
Convenience	3.74
Level of skills	3.04
Attitude	3.52
Average	3.36

then an average was calculated for all five of them (Table 4).

The maximum rating was 4, and the minimum was 1.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Respondents thought most highly of the convenience of E-services, but they want them to be faster, and that is a key reason why electronic versions of the services are needed. People need to be able to connect to the Internet anywhere in Latvia, and local government buildings should have Internet access facilities so that E-services can be used.

In the age cohort 15-24, 92.9% of respondents have a sufficient or nearly sufficient level of knowledge, but that is the factor in terms of effectiveness which received the lowest rating. The issue of attitudes vis-à-vis services could become less important in the future, because increasingly there will be services which do not require communications with an operator. During the transition period in this area, however, support from employees is very much needed, because that will have everything to do with how quickly local residents learn to use the services.

People in Latvia say that E-services allow them better to plan their time, because they don't have to think about the opening hours of institutions, nor do they have to stand in queues. Advantages of E-services as identified by respondents, thus, include speed, convenience, mobility and simplicity. Asked what concerns them about E-services, the greatest number of respondents said that they cannot be sure that the documents which they file have been received. Quite a few people spoke of technological problems.

Finally, when asked about obstacles against the use of E-services, the largest number of respondents said that they have no Internet access or that they do not know how to use the Internet. Others pointed out that electronic signature services are not yet available in Latvia. □

Source: www.eps.gov.lv