



European Survey on e-Government and Environmental Permits

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www.eEnviPer.eu

1 Introduction

Environmental permits have existed for some time, but only recently have public authorities started to bring the permitting process into the internet age. Earlier last year, the European Commission funded the eEnviPer project to pilot test a cloud-based e-government solution for the application, administration and consultation of environmental permits across Europe.

In November 2012, eEnviPer invited public authorities and experts to provide input into an assessment of the current situation of e-government in environmental permits in Europe. This document presents a summary of the survey results. They will be used to build the understanding of the e-government sector and to help to make the eEnviPer platform more relevant to the market's needs.

2 Summary of the survey results

In November 2012, eEnviPer carried out a survey to find out more about the existing situation concerning environmental permits in Europe. Thirty-two respondents provided their input. This small sample is of course not representative. However, the answers to the survey give an indication of the current perception of the environmental permits process and highlight potential issues for further consideration.

2.1 Respondents' profiles

The survey reached two of the most relevant target groups involved in the environmental permitting process: *experts or consultants* (44%) and *permitting authorities* (28%). Nineteen per cent had *other* roles in the environmental process, for example: e-government specialists, business association representatives and NGOs. Only one respondent was an *investor or developer*.

All respondents answered the same questionnaire. Where respondents did not have access to concrete information, the survey asked for their best estimation.

All respondents were from Europe, except for one respondent from Japan. Within Europe, the majority of respondents (56%) were from Greece. Nine per cent were from Croatia and Serbia each, and 6% from Italy and Romania each. Germany, Spain and Turkey had only one respondent each. Most respondents work on environmental permits at a regional level (41%), 28% at a national level, and 22% at the local level.

Of the Greek respondents, the majority were *experts or consultants* (56%), while only a 17% were from permitting authorities. Twenty-two per cent had *other* roles in the environmental process, such as e-government specialists or members of an advisory committee. For Croatia, Italy and Serbia, there was a variety of respondents, including experts or consultants, permitting authorities and a business association representation, while all Romanian respondents were from permitting authorities. For further details per country and per role please refer to Figure 1.

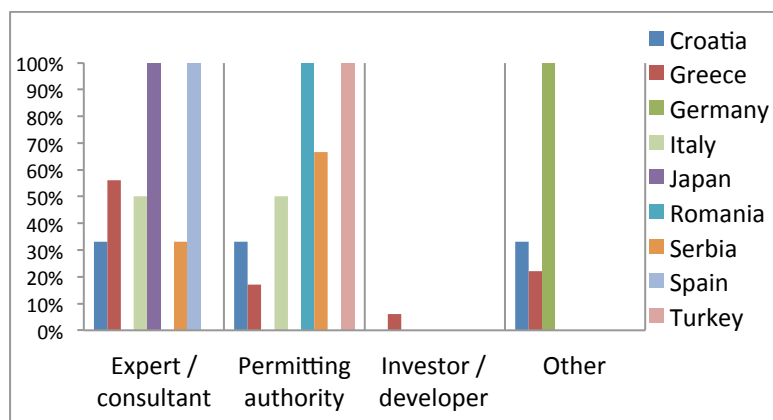


Figure 1. Roles of the respondents in the environmental permitting process, per country

Of the Greek respondents, 44% dealt with environmental permits at regional level, 33% at national level and 17% at local level. For Italy and Romania, all respondents dealt with environmental permits at regional level, while for Serbia, all respondents dealt with environmental permitting process at local level. For further details per country and per level of involvement in environmental permits please refer to Figure 2.

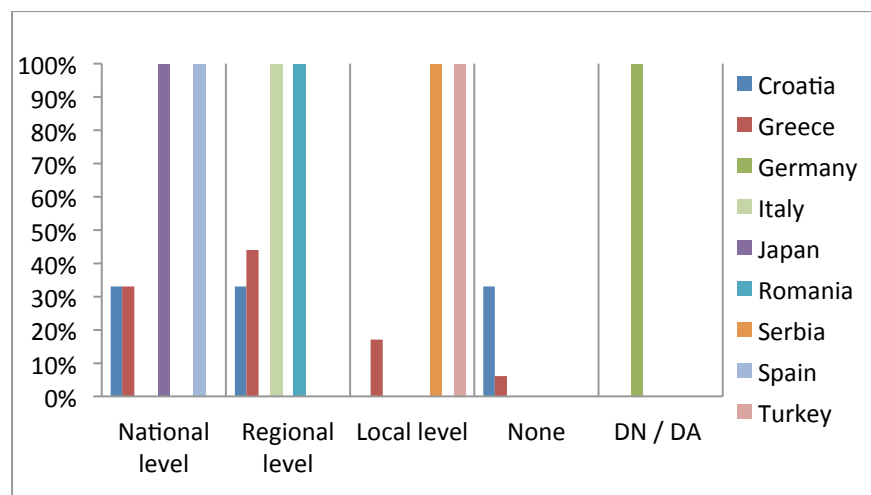


Figure 2. Level of the environmental permitting process at which the respondents deal with, per country of the respondents¹

2.2 Environmental permits in practice

Data about the number of applications received per year, applications approved per year, as well as the duration of the process, varied considerably from one public authority to another.

Out of all type of respondents, 28% of respondents estimated that *between 10 and 100 applications* for environmental permits are received in the permitting authorities per year; 25% mentioned *less than 10 applications* are received per year; while 13% of respondents mentioned that 1,000 or more applications are received per year (Figure 3). Nineteen per cent did not know or did not have the information available.

However, these results change when looking at the responses per respondent group. The majority of the permitting authorities (50% compared with 28% against all respondents) responding the survey mentioned that they receive *between 10 and 100 applications* for environmental permits per year, while 40% of the permitting authorities (against 16% of all respondents) replied *between 100 and 1,000*. For those

¹ DN / DA: Doesn't know / Doesn't answer.

answering as expert / consultants, 27% did not answer or did not know and another 27% approximated that less than 10 applications are received per year (against 25% of all respondents). This suggests that the permitting authorities actually receive more applications than suggested by the non-public authority respondents.

The process in Croatia is at the beginning. Only one or two permits were approved while around 150 applications await.
-- Director, Croatian Business Association

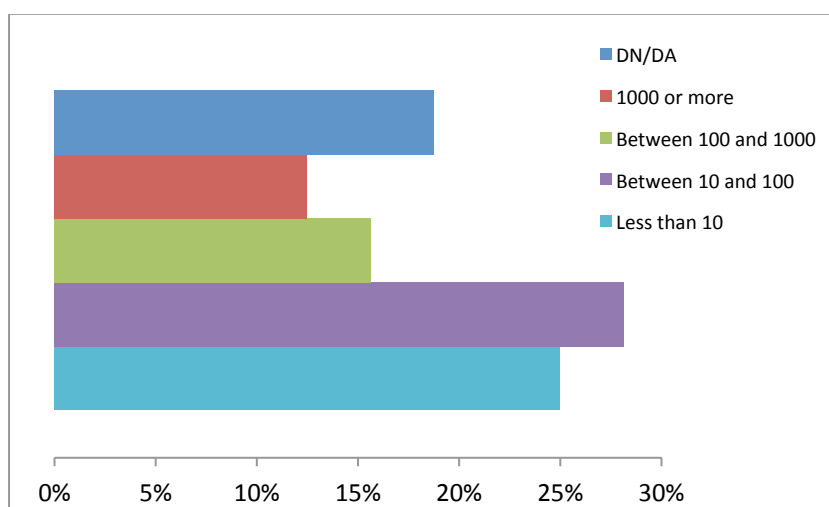


Figure 3. Applications for environmental permits received per year

On the other hand, 25% of respondents thought that *less than 10* applications are approved per year, another 25% of respondents *between 10 and 100* and another 25% of respondents *between 100 and 1,000* (Figure 4). Almost an equal number of respondents did not know or did not have the information available.

However, the majority of the permitting authorities (50%) considered that *between 10 and 100 applications* are approved per year (against 25% of all respondents), while 30% mentioned *between 100 and 1,000* applications are approved per year (against 25% of all respondents). On the other hand, 27% of the expert / consultants responding to the survey approximated that less than 10 applications are approved per year, another 27% *between 100 and 1,000*, and another 27% does not know or does not answer. This suggests that permitting authorities approve each year more environmental permits than suggested by the non-public authority respondents.

According to 31% of all respondents, the environmental permit process takes *between 2 to 4 months* from application to approval. However, 28% thought that this process takes *longer than 6 months* (Figure 5). However, for 40% of the permitting authorities responding the survey, the environmental permitting process takes *less than 2 months* (against 25% of all respondents) and for another 40% *between 2-4 months* (against 31%

of all respondents). On the other hand, for 33% of the expert / consultants responding the survey, the applications take between 2-4 months and for another 33% they take longer than 6 months. This suggests that the process is actually quicker than non-public authority respondents would expect.

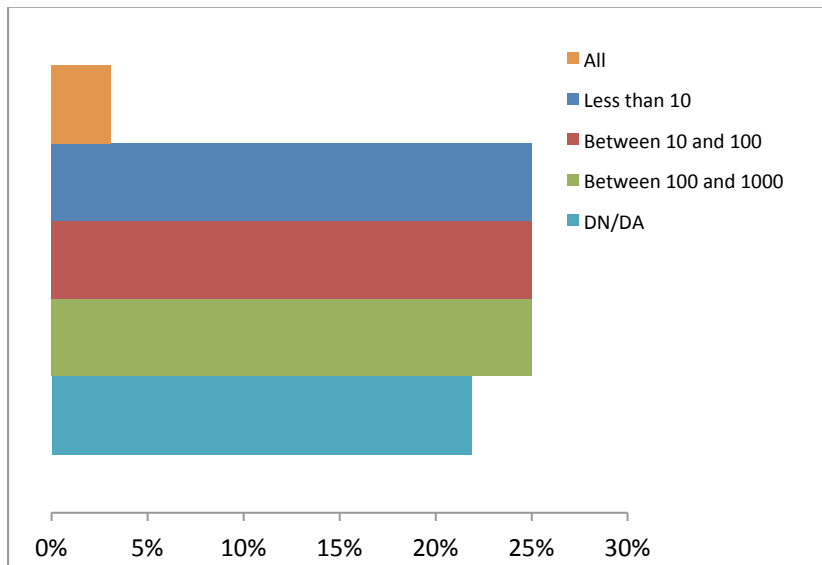


Figure 4. Applications for environmental permits approved per year

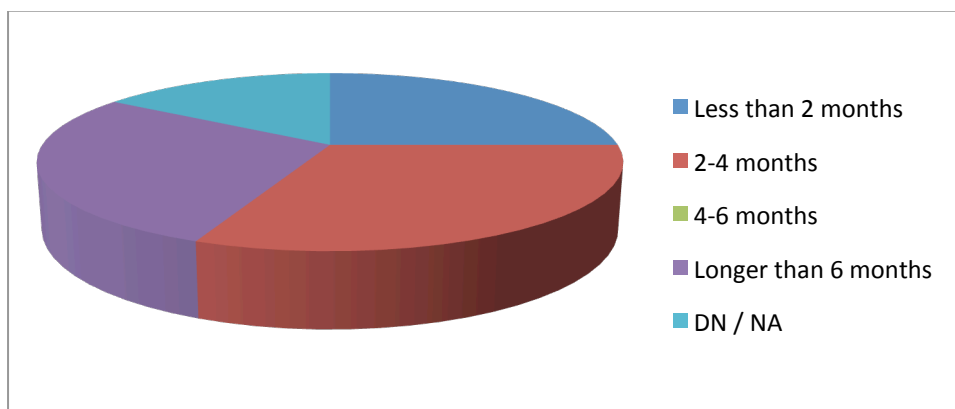


Figure 5. Average time an environmental permits process takes from application to approval

For most of the respondents, the most common project types undergoing the environmental permits process in their community were *infrastructure projects* (53%) and *energy industry projects* (50%). Thirty-four per cent of the respondents also included *agriculture, silviculture and aquaculture* and *tourism and leisure projects* in

their list of the three most common project types undergoing the environmental permits process (Figure 6).

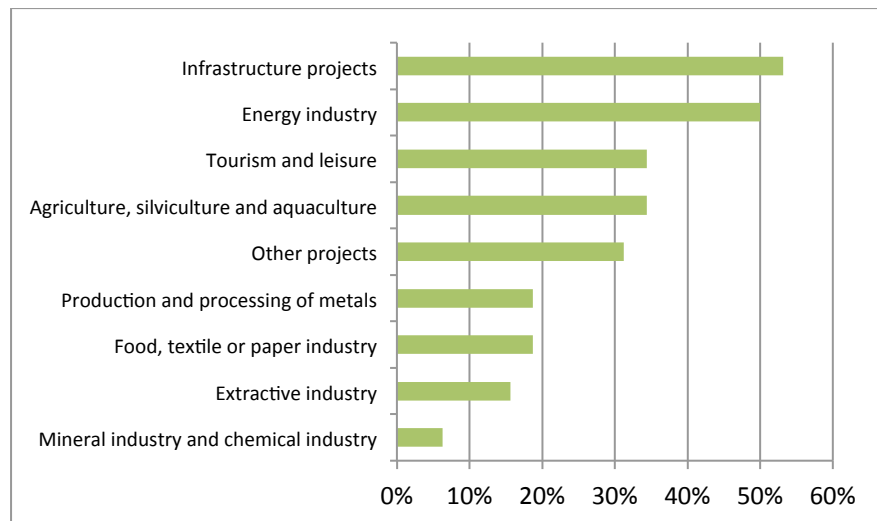


Figure 6. Most common kinds of projects undergoing the environmental permits process

2.3 Current use of e-government tools

According to the results of the survey, the majority of applications submitted are in *paper and digital documents (doc, pdf)* (59%), while still 38% use only *paper*, and a minority (9%) an *online application form*.

Moreover, most of the respondents considered that the permitting authorities still communicate with the applicants through *letters* (75%). Forty-one per cent considered that the authorities communicate with the applicants through *phone calls*, 44% through *personal meetings* and 41% through *emails*. Only a minority (13%) of the respondents considered that the authorities communicate through an *online platform* with the applicants.

Likewise, the majority considered that the authorities consult stakeholders through *document review during office hours* (63%) and through *public meetings* (59%), and only 9% through *online consultation*.

The same three respondents answered that the authorities provide an *online application form*, communicate with the applicants through an *online platform* and consult stakeholders through an *online consultation*. Out of these three respondents, two were *expert /consultants*, and the other was from a *permitting authority*. These three respondents were from Italy, Japan and Turkey.

The majority suggested that the authorities store documents in *paper archive* (84%), and do not provide *online information about the environmental permits process* to applicants (56%).

Forty-one per cent of all respondents considered that permitting authorities do not use *workflow management systems*; however 60% of the permitting authorities responding the survey mentioned that the authorities use *workflow management systems*, but inside the authority only.

Concerning *Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in relation to environmental permits*, 38% of respondents mentioned that the authorities do not use them at all for permitting purposes, and another 38% said that authorities only use GIS internally. In fact, an even higher proportion of the permitting authorities responding the survey (50%) considered that they do not use *Geographic Information Systems (GIS)* in relation to environmental permits, while 40% of the expert / consultants responding the survey considered that the authorities use them only inside the authorities.

Examples of public websites on the environmental permits process:

- Website by the Greek Ministry of the Environment: <http://aepo.ypeka.gr>
- Public overview by Serbian municipality Indjija: <http://www.indjija.net/code/navigate.php?id=517>
- Website by the Croatian Ministry of the Environment: <http://www.mzoip.hr/default.aspx?id=10258>
- Website by the Turkish Ministry of the Environment: <http://izinlisans.cevre.gov.tr/Sorgular/YazilimNetIzinLisansSorgula.aspx>
- Website by the Spanish Ministry of the Environment: https://servicios.magrama.es/irj/servlet/prt/portal/prtroot/pcd!3aportal_content!2fMMA!2fcom.mma.anonimo!2fcom.mma.launcher_anonimo?NavigationTarget=navurl%3A%2F%2Faf7b94a698174c8f919c9075e304dbcc&CurrentWindowId=WD1258101186250&NavMode=3

2.4 Future needs for e-government

The majority of the respondents (50%) thought that their public authority is *currently working on or planning improvements to modernise the environmental permits process using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)*, but out of these, only 38% are actually currently working on these improvements. The other 13% mentioned that these improvements are expected in the next 1-2 years (Figure 7). Interestingly, 70% of the permitting authorities responding the survey agreed that *currently working on improvements*, but only 33% of the expert / consultants answering the survey considered that the authorities are working on improvements.

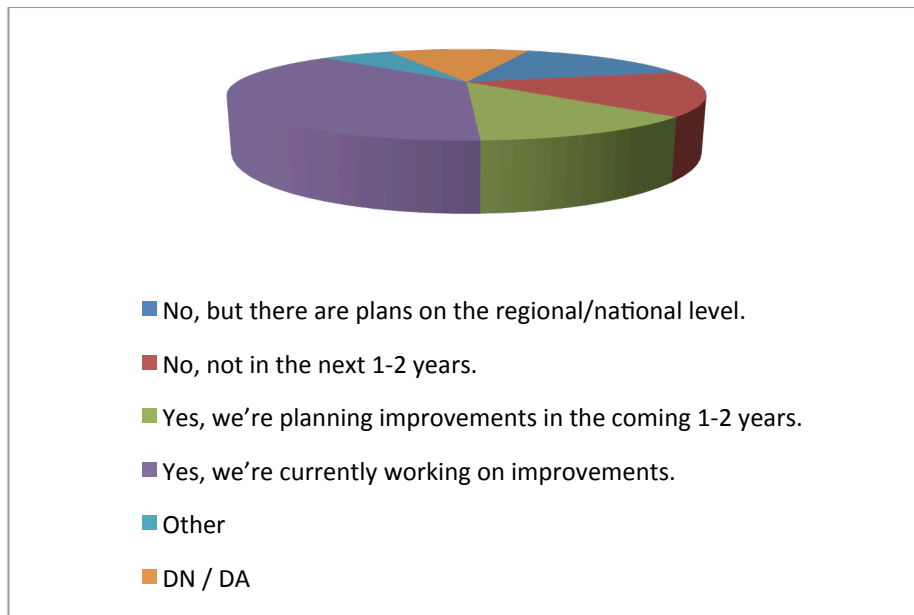


Figure 7. Plans to modernize the environmental permits process using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

For the majority of the respondents, the priorities for improvements of their e-government services in environmental permits are: *Geographic Information Systems* (63%), *public participation* (53%), *internal workflows* (53%) and *knowledge management* (53%).

Furthermore, for the majority of respondents, the most important properties when thinking about those improvements were: *transparency* (53%), *engagement and citizens' participation* (50%) and *integration with existing platforms* (50%) (Figure 8). Forty-one per cent of the respondents considered that *open source* was also an important property.

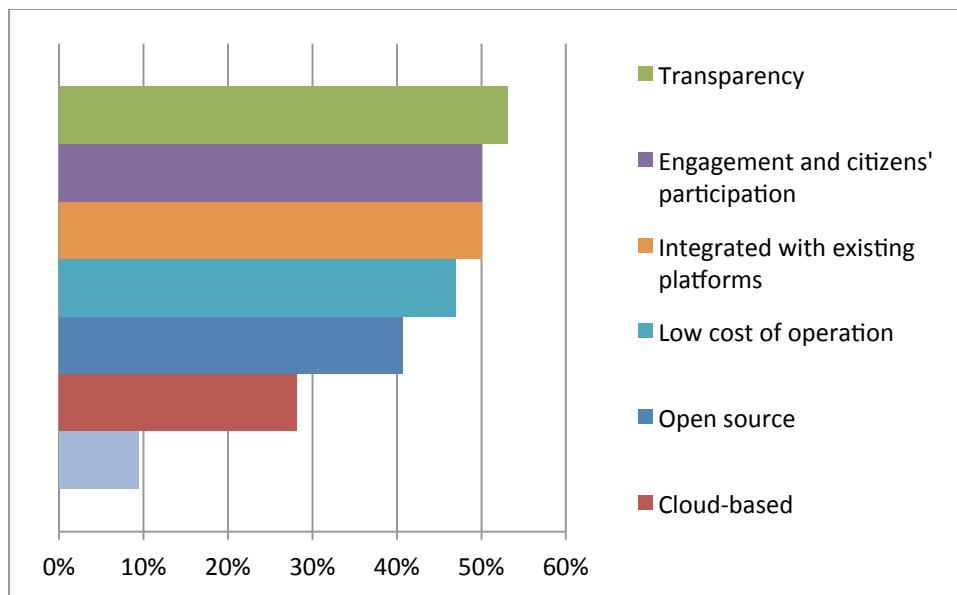


Figure 8. Most important properties in relation to planned improvements

3 Conclusions

The survey has contributed on one hand to building understanding of the e-government sector in Europe and, on the other, to allow the tailoring of the eEnviPer platform to current needs.

The results of the survey have confirmed many of the assumptions that the eEnviPer project had made at its inception:

In particular, only a very small number of the respondents considered that the environmental permitting process in their region integrates Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The survey also confirmed that only a few public authorities have started to bring this process into the internet age, i.e., only 9% of respondents thought that public authorities use online application forms. Likewise, only 9% of respondents consider that the authorities use online consultation systems to consult stakeholders on environmental permits.

Data about the number of applications received per year, applications approved per year, as well as the duration of the process, varied considerably from one public authority to another. Moreover, the responses vary among the different respondent groups; for example, 31% of all respondents considered that the environmental permit process takes *between 2 to 4 months* from application to approval, while 40% of the permitting authorities mentioned *less than 2 months* and another 40% between *2-4 months*.

The survey showed that many public authorities receive hundreds of applications per year, suggesting substantial benefits from a web-enabled software platform to reduce the bureaucratic burden and decrease the time needed from application to decision.

The answers concerning the future needs confirmed that the eEnviPer platform offers valued properties: transparency; engagement and citizens' participation; integration with existing platforms; low cost of operation; open source; and cloud-based solutions. Finally, most of the respondents mentioned that their public authorities are currently working to modernise the environmental permits process using ICT, or will do so in the coming 1-2 years. This confirms the need for e-government solutions such as the eEnviPer platform.