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INTERNEWS

e-Gov Project

EVALUATION OF THE e-Gov APPLY ONLINE APPLICATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Civil Servants Agency of the Republic of Macedonia is responsible for organising and conducting the recruitment process of civil servants for the state administration institutions. This obligation is one of the key tasks of the Civil Servants Agency and is regulated by the Law on Civil Servants.

In April 2005 the USAID e-Gov Project and the Civil Servants Agency started mutual cooperation to create an IT based Apply on-line application to improve the efficiency and transparency of recruiting civil servants.

As part of the work the legislation was amended to provide for a *no-cost application process* for vacancies. A previous obligation on candidates to attach five official documents to each application was thus eliminated, leading to cost savings of around 5000 MKD (\$100) per application.

The new legislation recognises the *electronic application form* as being valid.

The system covers the following phases of recruitment:

- Publication of vacancies and invitation to apply
- Submitting of applications
- Identification of applicants that meet the specified formal requirements
- Invitation to applicants to participate in testing
- Testing
- Evaluation of testing
- Ranking of applicants

The USAID e-Gov Project organised the following promotional activities before the system was launched:

- 25,000 brochures and 400 posters were designed, printed and distributed;
- Training was organised for representatives of 14 Citizen Information Centres of the Local self-government units and 30 Regional Offices of the National Employment Agency (Job Clubs), whose task was to promote the system and provide assistance to potential applicants.

Furthermore specific attention was given to the very low internet penetration rate in the Republic of Macedonia and that measures thus had to be taken to make sure that the system nevertheless should be available to almost anyone.

The system was officially launched on 20th December 2005 with the first job announcement published on-line.

The Apply online system is designed to provide the following benefits:

- Efficiency gains for the Agency
- Eliminate the risk of human mistakes or biased evaluation based on gender, minority group membership or other factors
- Increase transparency
- Simplification of the application process: Make it possible for anyone to apply and provide more good quality candidates

The e-Gov Project conducted a first evaluation during June 2006. It was a comprehensive process including statistics regarding the usage of the system, interviews with candidates who applied and were tested, and with some key Civil Servants Agency staff directly involved in the recruitment process. The evaluation covered the experience gained during the first six months. The results showed a system that had outperformed the expectations.

The major benefits the system achieved to introduce were:

- Appropriate support of the simplified procedure of applying;
- Simplified recruitment process for the Civil Servants Agency;
- Increased transparency;

After nearly one year of using the Apply online system, the e-Gov Project conducted second evaluation process, which covered the whole year of practising the system.

The purpose of the second evaluation is to:

- Identify whether the system is still providing the foreseen benefits for the citizens and the CSA administration
- What is the general impact of the one-year practice of the system?

The second evaluation process was conducted in two parallel phases:

- Collecting statistics regarding the usage of the application.
- Interviews with randomly selected job candidates and key personnel from the Civil Servants Agency.

The second evaluation included phone interviews with 70 candidates who applied and were tested.

Five Civil Servants Agency employees, different to the ones interviewed at the first evaluation, were individually interviewed. These employees are directly involved in the recruitment process and the Apply online system is their main working tool.

I. STATISTICS REGARDING THE USAGE OF APPLICATION

The second evaluation was conducted during month of December 2006, exactly one year after the system was implemented. The data collected reflect one-year practicing of the system.

This evaluation also includes data which reflect the recruitment process before the system was implemented. Hence, the statistics collected were used for comparison of the recruitment process before and after the Apply online system was implemented, but also to reflect some other characteristics of the new system.

Each section includes comments from the e-Gov project staff.

A. JOB ANNOUNCEMENTS PUBLISHED/APPLICATIONS PER VACANCY

Number of Announcements/Applications per vacancy	
Total for 2005	110 job announcements (841 vacancies)¹ plus 45 repeated job announcements average number of applications per vacancy = 7
By the beginning of December 2006	183 job announcements (860 vacancies) no job announcement was repeated average number of applications per vacancy = 40

Comments:

- During 2005 the Civil Servants Agency processed 110 job announcements, but was also required to repeat 45 job announcements because many were declared as not valid due to a lack of candidates meeting the formal requirements.
- The Civil Servants Agency now handles 6 times more applications per vacancy with the same number of staff members, which clearly highlights the efficiency gains for the Agency by using the system.

¹ Each job announcement, which is organised and published for one institution at the time, can comprise more than one vacancy within that institution.

B. NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

Applications Received	
Total for 2005	4,342
By the beginning of December 2006	33,946 78% online applications 22% paper form applications

Comments:

- It is a fact that the number of applications received for year 2006 has increased 7 times compared to year 2005, before the system was launched. According to information the attractiveness of the vacancies are relatively stable between the years, so the specific vacancies have not influenced the number of applications. Clearly the previous obligatory cost of around 5.000 denar per application deterred many potential candidates from also applying. The abolition of the obligation to provide these costly documents is a direct effect of the e-Gov initiative. In addition the interviews have confirmed that the applicants now fully trust the system and thus find it worth while to apply.
- During the first two months of practicing the system, it was identified that 75% of the applications were received online. This figure was beyond any expectations. Now, after eleven months of practising the system, the ratio between the online and paper form applications is 78% / 22%.

C. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

% of Applications who submitted a complaint	
Total for 2005	7% of applicants submitted a complaint
By the beginning of December 2006	0.99 % of applicants submitted a complaint (in absolute number 337)

Comments:

- The number of complaints decreased during 2006 from 7% to less than 1%. Candidates trust this system better than the manual one.
- Most importantly, none of the present complaints has addressed the system and its functioning, but they all refer to the last phase of the recruitment process which is the interview with the recruiting institutions.

D. STRUCTURE OF CANDIDATES WHO APPLIED

Based on statistical data from the new system only

Structure of Candidates Using the Apply on-line System	
Gender	60% of the candidates were women 40% of the candidates were men
Education level	92% of candidates have a University Degree
Age	80% were under 30 years of age

Comments:

- Women are equally or more encouraged than men to use the system.
- Highly qualified candidates apply for vacancies as civil servants, which is a solid basis for establishing a professional state administration.
- Young people are interested in applying for civil service.

II. RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH CANDIDATES

70 interviews were made with randomly selected candidates that had been selected to proceed to the testing. In all, 50% of the interviewed candidates were women and 50% men. Out of the candidates interviewed 30% represented various minority groups.

- A. **Findings:** 53% of interviewed candidates had seen the advertisement in the daily newspapers, and 40% of the interviewed candidates regularly checked the web site instead of the daily papers for new vacancies.

Comments: During the first evaluation it was identified that 72% of the candidates saw the advertisement in the daily newspapers. The situation is different now. There are more and more candidates who regularly check the web site and no longer need to go through the daily newspapers when looking for a job.

- B. **Findings:** 3% of candidates submitted both paper and on-line application form. During the first evaluation it was 15% of candidates.

Comments: This indicates that the candidates are far more trustful to the online system now after one year has passed

- C. **Findings:** All candidates who submitted online applications stated that it was very easy to use the system and they did not need any assistance.
- 83% of candidates who applied on line had used the testing simulation, which they all found useful.
 - 4% did not use it, because they did not need it.

Comments:

- The system is user-friendly for all candidates in all its components.
- The testing simulation on the web is still very attractive for the candidates.

- D. **Findings:** Same findings as with the previous evaluation - 95 % of the interviewed candidates answered that the on-line version of the obligatory testing was very easy to use and that they trusted the result².

Comments: Candidates again confirmed the trust they have in the system, specially the testing module, which is most important for them. Many of the candidates also stated that the best thing they like about the system were the immediate results which are electronically generated at the end of the testing. This is one of the reasons they trust the system and that they feel the human influence is totally eliminated in this section.

- E. **Findings:** 62% of candidates answered that they have used the registration module, which is quite contrary to the figures identified during the first evaluation, when only 5% of candidates used the registration module.

Comments: We have a significant improvement here. The figures indicate that candidates are more interested in the options available within the system now, after 11 months of practising.

- F. **Findings:** 95% of candidates believe their application was objectively evaluated.

Comments: The trust in the objectiveness of the system has been confirmed again with the second evaluation.

- G. **Findings:** 50% of the interviewed candidates had applied in both the old and the new system. They were asked to make comparison regarding the transparency of the new and the old system - 100% believe the new system is more transparent.

Comments: One hundred percent of candidates who are able to compare the old and the new system trust the new system as being more transparent. One of the major objectives of the project is confirmed with these statements of the citizens.

² Results from the testing are automatically calculated at the end of the testing and immediately presented to candidates.

H. **Findings:** 32 % of applicants who submitted online application used their home internet connection; 32% used their offices' connection for applying; 20% used Internet café services, 10% used friends' Internet connection.

Comment: Candidates manage to find a way to submit on-line application. The attention paid by the e-Gov Project to make the system easily available obviously paid off.

I. **Findings:** 14% of all interviewed candidates submitted a paper form application. Half of them stated that the reason for this was not having access to Internet. The other half stated various other reasons, such as lack of trust in Internet in general or lack of knowledge.

Comment: During the last evaluation most of those who send paper form application stated that they were sceptical about the system. Now the scepticism is not present in their answers, but the only issue remaining is the Internet access.

The general impression from the interviews with candidates is that people do trust the system and are happy with the opportunity that was given to them. They are very pleased with the fact that no documents are required when applying and that results from the testing are available immediately, after the testing is finished. They believe the computer can not be wrong in calculating the results, unlike the humans who can sometimes make mistakes "on purpose". Many of the candidates stated that the system is clear and simple, well organised and not corrupted.

None of the candidates criticised the functioning or the trustfulness of the system.

III. RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH KEY CSA EMPLOYEES

During second evaluation we have individually interviewed five representatives from the Civil Servants Agency, who are directly involved in the recruitment process and who are direct users of the Apply online system as it is their major operational tool.

The interviewed persons in general stressed the following:

- All interviewed Civil Servants Agency employees were able to make comparison between the processing of the recruitment procedure before and after the Apply online system was launched, since they have been employed there long before the system was launched. The first and mutual conclusion was that they would never like to go back to the old system.
- The system is highly functional and operates in accordance to the legislation and internal recruitment procedures.
- It is much easier to conduct the recruitment process now; even though the number of candidates has increased significantly.

- Time savings have been achieved in each phase of the recruitment process:
 - The administration selection: The time needed for this part has gone down from around 15 minutes per application to probably less than 2-3 minutes. Civil Servants Agency employees even suggested little minor modification to the system which would make this time even shorter.
 - The minutes/reports from the phase of administrative selection are now produced by pressing one button. Previously it took them hours to prepare such a report.
 - Testing phase:
 - **Before** the system was launched everything was produced manually: producing the test; evaluation of the scores; ranging the candidates and preparing the minutes. Sometimes when there were more than 2000 candidates per vacancy, it took the group of 4 commission members 3-4 days (16 man days) to prepare reports.
 - **Now**, the reports for the testing phase are produced in 5-7 minutes, regardless of the number of candidates.
- The Civil Servants Agency employees, specially the ones involved in the creation of the recruitment policy and civil servants improvement techniques, are now able to concentrate on creating policies and long-term objectives, which they could not focus on before, since they were burdened with daily problems regarding the recruitment process.
- All interviewed employees individually confirmed they have noticed drastic decrease of complaints received, and drastic increase of the trust of candidates in the last few months. They claim that the candidates are very satisfied with the new manner of applying, and that they strongly believe the Agency is processing transparent and fair recruitment process. The Agency employees experienced that the candidates consider the Agency to be their best supporter in finding a job which meets their level of education and experience.
- The possibilities of making human mistakes is very low in the phase of administrative selection (it does exist because the paper form application are manually inserted in the system), but even this low risk is rapidly eliminated in the last few month, since the candidates are evidently more and more using the online applying.
- The risk of human mistakes and influence in the phase of testing and scoring has been completely eliminated since the computer automatically calculates the scores from the testing.
- All interviewees stated that they were sceptical at the beginning about receiving false statements in the applications from the citizens, but it turned out quite the opposite, that the citizens do not violate the system, since none of the received applications was false. It seems that the citizens are serious when it comes to official relations to the state institutions.
- The job announcements are continuously available on the web site, and anybody can thus read it at any time during the period of publishing which increases the possibility for candidates to be made aware of the vacancy. The previous system only published the job announcements once in two daily newspapers.
- The employees admit that the previous risk of human influence in the selection has been eliminated. The system does not allow opening of the submitted applications before the job announcement is formally closed. Previously the applications were opened before the job announcement was formally closed, which could result in some manipulation.

IV. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The e-Gov Project, together with the Civil Servants Agency can be considered as pioneers in introducing electronic government applications available to all the citizens. Even more importantly, this is one of the very first interactive applications available to the Macedonian citizens.

The <http://prijava.ads.gov.mk> web site is still the most visited Macedonian governmental site on the Web.

This second evaluation confirms and further strengthens the first findings that the system is fully providing the foreseen benefits for which it was designed:

- Civil Servants Agency employees now have time for essentials such as improvement of the recruitment procedure, developing long term programs for improvement of the civil servants skills and knowledge, etc.
- The Civil Servants have had no problems to adjust to working with the IT based system.
- The citizens trust the system fully and believe that the Civil Servants Agency is one of the few state institutions that offer transparent and non corrupted service for them.

The first year of practicing the Apply on-line system has shown that if a good on-line service is provided to the Macedonian citizens they would have no doubts in using it. The statistically confirmed low internet penetration rate is not necessarily an obstacle, although the issue may never be underestimated as a problem. It was a revolutionary step which proves that citizens can trust the institutions if they are offered transparent and not corrupted services.

ANNEX I. Questionnaire for 70 random selected candidates (phone interview)

<p>1. How did you find out about the job vacancy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By regularly checking the vacancies on the www.prijava.ads.gov.mk • From the newspaper advertisement • Word of mouth • Other _____
<p>2. How did you apply?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online (go to question nb.3) • paper form (go to question nb.4)
<p>3. How did you find out about the online system? (go to question nb.5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online • TV • Newspapers articles • Job announcement in a paper • Friend • Job Club • Other (what?)
<p>4. Why did you choose to not use the online system? (go to question nb. 10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not know that I could • Do not trust the internet • Do not have access to the internet • Knew that I could but did not know how to use the system
<p>5. Where did you apply from?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home • Office • Internet café • Friends house • Job Club • Other
<p>6. Did you need any special assistance when using the system?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No • Yes <p>For which part of the process did you need help?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opening the web site • finding exact job announcement • clarity of the data requested • submitting the form <p>How did you get the information you needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Took a guess • Used the online help • Phoned the CSA • Other (provide details) _____
<p>7. Did you use the simulation of the testing when applying?</p> <p>Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was useful • It was not of any help <p>No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You were not aware • You were not interested

<p>8. How easy was it to apply using the online system?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very easy • Easy • Slightly difficult • Difficult
<p>9. Do you think the online system improved the level of transparency in the selection process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes – improved • No change – same as with the paper based • No – the online system is less transparent
<p>10. How easy it was to take the test?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very easy • Easy • Slightly difficult • Difficult
<p>11. Did you trust the results?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No - Don't trust computers in general - Don't trust the system
<p>12. Did you register in the system after testing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No - Don't have regular Internet access - Not interested - Don't know how
<p>13. Did you encounter any technical problem when using the system from applying to testing?</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Explain:</p>
<p>14. If there is another public sector job for which you qualify, how would apply?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online system • Go back to paper based application
<p>15. Do you trust that the system is fair</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Why?</p>
<p>16. What did you like most about using the online system?</p>
<p>17. What did you like least about using the online system?</p>

ANNEX II. Questions to employees within Civil Servants Agency:

- Have you faced any major technical problems since the system has been launched?
- Can you make comparison between the old and the new manner of conducting the recruitment process?
- What are the major advantages and disadvantages of the Apply online system?
- Have you identified any time savings in each phase of the recruitment process individually?
- Have you identified any decrease of the risk of making human mistakes?
- Have you felt any protection regarding pressure for making human influence in the process?
- What are the reactions of the candidates that you meet during testing?
- Is the system flexible enough for your specific tasks?
- Do you have any doubts about the system?
- Would you do back to the old system?
- Has the Agency received comments from the agencies recruiting?
- If so, what kind of comments?