

## **E-public Services Evaluation, based on Citizens' Perception, (The Albanian Case)**

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*Abstract:* - The development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in recent years has significantly affected business activities in the private sector, as well as in the public sector. Over the years, there has been a growing trend in utilizing technology to provide public services at national and global levels. In Albania, the government and public agencies have faced challenges in implementing electronic services, aiming to enhance the efficiency of public service delivery and meet the needs of citizens and society. The objective of e-government is to cater to the general public's expectations and satisfaction by offering valuable public services. In this regard, an e-government platform plays a crucial role in facilitating the efficient provision of electronic services, enabling citizens, businesses, and the public to interact successfully with the government and its institutions. The increasing demand for electronic services in Albania is driven by citizens' desire to improve the quality of public service delivery. To assess the significance of electronic services, this study examines relevant indicators on the e-Albania platform. A survey was conducted in the Tirana region of Albania, involving the distribution and completion of 190 questionnaires. The variables were evaluated using a Likert scale (1-5 rating). The main objective of this research is to assess citizen perception and evaluate the importance of electronic services offered by the e-Albania platform, through measuring citizen's perception.

*Key-Words:* - Electronic public services, e-Government, ICT, perception, performance.

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### **1 Introduction**

The effective allocation of public resources, strategic investments, and the implementation of well-targeted public policies play a vital role in determining the performance of government services. This holds particularly true when examining the realm of electronic services. The utilization of technology in public services through e-services has experienced a significant upward trend globally and nationally. Across the globe, governments and public agencies are implementing digital transformation projects and initiatives for a variety of reasons, one being improving user experience and the other, cost savings, [1]. The integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the public sector not only translates to an adaptation of public administration practices but also an enhancement of service performance. The public sector is confronted with new demands and expectations due to rapid

technological advancements. The continuous growth, spread, and rapid use of ICT has helped many governments to innovate and design public services and change traditional methods of service delivery, [2].

E-government serves as a fundamental pillar in developing a comprehensive structure for public services, leveraging technology and communication to improve governmental agencies' efficiency and deliver high-quality services. Service design is crucial to its delivery in the market and is particularly important in the public sector, as governments are obliged to provide access to services for the entire population, [3]. Enhancing customer satisfaction, fostering strong relationships with customers and business partners, and reducing service delivery costs are key drivers of electronic service delivery. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made it possible to reduce administrative costs

and harness technology's tremendous potential for more efficient public services. Public electronic services are provided to citizens by the government using digital platforms, [4]. E-government platforms are designed to provide services and share information with citizens, enabling improvements in government efficiency, administrative cost reductions, and enhanced public service quality, [5]. Furthermore, e-government is considered a powerful tool for governments to reduce costs, improve transparency and accountability, enhance the quality of public service delivery, and combat corruption. Consequently, it is crucial to present indicators that influence citizens' perception of electronic public services and raise awareness regarding their utilization. The objective of e-government revolves around transactions and interactions among four groups: citizens, businesses, government, and employees. Citizen satisfaction with e-government services is closely related to their perception and usage of government platforms, and their trust in the government. Through accessing e-services, citizens can save time, reduce expenses, and have easier communication access across all levels of the government, [6]. The Albanian government to give priority to the provision of digital services has drawn up, Cross-Sectoral Strategy "Albania's Digital Agenda", which had three main objectives; 1) the growth and promotion of electronic services for citizens, businesses, and administration; 2) the use of ICT in education, to overcome the digital divide, and 3) the consolidation of digital infrastructure in Albania. However, when it comes to electronic services in Albania, the adoption of technology has posed challenges for the government, public agencies, and citizens. The e-Albania platform serves as the sole government platform, providing citizens, businesses, and public administration personnel with online access to public services. Through this Government Platform, institutions and public agencies interact with each other, to provide online services to citizens. Over the past five years, significant positive developments have been observed in the variety and the number of services offered through the government service platform, indicating the government's efforts to improve and expand electronic public service provision.

The objectives of this study are:

- to analyze the national context, highlight the importance and user benefits of e- public services via the government gateway,

- to identify the main barriers and challenges related to e-service usage through the government gateway,
- to evaluate citizen perception of public e-services within the Government-to-Citizen (G2C) context.

## 2 Literature Review

An e-government portal plays a crucial role in facilitating the efficient delivery of e-services and enabling successful interactions between citizens, businesses, and public institutions. It is important to emphasize that the digitalization of public administration services should not be pursued as an isolated objective, but rather on a more global scale to create value for both public powers and citizens, [7]. The utilization of ICT goes beyond merely increasing efficiency and effectiveness in internal working procedures; it also serves as a means of managing interactions with external users, such as the provision of e-services by public administrations for citizens, [8]. To develop citizen-centered e-Government services, governments need to have a clear understanding of what citizens desire from e-government, [9]. Effective e-public services can only be developed if governments offer citizen-centered services that deliver tangible public value. The factors affecting the quality of public service are; access to the service; level of communication, responsiveness to service; politeness and professionalism of the administrative staff, reliability and responsibility, as well as security and quality in the provision of the service in question. Evaluating the effectiveness of public services from the perspective of the user/consumer is an opportunity to discover the factors that hinder, or otherwise facilitate their impact on society. The development of the role of public administration in the provision of social welfare has led to the decentralization of public services to allow better access for citizens to the services provided. The concept of public services should be seen as an activity carried out by public agencies to satisfy the interests of its citizens, [10]. E-government refers to the application and utilization of ICTs in the public sector to ensure effective service delivery, [11]. E-public services can be considered crucial elements for economic development, and therefore citizens and businesses expect to access data and information flexibly. In this context, the provision of e-services is closely linked to effective management, sustainable economic development, governance accountability,

transparency, and decision-making, [12]. The level of e-government services provided represents the extent to which an e-government platform enhances the delivery of efficient e-services to citizens, businesses, and the public. The level of citizen interaction has the potential to improve e-government efficiency, thereby providing citizens with a high level of service satisfaction, [13]. Considering citizens' perceptions and attitudes towards electronic services is an essential indicator for all public agencies that serve the government, as it can influence citizens' attitudes and behaviors, [14]. By measuring citizen satisfaction, governments can improve their services, leading to positive governance outcomes, [15]. E-government is particularly important as it contributes to higher levels of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in the public sector. It can help reduce corruption and enhance the provision of more efficient systems and services, [16]. This is particularly important when considering that ICTs, which are currently widely used platforms by many citizens, were less usable a decade ago.

E-government platforms provide benefits for citizens and businesses, allowing them to save time and money by avoiding physical visits to offices, reducing expenses related to paperwork, and ensuring the accuracy of information transactions. It is crucial to realize the benefits derived from implementing e-government in various socio-economic contexts, with the underlying expectation that public services effectively address the needs and requirements of citizens, [17]. Adopting a citizen-centered approach enables the government to achieve significant efficiency gains, improve service delivery levels, enhance citizens' satisfaction with government services, and improve their overall quality of life. Focusing on citizens in the context of public service delivery represents a realistic approach and provides an excellent opportunity for interaction between the government and citizens. E-government must be seriously considered, especially in developing countries, for its potential to build stronger institutional capacity, [18]. Citizens' perceptions of public services can, of course, change unevenly over time, as citizens are exposed to a multitude of events and policy changes, both nationally and globally, [19]. Digital technologies played an indispensable role in maintaining civil society during the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting the provision of essential public services, [20]. E-governance has the potential to transform citizens from passive consumers of

services into active participants who can shape the type of services they desire into the most effective service structure. This involves promoting and enhancing citizen participation, refining online service delivery through analysis and evaluation, benchmarking efficiency against alternative service delivery methods, and measuring performance.

The e-government framework is presented in Figure 1.

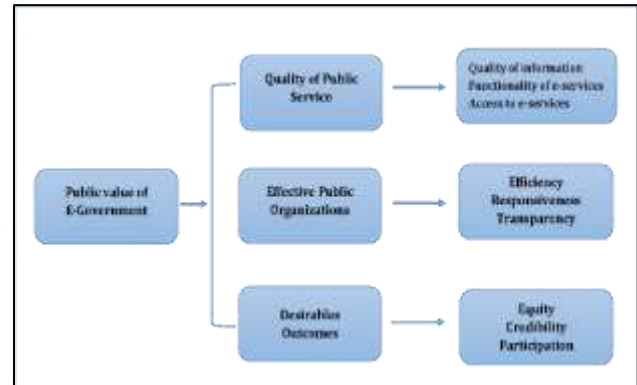


Fig. 1: E-government framework

### 3 Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, a combination of analysis and synthesis methods was employed. To gain a clearer understanding of citizens' perception of electronic services, primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with citizens, supplemented by secondary data.

The variables used in the questionnaire were derived from relevant literature sources such as the Government Survey by the United Nations, the e-Government Benchmark by the European Commission, and the e-Albania platform by the National Information Society Agency (NISA), [20], [21], [22]. To ensure alignment with the national context, the main sections of the government platform services were considered. Furthermore, the study analyzed the perceptions of electronic services from different groups of respondents, including variations based on education level (higher or secondary), residential area (urban or rural), and employment sector (public or private).

Interviews/questionnaires were conducted face-to-face with citizens in the biggest region of Albania, Tirana. Due to constraints in terms of time and cost, approximately 190 citizens/interviewees were

randomly chosen. The indicators of the importance and barriers of electronic services were measured using the Likert scale (1-5 points).

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

- What is the level of citizen utilization of e-services through the government gateway?
- What are the benefits experienced by citizens when using e-services through the government gateway?
- Which public service offered by the e-Albania platform is considered most important?
- What are the structural barriers related to the use of e-services through the government gateway?

## 4 Results and Discussions

E-government encompasses the establishment of inter-organizational relationships involving policy coordination and implementation, as well as the provision of services through online platforms or other electronic channels to citizens. E-public services have a crucial role in enhancing service quality, increasing citizen satisfaction, and improving the overall performance of public organizations. The e-Government Indicators in Albania are presented in Table 1.

E-government holds significant potential in transforming public institutions' operations and service delivery to citizens. The e-Government Survey stands as a prominent global report that evaluates the progress of e-government development. Through the e-Government Development Index (EGDI), the survey assesses the advancement of e-government at the national level and gauges the effectiveness of e-government in delivering public services.

Table 1. E-Government Indicators, in Albania

Indicators/ Year	EGDI rank	EGDI value	EPI rank	EPI value
2003	114	0.31	123	0.02
2004	110	0.34	97	0.03
2008	86	0.47	152	0.02
2010	85	0.45	86	0.13
2012	86	0.52	101	0.11
2016	82	0.53	55	0.64
2018	74	0.65	59	0.76
2020	59	0.74	36	0.85
2022	63	0.74	22	0.76

Source: United Nations, e-Government Survey, 2022

Based on the findings of the e-Government Survey, 2022, [20], Albania demonstrates a well-developed infrastructure and a skilled human capital, positioning itself on a promising trajectory towards achieving a high level in the e-Government Development Index (EGDI). Examining the aforementioned data related to the EGDI, Albania has taken significant strides in advancing its e-government initiatives. The reforms and initiatives implemented within Albania aim to enhance the quality of public services provided by governmental institutions. Over the past five years, the e-Albania platform has continually expanded and enhanced its range of electronic services available to citizens and businesses, showcasing notable improvements. The number of users, electronic public services, and transactions on the e-Albania platform are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The number of users, electronic public services, and transactions on the e-Albania platform

Year	No of e-services	No of users	No of transactions
2013	14	49,738	683,207
2014	119	43,299	2,884,726
2015	248	76,731	11,420,798
2016	465	71,698	25,570,757
2017	527	151,439	26,624,830
2018	591	334,786	52,400,816
2019	601	302,068	70,224,089
2020	1,021	758,735	144,326,634
2021	1,212	628,296	215,835,976
2022	1,227	417,246	265,436,673

Source: National Information Society Agency, 2023

Based on the above data, the e-Albania platform provided a total of 1,227 services in 2022, catering to 417,246 users who conducted approximately 265,436,673 transactions, [22]. As for the above indicators, it is noted that there are obvious differences in the results collected by the respondents related to rural and urban areas. They are presented in more detail in Figure 2 below.

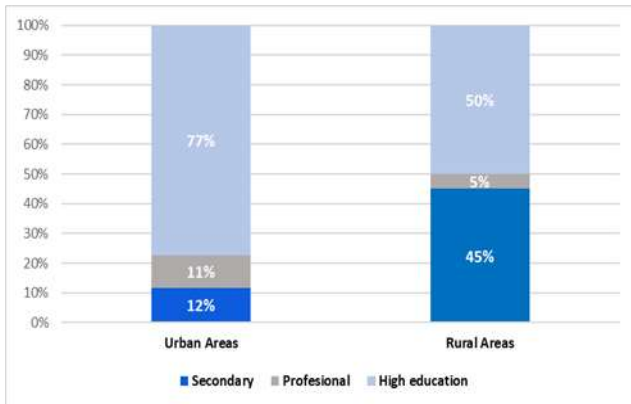


Fig. 2: Structure of respondents according to residential area and education  
 Source: Authors' results, 2023

The analysis of respondent data encompassed their educational background, employment sector, and residential area. Regarding the level of education, there is a difference in the percentage of respondents with about 27% higher in urban areas than those in rural areas. After processing the data, we conclude that there are no significant differences in the level of familiarity with digital platforms and services between employees in the public and private sectors. The structure of respondents according to employment and education is presented in Figure 3.

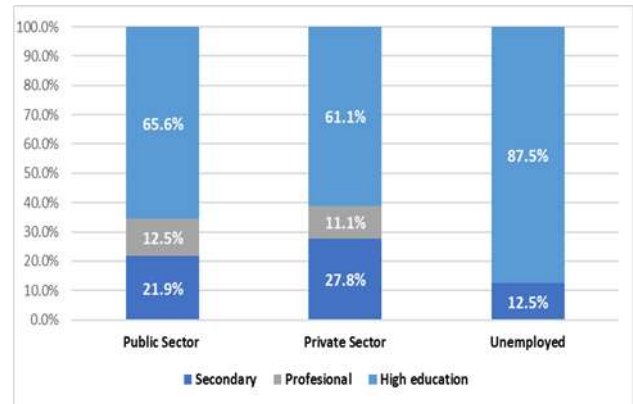


Fig. 3: Structure of respondents according to employment and education  
 Source: Authors' results, 2023

Based on the research objectives and after the data analysis, it turns out that the respondents value (maximally and very much important) services such as: application for personal/family certificates, application for passport and ID card, health care, medical check-ups, driving license, vehicle taxes, fines, ownership certificate, legalizations, certificate of judicial status, certification for the payment of contributions, high school diploma, and construction permit, transport. While from the responses, they place less value on (less and very little important) business extract/registration, subsidies for farmers, and customs agencies. The importance of electronic services provided by the e-Albania platform is presented in Figure 4.

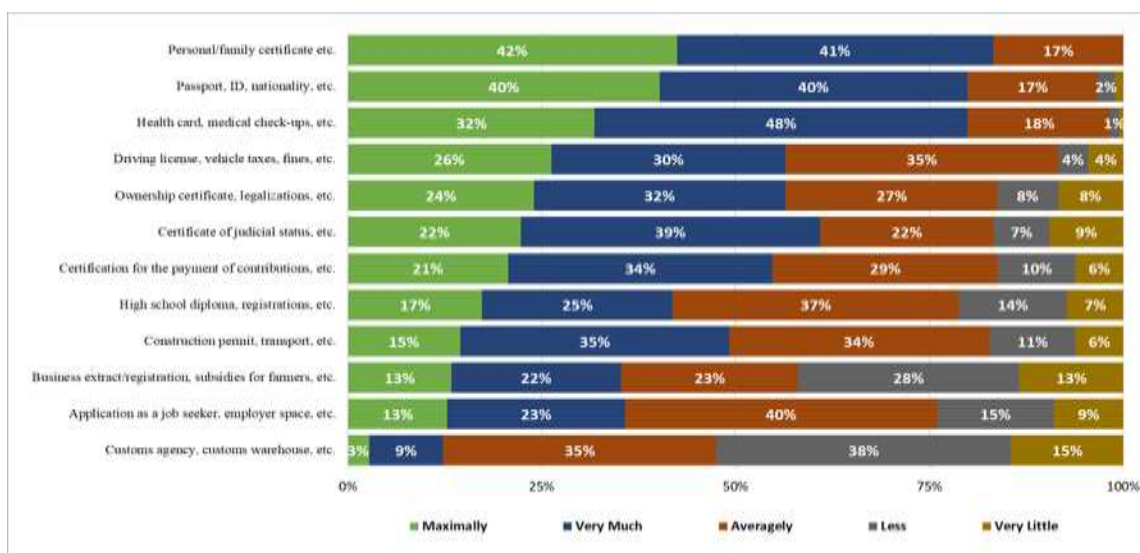


Fig. 4: The importance of electronic services provided by the e-Albania platform  
 Source: Authors' results, 2023

Table 3. The main barriers to providing electronic services through the e-Albania platform

No	The barriers to providing electronic services	Maximally	Very much	Averagely	Less	Very Little
1	Lack of computer equipment, smartphones, etc.	n/a	2%	17%	33%	48%
2	Lack of Internet access	n/a	3%	18%	34%	44%
3	Lack of knowledge on the use of electronic devices	n/a	4%	29%	36%	31%
4	Age	1%	3%	27%	31%	39%
5	Level of information about the use of e-services	1%	4%	31%	40%	23%
6	Issues related to security and privacy	5%	11%	35%	32%	17%

Source: Authors' results, 2023

Lastly, the main barriers to providing electronic services through the e-Albania platform are presented above in Table 3.

Referring to the data about the main barriers in the provision of electronic services through the e-Albania platform, it results that the respondents value: issues related to security and privacy, the level of information on the use of electronic services, the lack of knowledge on the use of electronic devices and age.

In accordance with the objectives of the study as well as the methodology and structure of the questionnaires, the indicators related to the gender of the respondents, the area of residence, the level of education, and the sector in which they are employed were analyzed. The level of familiarity with the e-government platform seems to be high (approx. 90%), although with a slight difference in urban areas.

We measured and analyzed the 12 main sections of the government platform services, from which it turns out that 9 of them are massively used and considered important, while three of them are less used and rated moderately important.

It is noted that there is a relationship between the level of use of services and the importance perceived by users.

The results found by us regarding the barriers to the use of services mainly correspond to the cited literature as well as reports from international organizations. This highlights such barriers and concerns related to privacy, security as well as the necessary skills in the use of digital devices and technologies. The last indicator is closely related to the age of the respondents, with a high level among the elderly.

We think, based on the evidence, that an increased effort is required on the part of public and policy-making structures to reduce the differences in

the provision of electronic services, the so-called "digital divide".

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Evaluation of e-services is an important aspect of the decision-making process by managers and public institutions and should always be based on indicators that help in decision-making, providing better performance for public agencies and institutions.

Based on the analyzed data, it is evident that there is a noticeable discrepancy in the use of electronic services based on urban and rural residences. This difference is primarily attributed to the lack of infrastructure and internet accessibility in rural areas.

Regarding the findings, respondents identified several key services as the most important. These include services related to personal/family certificates, applications for passports and ID cards, health care, driving license, and ownership services.

Referring to data from the National Information Society Agency (NISA) and the e-Government Survey, it is apparent that Albania has made significant progress in the past five years, leading to increased utilization of electronic services offered by the government and public agencies. The results obtained largely align with the overall perception of citizens regarding the most frequently used and significant services.

Moving forward, the government and public agencies should prioritize addressing challenges related to enhancing the quality, security, level of awareness, and information dissemination regarding the use of e-public services by citizens.

In conclusion, comprehensive strategies and policies are necessary to adopt a clear vision and approach to overcoming obstacles and challenges. It will therefore be necessary to make comprehensive efforts to minimize the phenomenon of the "digital division" mentioned above, as well as inequality in

the possibilities of using public services that naturally arise from the barriers identified in the study. This approach will effectively improve the provision of electronic services in alignment with citizens' expectations.

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### **Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)**

The authors have contributed together in the preparation of the paper, from problem formulation, literature review, methodology, questionnaire preparation, primary and secondary data collection and analysis, to the conclusions and recommendations.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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