

Regulations concerning mandatory ICT standards – Notification to ESA

Background

The Ministry of Government Administration and Reform (FAD) proposes changes in regulations relating to amendment of the Regulations of 25 September 2009 No. 1222 for use of IT standards in the public administration, pursuant to Section 15a (d) of the Public Administration Act of 10 February 1967. The background for the draft regulations is the Government's wish that common, mandatory IT standards should be used at all administrative levels. The Ministry's objective is that these regulations will enter into force on 1 January 2011.

It is the Ministry of Government Administration and Reform that coordinates the Government's IT policy. The practical responsibility for regulations under Section 15 a of the Public Administration Act has therefore been assigned to the Ministry of Government Administration and Reform, even though the Public Administration Act falls under the Ministry of Justice.

The purpose of the draft regulations is the wish to achieve good electronic interaction within the public sector and with the public. We seek to achieve this by ensuring that the various IT systems being used in the public sector will be able to interact by means of open mandatory standards.

Proposal – required use of mandatory standards

- 1) Exchange of documents containing text as enclosures to e-mails:

The proposal entails that when read-only documents are to be exchanged as an enclosure with an e-mail from the public sector to citizens and businesses, PDF 1.4 – 1.6, PDF 1.7 (ISO 32000-1) or PDF/A (ISO 19005-1) shall be used. For exchange of documents to be edited by the recipient, ODF 1.1 (Oasis, February 2007) shall be used. It is proposed that the public sector shall comply with the above requirements as of 1 January 2011.

- 2) Multimedia content on public websites

Within an area where there is a very large range of formats, it will become necessary to standardise the use of a smaller and relevant set of formats to ensure both users and providers can use solutions independent of platforms and software selected for their own use.

On the publication of **videos** on public websites, at least one of the following standards shall be used:

- a) Video track encoded in Theora 1.0 (Xiph.org 2008) and sound track in Vorbis 1 (Xiph.org 2004) encapsulated in Ogg (RFC 3533, IETF 2003)
- b) Video track encoded in H.264 (ISO/IEC 14496-10) and sound track in ACC (ISO/IEC 13818-7:2003) encapsulated in MP4 (ISO/IEC 14496-10:2005).

On the publication of **audio with lossy compression** on public Internet sites, at least one of the following standards shall be used:

- a) Vorbis 1 (Xiph.org 2004) encapsulated in Ogg (RFC 3533, IETF 2003)
- b) MP3 (ISO 11172-3), without encapsulation

For **audio with lossless compression** the standard FLAC 1.2.1 (Xiph.org 2007), shall be used, encapsulated in Ogg (RFC 3533, IETF 2003) or FLAC's own encapsulation format.

On the publication of **images** on public websites, the following standards shall be used:

- a) JPEG (ISO/IEC 10918-1) for images with lossy compression
- b) PNG (ISO/IEC 15948:2003) for images with lossless compression, preferably supplemented by GIF

3) Design of business forms on public Internet sites

It is stated in the Government's action plan "Electronic services for businesses"¹ that all forms shall be based on the Elmer 2 Guidelines within 2008². This represents a continuation of the requirement stipulated in the action plan "A simpler Norway"³. The Ministry proposes that the use of the Elmer 2 Guidelines become mandatory for design of business forms on public websites. By making this a regulatory requirement, businesses will have access to uniform electronic forms for reporting purposes and for communication with public enterprises.

4) Character set for internal systems and during exchange of information between public enterprises and with citizens/businesses

The character set standard ISO/IEC 10646, represented by UTF-8, shall be used during all exchange of information between public enterprises and with citizens/businesses. The scope of application covers exchange of information irrespective of type of exchange, type of data, whether humans are involved or whether it is a machine-to-machine exchange.

The proposal does not include the entire ISO/IEC 10646 represented by UTF-8, but is limited to the characters also represented in ISO 8859-1, as well as 6 additional North Saami characters in large and small representations. The Ministry considers this to be an intermediate solution, and assumes that full support for ISO/IEC 10646, represented by UTF-8, will be required over time. The purpose of proposing such an intermediate solution is to contribute to a cost-efficient transition before data registers and discipline systems have full support for ISO/IEC 10646. It is also proposed that it become mandatory for all public enterprises that are to make major changes, through new establishments or further development, to implement ISO/IEC 10646 in their systems.

¹ Published by the Ministry of Trade and Industry 26. January 2007

² ELMER 2 – User Interface Guidelines for Governmental Forms on the Internet, published by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1. October 2006

³ Regjeringens handlingsplan for Et enklere Norge 2005-2009: Forenkling og tilrettelegging for næringslivet, published by the Ministry of Trade and Industry 27. June 2005

According to the draft Regulations, public enterprises shall comply with the above requirements regarding exchange of information as of 1 January 2012. The implementation of ISO/IEC 10646 for major changes shall be implemented as of the date this catalogue enters into force.

5) Electronic invoices and credit notes

The proposal entails that State enterprises as of 1 July 2011 must be able to receive electronic invoices from their suppliers in the format described in the standard "Ehandel.no format version 1.0"⁴. This is based on the european NESUBL standard. The intention is to extend this requirement to cover the entire public sector as of 2012.

A working group appointed by the Ministry of Government Administration and Reform has submitted a proposal for a strategy for mandatory electronic invoicing in the government. The working group submitted the report⁵ on 25 March 2008. The report was subjected to a consultation process. The consultation letter and consultation memo are available on the Ministry's website.⁶

The Ministry is of the opinion that it is important for public enterprises to use a common standard to ensure coordinated and efficient public e-commerce. The proposed standard is open and freely available, and the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi) is responsible for maintaining it.

6) Exemptions

In order to ensure that the Regulations do not entail any unreasonable or unintended consequences, the Ministry proposes that an exemption clause be incorporated into the Regulations. The exemption clause is worded as a "use or explain" clause. This entails that special grounds must be provided for any lack of conformity with the requirements.

The Ministry proposes that the draft Section 6 will provide a legal basis for not complying with Section 4, fifth subsection in those cases where compliance with the relevant mandatory standard will entail a particularly disproportionate burden for the enterprise in question. Section 4, no. 5 of the draft Regulations addresses the required character set for exchange of information between public enterprises and with citizens and businesses.

The assessment of whether the standard entails a "particularly disproportionate burden" must emphasise whether compliance entails significant costs for the enterprise in excess of the costs incurred by corresponding enterprises, or in some other manner entails significant drawbacks. It is assumed that the threshold for applying the exemption clause will be high.

⁴ The standard is available from <http://standard.difi.no/forslag-og-saker/saker/elektronisk-faktura-ogkreditnota/forslag-til-valg-av-standarder-for-elektronisk-faktura-og-kreditnota>

⁵ AGFA – reviews and recommendations for electronic invoice in the public sector: <http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/FAD/Vedlegg/IKT-politikk/AGFArapportWEB.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/fad/dok/horinger/horningsdokumenter/2008/horing---forslag-ominnforing-av-obligat.html?id=520279>