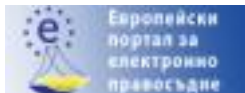


European e-Justice internet portal offers quick answers to citizens' legal questions

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An Italian travelling in Germany needs a lawyer. A French entrepreneur wants to search the Hungarian land register. An Estonian judge has a question about the Spanish court system. At the moment, it may take weeks to get this information. Answers to these questions - in 22 European Union languages - will be a click away.

The EU today launched the European e-Justice portal - an electronic one-stop-shop for access to justice throughout the EU. The web site benefits citizens, businesses, lawyers and judges with cross-border legal questions and boosts mutual understanding of different legal systems by contributing to the creation of a single area of justice. With more than 12,000 pages of content, the first version provides information and links on laws and practices in all Member States. For example, the portal offers information on legal aid, judicial training, and videoconferencing, as well as links to legal databases, online insolvency and land registers. Justice information is now at the fingertips of more than 10 million citizens involved in cross-border judicial procedures each year.

"Today is an important day for the European area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Through this portal, we lay the foundations of a more efficient and accessible justice to the European citizen", said Stefaan De Clerck, Belgium's Ministers of Justice. "The e-Justice project is the cornerstone of a modern European Justice, and the e-Justice portal is the door which gives access to it. An intensive cooperation between all stakeholders involved is now essential for a long-lasting success."

"E-Justice is justice at a click. We're taking a major step today in bringing justice closer to EU citizens and in increasing mutual knowledge of each other's legal systems. With knowledge comes trust and with trust comes the confidence that your rights will be protected no matter where you are in Europe," said Vice-President Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship. "Citizens, businesses and lawyers will benefit from a real one-stop cyber shop for justice information. Eventually, the site will modernise and streamline the way people receive legal information and advice. Citizens will get answers in their own language and they will get them quickly. We all know how crucial this is: justice delayed is justice denied." Who benefits from this site?

» **Citizens** can get answers on how the 27 Member States' legal systems function. They can get quick answers when dealing with real-life events such as divorce, death, litigation or even moving house. They can find a legal practitioner in another country, learn how to avoid costly court cases through mediation, where to bring a lawsuit, which Member State's law applies in cases and whether they are eligible for legal aid.

» **Lawyers, notaries and judges** can have access to legal databases, contact colleagues through judicial networks and find information on judicial training. They also find information on arranging cross-border videoconferences;

» **Businesses** will find links to insolvency and property registers and information about the laws that apply and about cross-border proceedings.

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Language barriers - which often complicate getting this information - are overcome by offering information in all official EU languages. The website's contents are available in 22 official EU languages. The website's links will direct users to national information of Member States. The involvement of judges and legal practitioners - notaries, lawyers, bailiffs and mediators - is essential to the success of the portal and several projects are underway. For example, work is ongoing on a European Case-Law Identifier (ECLI) to facilitate access to national and EU case law in the cross-border context.

The Commission, which manages the site, will continue to work closely with Member States to progressively enrich its content and develop new functionalities.

Next steps

Today's launch is the first step in developing a multilingual portal that can make life easier for citizens, businesses and practitioners in Europe.

New information, tools and functions will be added to the portal in the next few years. Fact sheets on defendants' rights and victims' rights in all EU Member States will be available in early 2011, including, for example, information on how road traffic offences are dealt with in different countries.

These fact sheets will serve as a basic reference tool for legal practitioners as well as citizens.

Future versions of the portal will also make existing EU justice tools more effective, allowing a citizen to make a cross-border small claim or payment order online. Businesses will also benefit from lower costs thanks to simpler, streamlined online legal procedures once insolvency registers, business registers and land registers are accessible via the portal. Courts would be able to deal with cross-border requests online and communicate with the claimants and defendants in a particular case as well as with courts in other Member States.

Work is already underway to ensure that by 2013 there will be a tool allowing citizens to narrow their searches for lawyers. For example, the portal will allow a citizen to look for a German-speaking lawyer who specialises in family or divorce law in Hungary.

Good progress is also expected to be made to tackle EU-wide interoperability issues for e-Signature, e-Identity and e-Payment. Solutions in these areas are required for several of the e-Justice projects' full implementation, such as for the European Payment Order or the European Small Claims procedure.

A [Roadmap](#) on e-Justice gives more information on the work to be done by end 2013.

Background

The [Council Action Plan on European e-Justice 2009-2013](#), adopted in November 2008, aims to improve access to justice and its delivery. It sets the objective of creating a European e-Justice portal. It recognises that information and communication technologies can play a key role in improving the way judicial systems work because they can facilitate legal practitioners' daily work and foster cooperation among legal authorities.

The Commission is already working to tackle bottlenecks to the Single Market under its Europe 2020 strategy of 3 March 2010 ([IP/10/225](#)). The smart use of technology is one of the best ways to reduce the cost of legal proceedings and simplify cross-border operations with online procedures for Small Claims, European Payment Orders, and the interconnection of insolvency and business registers.

Visit the e-Justice Portal at: <https://e-justice.europa.eu/>