

The Realization of E-Government Services at the Municipal Level in Algeria

تجسيد الخدمات الالكترونية على مستوى البلدية في الجزائر

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Abstract:

Communication technologies, and within the framework of implementing the principles of electronic administration across various sectors, the Algerian state has initiated a policy aimed at the digitalization of public services. This process began with the digital transformation of municipal services, given that municipalities represent the primary interface for interaction with citizens. This digital shift has contributed to enhancing the quality of public service delivery in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, while also reducing reliance on manual documentation of administrative records. However, these efforts remain insufficient to achieve a fully integrated electronic administration, considering the challenges posed by the digitalization of municipal services, in addition to the various advantages and disadvantages accompanying this transformation.

Keywords: Digitalization, Biometric Documents, Electronic Services, Digitalization of the Municipality.

الملخص:

استناداً إلى التطورات المتسارعة التي شهدها مجال تكنولوجيا الإعلام والاتصال، وفي إطار تجسيد مبادئ الإدارة الإلكترونية عبر مختلف القطاعات، بادرت الدولة الجزائرية إلى اعتماد سياسة رقمنة المرافق العامة، حيث شُرع أولاً في رقمنة مرفق البلدية باعتبارها الواجهة الأولى للتعامل مع المواطنين، وقد ساهم هذا التحول الرقمي في تحسين جودة الخدمة العمومية من حيث الكفاءة والفعالية، فضلاً عن تقليص الاعتماد على التدوين اليدوي للوثائق الإدارية. غير أن هذه الجهود لا تزال غير كافية لبلوغ إدارة إلكترونية متكاملة وذلك بالنظر إلى ما تطرحه عملية رقمنة مرفق البلدية من تحديات، إلى جانب بعض الإيجابيات والسلبيات التي ترافق هذا المسار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرقمنة، الوثائق البيومترية، الخدمات الالكترونية، رقمنة البلدية.

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Introduction:

The electronic municipality is considered a vital project that has emerged as a pressing necessity within the framework of administrative reforms in local government entities. This initiative addresses the shortcomings in the quality of public service delivery in some municipalities. The project serves as a modern alternative to the traditional municipality, aiming to enhance the performance of public facilities and achieve the highest levels of efficiency in providing services to citizens. Practical experience has proven the effectiveness of this approach, with significant progress made in digital transformation, contributing to the shift from traditional methods to the adoption of innovative electronic services that meet citizens' expectations and fulfill the goals of modern administration.

This process has been further strengthened by documenting the efforts of employees through the allocation of a unique PIN for each, ensuring data confidentiality and enhancing cybersecurity. This system also contributes to motivating employees to take initiative and assume responsibility, particularly regarding transactions related to citizens' personal lives. This reflects a greater commitment to a public service that is more transparent and efficient.

The digitalization process at the municipal level included the development of several services, starting with the application of digital transformation to the Civil Status Department, which is one of the most important departments directly interacting with citizens. Over time, the scope of digitalization expanded to include various other administrative departments and activities within the municipality, contributing to improved administrative efficiency and facilitating more effective and transparent access to public services.

In this context, the following research problem is raised:

To what extent has the municipal service in Algeria advanced in developing electronic services?

Such studies require the adoption of two methodologies: the first being descriptive and the second analytical. This is because the first methodology is essential, while the second involves explaining and detailing the legal texts related to the development and digitalization of the municipal sector.

To address this issue, the study explores the following axes:

Based on the above, in **(Section One)**, we will address the digitalization of the Civil Status Department and biometric documents, and in **(Section Two)**, we will discuss the expansion of digitalization to other municipal services.

Chapter One: Digitalization of the Civil Status Department and Biometric Documents

In implementation of the electronic municipality project in the field of public service, the Ministry of the Interior has undertaken efforts to digitalize civil status records through the use of information and communication technologies, which allow citizens to access the designated electronic platform. This initiative aims to meet citizens' needs remotely, saving both time and effort for the service requester and provider alike. In this way, citizens can obtain civil status documents electronically.

Additionally, the Ministry of the Interior and Local Authorities has progressively introduced a secure national identification system based on two main pillars:

- The launch of the electronic biometric national identity card;
- The launch of the electronic biometric passport.⁽¹⁾

Section One: In the Field of Civil Status

A number of digitalization projects have been implemented at the municipal level, including the digitalization of the Civil Status Department.

Subsection One: Establishment of the Automated National Register

The Automated National Civil Status Register was established at the Ministry of the Interior pursuant to Law No. 14-08 relating to civil status. The creation of this register represents one of the most significant aspects of modernization aimed at facilitating the implementation of electronic administration. The automated register contains digital civil status records—birth, death, and marriage certificates—from all municipalities across the country. These digital records are scanned and entered starting from the original civil status registers at the municipal level and are then transmitted to the National Automated Civil Status Register at the Ministry of the Interior through the information systems and networks established for this purpose.

It is worth noting that the initial initiative to establish the automated civil status register preceded the enactment of Law No. 14-08 amending the Civil Status Law. This initiative began with a directive issued by the Minister of the Interior and Local Authorities concerning the implementation of the National Automated Civil Status Register, which set February 15, 2014, as the date to begin issuing birth certificates exclusively based on this register. Law No. 14-08 was later adopted, serving as the legal foundation for the digitalization of the civil status service. The law introduced a dedicated section titled 'The Automated National Civil Status Register,' established within the Ministry of the Interior and connected to municipalities and their administrative annexes.⁽²⁾

The digitalization process covered all civil status records through scanning and the transmission of digital copies to the Automated National Register Service at the Central Automated Register. All scanned and transmitted records, as well as any amendments or omissions, are centrally archived. A certified digital copy identical to the original records

⁽¹⁾ Belharbi, Nawal. The Role of the Electronic Municipality in Promoting Electronic Services in Algeria. *The Critical Journal of Law and Political Science*, University of Tizi Ouzou, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2022, p. 253.

⁽²⁾ Abdallah, Nawal. Digitalization of the Civil Status Service under Law No. 14-08. *Journal of Knowledge Issues*, University of Djelfa, Algeria, Vol. 2, No. 2, March 2022, p. 94.

stored at the central level is then provided to civil status officers at municipalities, administrative annexes, and diplomatic missions. These officers are thereby authorized to sign and stamp the records before delivering them to the applicants. This procedure is stipulated in Article 03 of Law No. 14-08.⁽¹⁾

Subsection Two: Electronic Issuance of Civil Status Documents

In line with modernization efforts, the Algerian legislator issued Executive Decree No. 15-315 concerning the electronic issuance of civil status documents. According to this decree, civil status documents are issued electronically from the National Automated Civil Status Register, with an electronically qualified signature, ensuring that the electronically transmitted civil status document holds the same legal validity as the original document, provided it is prepared in accordance with the applicable legislation, as stipulated in Article 02 of this executive decree.⁽²⁾

The civil status documents used in municipalities, as specified in the annex of Executive Decree No. 14-75, are defined as follows:

- Civil status documents used in municipalities and consular services, which include: Marriage certificate, family record book, family civil status card, certificate of single status, certificate of no divorce, certificate of no remarriage, extract from collective birth declarations, extract from the original register, birth certificate,
- full copy or extract of the birth certificate, death certificate, full copy or extract of the death certificate, burial permit, life certificate, and protection certificate.⁽³⁾

The issuance of electronic copies and their signing is based on Law No. 15-04 relating to electronic signatures and certification, which facilitates the completion of electronic transactions in a secure and reliable manner. The law aims to establish a legal framework to address the legal and regulatory requirements necessary to create a trustworthy environment for the widespread adoption and development of electronic exchanges among all users.⁽⁴⁾

The Algerian legislator also issued Executive Decree No. 16-142, which defines the procedures for storing electronically signed documents. It defines storage as a set of technical measures that allow for the storage of the signed document on a storage medium, which serves as a physical means for receiving and retrieving the electronically signed document.⁽⁵⁾

Section Two: In the Field of Biometric Documents

In continuation of the municipality's digitization efforts and as part of the electronic municipality project, the Ministry of Interior has focused on digitizing additional documents, particularly identity documents such as passports, national identity cards, driver's licenses,

⁽¹⁾ Law No. 14-08 dated 13 Shawwal 1435 corresponding to August 9, 2014, amending and supplementing Ordinance No. 70-20 dated 13 Dhu al-Hijjah 1389 corresponding to February 19, 1970, relating to civil status, Official Gazette No. 49, issued on August 20, 2014.

⁽²⁾ Executive Decree No. 15-315, dated December 10, 2015, concerning the electronic issuance of civil status documents, Official Gazette No. 68, published on December 27, 2015.

⁽³⁾ Executive Decree No. 14-75, dated February 17, 2014, defining the list of civil status documents, Official Gazette No. 11, published on February 26, 2014.

⁽⁴⁾ Law No. 15-04, dated February 1, 2015, defining the general rules relating to electronic signatures and certification, Official Gazette No. 6, published on February 10, 2015.

⁽⁵⁾ Executive Decree No. 16-142, dated May 5, 2016, defining the procedures for storing electronically signed documents, Official Gazette No. 28, published on May 8, 2016.

and making them biometric. Additionally, the vehicle registration card has been digitized, which is the focus of this discussion:

Subsection One: The Biometric Service

As part of the municipality's digitization efforts, the Biometric Service was established to issue biometric documents. The unified electronic counter serves as a technical solution that processes various biometric document requests and registers them in real-time in a central database. This is facilitated through direct integration with the biometric document database and the National Automated Civil Status Register. The project for the unified electronic counter for biometric documents has been rolled out across all municipalities to ease the process for applicants of biometric passports⁽¹⁾, biometric national identity cards⁽²⁾, and biometric driving licenses⁽³⁾, while also reducing processing times.

Subsection Two: Establishment of the Automated Vehicle Registration System

The process of issuing vehicle registration cards was extended across municipalities nationwide as part of efforts to bring public administration closer to citizens and reduce paperwork and administrative procedures. Based on Ministerial Instruction No. 1614, dated 8/12/2015,⁽⁴⁾ all municipalities were connected to the national vehicle registration application, which is dedicated to confirming the technical specifications of vehicles. Furthermore, the delegation of signing authority was expanded to include municipal secretaries-general and the officials in charge of vehicle registration offices, in accordance with Ministerial Instruction No. 2778, dated 14/09/2016.⁽⁵⁾

As part of public service reform and the simplification of administrative procedures, the vehicle purchase invoice was removed from the required documents for the sale of vehicles acquired through special privileges or imported vehicles. Additionally, the requirement to certify the vehicle information form was abolished to ensure the successful implementation of these new measures at the municipal level.⁽⁶⁾

⁽¹⁾ Law No. 14-03, dated February 24, 2014, concerning the documents and securities of passports, Official Gazette No. 16, issued on March 23, 2014.

⁽²⁾ Presidential Decree No. 17-143, dated April 18, 2017, setting the procedures for the preparation, issuance, and deadlines for the national identity card, Official Gazette No. 25, issued on April 19, 2017.

⁽³⁾ Executive Decree No. 16-142, dated May 5, 2016, establishing the procedures for the preservation of electronically signed documents, Official Gazette No. 28, issued on May 8, 2016.

⁽⁴⁾ Ministerial Instruction No. 1614, dated 08/12/2015, concerning the expansion of vehicle registration card issuance at the municipal level.

⁽⁵⁾ Ministerial Instruction No. 2787, dated 14/09/2016, concerning the extension of signing authority to municipal secretaries.

⁽⁶⁾ Razika Mokhnach, Electronic Public Service at the Level of Algerian Municipalities, Journal of Legal and Political Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2020, p. 234.

Chapter Two: Expansion of Digital Services to Other Municipal Departments

The Ministry of the Interior aims to generalize digitization across all municipal departments, particularly in accounting, construction, and urban planning services. This includes the adoption of applications for budget monitoring and administrative accounting, as well as the digitization of the municipal property office. Proposals have also been made to introduce electronic contracts in lease agreements and to implement electronic announcements for public tenders through a dedicated digital platform.

As part of public service improvement, a single-window system has been adopted within construction and urban planning services to process permits for construction, demolition, subdivision, and property regularization. The digital transformation also extends to social affairs, public procurement, elections, and human resources departments, reflecting the broader policy of modernizing local administration.

Section One: In the field of social affairs

The concerned ministry has focused in the past two years on providing electronic services in the field of social affairs, such as registration for Hajj, the Ramadan food basket, and registration for national service. This is part of the ongoing efforts to complete the digitization of municipal services, as detailed below:

Subsection One: Electronic Registration for Hajj

Since 2016, citizens have been able to register for the Hajj lottery electronically through all municipalities nationwide. This is done by filling out a personal information form, which is available to every citizen aged 19 or older. Any citizen can register at any municipality, provided that the employee handling the registration process specifies the actual municipality of residence and the governorate of the citizen's residence. Additionally, the individual must possess a biometric passport.

Subsection Two: Registration for the Ramadan Solidarity Program

Since 2020, the Ministry of the Interior has developed a dedicated application for the Ramadan Solidarity Program, aimed at providing financial aid to legally designated groups. This application is connected to the national civil status network, so by simply entering the individual's name, their full details are automatically retrieved. Additionally, the postal account number and the number of dependents are included to facilitate the disbursement of financial assistance. As a result, citizens no longer need to obtain documents that are electronically available at the civil status office, thereby avoiding many bureaucratic obstacles.⁽¹⁾

Subsection Third: Digitization of the Electoral Office.

The Elections Office has been digitized to ensure the integrity and transparency of electoral processes, and to establish an independent higher authority responsible for overseeing elections, namely the Independent National Election Authority. This was achieved by linking the automated civil status registry with the election services and incorporating an

⁽¹⁾ Nawal Belharbi, Previous Reference, p. 258.

application that allows for automatic deletion and address changes. Additionally, an application was introduced to cleanse the electoral lists by removing deceased individuals.⁽¹⁾

Section Two : Digitalization of the Public Procurement Department

The Public Procurement Department is one of the most important departments at the municipal level, as it is responsible for entering into written contracts to meet the needs of the department in areas such as works, supplies, services, and studies. The state has worked on introducing digitization in public procurement to improve public service by effectively managing public expenditures, enhancing competition, and simplifying procedures for contracting parties. Presidential Decree No. 15-247, under Article 203, stipulates the establishment of an electronic portal for public procurement. Additionally, as part of its use as a database, contractors are not required to submit documents that the contracting authority can request electronically.⁽²⁾

The electronic portal of the contracting authority, as well as economic operators, provides a set of information that includes electronic publications, allowing operators to access information related to public procurement after it has been digitally stored. It also publishes regulatory and legislative texts related to public procurement, and includes a list of individuals or entities blacklisted.

The portal allows contractors to register by filling out and signing their forms, then submitting them. Once the registration is accepted, the contractor is provided with a personal account to access the portal and benefit from the services offered.

The portal also provides a service for inquiries and exchanging opinions on any topic related to public procurement. It can be said that the digitization of the Public Procurement Department has helped the contracting authority at the municipal level, as well as other public administrations, to operate electronically. For example, electronic advertisements are characterized by their quick dissemination and accessibility, which in turn facilitates participation for economic operators. This also helps in rationalizing expenses and protecting public funds. Meanwhile, the goal of the relevant authorities remains to expand digital services at the department level to ensure the quality of public services.⁽³⁾

Section Third: In the field of human resource management

The highest authorities in the country have relied on electronic portals to align with the demands of modernization, which has positively impacted citizens in the area of public services. Citizens can now request services by accessing the portal, selecting their desired service with a single click. The government portal for public service provides individuals and institutions with information and services based on different sectors. For example, the portal for the Ministry of the Interior, Local Communities, and Urban Planning offers various services targeting three categories: citizens, economic operators, and associations.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Zine El Abidine Sardo, Mustafa Jazair, The Role of Digitization in Improving the Quality of Public Service in Algeria - The Municipal Model, Algerian Journal of Law and Political Science, Vol. 8, Issue 2, 18/01/2024, p. 648.

(2) Presidential Decree No. 15-247, dated 16/09/2015, concerns the organization of public procurement and public service delegations, published in the Official Gazette No. 50, dated 20/09/2015.

(3) Zine El Abidine Sardo, Mustafa Jazair, Previous Reference, p. 654.

(4) Same reference, p. 656.

These services include the following:

- Tracking the request for a biometric passport.
- Requesting and issuing a marriage certificate online.
- Requesting civil status documents online (birth certificate, death certificate).
- Electronic request for the registration of the founding declaration for municipal associations and neighborhood committees.
- Online request for a driving license competency certificate for the Algerian diaspora abroad.
- Requesting the biometric electronic national identity card.⁽¹⁾

The goal of this process is to digitize all administrative documents related to human resource management for senior officials, employees, and agents under the Ministry of the Interior and Local Communities at the level of the governorates and municipalities. The Ministry of the Interior and Local Communities emphasized the need to begin digitizing all administrative documents related to senior officials, employees, and agents at the governorate and municipal levels. This requires the prior provision of a series of material, human, and organizational resources, including the creation of an electronic administrative file for each employee. The directive issued by the Minister of the Interior and Local Communities and Urban Planning, Instruction No. 17924, dated 06/12/2023, stressed the utmost importance of digitizing administrative documents related to managing the professional life of human resources and its strategic and sustainable nature. It emphasized the need to complete this process within two months (02) from the date of receiving this instruction.⁽²⁾

Conclusion:

Through our study of the implementation of digitalization at the municipal level in Algeria, we found that Algerian municipalities have undergone a gradual transformation towards digitalization as part of the state's efforts to modernize local administration and improve the quality of services provided to citizens.

One of the most significant aspects of this transformation is the digitization of civil status records, including birth, marriage, and death records, which has facilitated the issuance of administrative documents such as biometric documents and birth certificates (No. 12) remotely in certain municipalities.

Additionally, some local communities have begun launching electronic platforms that allow citizens to submit requests or complaints without the need to travel. Moreover, several licenses and administrative files, such as construction and demolition permits, have been digitized and transformed into digital files that can be tracked and processed electronically.

Limited experiences have also emerged in the field of electronic payment for taxes and local fees, in collaboration with institutions like the Algerian Postal Service. Some municipalities also rely on software to manage human resources and administrative correspondence, contributing to improved administrative efficiency.

These efforts are part of a broader national project called "E-municipality," which aims to expand digitization across all municipalities and provide unified platforms to manage local

⁽¹⁾ The website for the government portal for public services is: <https://bawabatic.dz/>

⁽²⁾ Ministerial Instruction No. 17924, dated 06/12/2023, concerning the digitization of administrative documents related to human resource management.

affairs based on data. Despite the progress made, the main challenge remains in providing adequate digital infrastructure and training human resources to keep up with this transformation.

Through our study, we have drawn some conclusions, summarized as follows:

- Enabling citizens to access information and services from their sites without visiting relevant offices.
- Contributing to customer satisfaction due to the quick response to their needs and the simplified delivery of services.
- Simplifying procedures within institutions, which positively affects the level of services provided to citizens, thereby reducing the time required to complete various administrative transactions.

Through our study, we have outlined several recommendations, summarized as follows:

- Giving actual attention to digitalization as an essential necessity.
- Reducing schedule time and allocating tasks among employees to avoid negatively impacting public health, as prolonged use of computers can gradually weaken eyesight.
- Activating protection measures for citizens' privacy, as e-transactions can allow some individuals to access the private information of others.
- Training users responsible for digitalization to implement electronic management correctly and accurately transitioning from traditional methods of electronic systems.

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