

High Level Conference “For a People-centred e-Justice”

Lisbon, 26 and 27 April 2021

e-Justice in the European Union

Digital transformation has profoundly changed people’s lives over the past decades and will continue to do so in the future. In the area of justice as well, digitalisation has played an important role in the policies developed by the European Union and is unanimously recognised as a way of improving the access to justice, and the efficiency, quality and transparency of the justice systems.

For more than a decade, the European Union has been committed to improving the functioning and the access to justice and has adopted successive strategies and action plans in this area. The e-Justice Strategy for 2019-2023 and its European e-Justice Action Plan for 2019-2023 are currently in the process of implementation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed serious challenges to the justice systems, confirming that digital technologies are essential to ensure timely and uninterrupted access to justice and to make national systems more robust and resilient. In a troubled period in which justice systems continue to be tested on a daily basis, it is therefore unavoidable to talk about digitalisation – where the digital by default gains even greater relevance – and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the development of emerging technologies, such as the artificial intelligence.

For these reasons, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union has identified the digitalisation of justice as one of the priorities of its programme in order to continue and deepen the process of digital transition in Justice.

The opportunity to include this issue in the priorities of the Presidency in the Justice area also stems from the primacy given to digital transition by the leaders of the Member States and by the President of the European Commission in the State of the Union 2020 address, and echoes the Commission’s Work Programme for the current year.

The Council's Conclusions on *Shaping Europe’s Digital Future*, of 9 June 2020, address a wide range of issues related to the implementation of the European Union’s digital strategy, highlighting a number of areas, such as the connectivity, digital value chains, data economy, artificial intelligence and digital platforms. It invites the Commission to adopt measures to enable digital cross-border exchange in criminal and civil areas in order to facilitate the judicial cooperation between Member States.

At the JHA Council of 9 October 2020, the Ministers of Justice endorsed the conclusions on *Access to Justice – Seizing the opportunities of digitalisation*, encouraging Member States to

make greater use of digital tools in legal proceedings and inviting the Commission to develop, by the end of 2020, an orderly communication plan for the digitalisation of justice.

The Commission's communication on the digitalisation of justice, *A toolbox of opportunities*, of 2 December 2020, defined a new approach to the digitalisation of justice on the basis of a comprehensive set of financial and IT legal instruments to be used by the various actors in the judicial systems, according to the needs and the most appropriate time. The Member States must therefore take advantage of the support and funding provided by the European Commission through the *Digital Europe Programme*, for the development of electronic solutions and tools and for the training of judicial operators.

At the Informal meeting of Ministers of Justice of the European Union of 29 January 2021, the subject of *e-justice – towards a comprehensive and inclusive digitalisation process* was again addressed and it was reaffirmed the need to continue to move forward in this process, which must be centred on the people, be inclusive and leave no one behind.

While agreement was expressed to explore the potential of using new technologies in Justice, including artificial intelligence, the need to avoid automatic decisions, maintaining the human dimension in the administration of justice, respecting fundamental rights, ensuring a fair and equitable, transparent and public process, was also underlined. Digital solutions should be user-friendly, but traceable and neutral.

About the Conference

In this context, the High-Level Conference “***For a people-centred e-Justice***”, organised by the governing area of Justice, under the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, has presented itself as an opportunity to reflect on the process of transition to digital justice, on the opportunities that emerge and the different challenges that arise, and to guarantee the access of all citizens to justice, effective systems and a more modern justice in the XXI century.

The Conference will be a space for joint reflection on how the use of technologies and the design of services centred on the people can be the catalysts for a close, accessible, innovative Justice that monitors the socio-economic evolution of the countries.

This event, which will take place on 26 and 27 April, in a virtual format, will have the participation of 73 speakers, who with their knowledge and experience will enrich the reflection, the debate and the sharing of experiences on the issues of Justice and their impact on today's society. It will focus in particular on:

- The digital transformation in the justice systems and the challenges that everyone faces in the development of people-centred services;
 - Access to justice and its essential function in the life of societies;
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- The use of emerging technologies, in particular artificial intelligence and their impact on the socio-economic development;
- Collaborative networks and the protection of privacy and cybersecurity.

Alongside the conference, there will be a virtual Exhibition Area in which are represented:

- Experimentation and Prototyping Projects.
- Legal Tech Companies.
- European institutions that provide legal assistance.
- European research institutions in the field of e-justice.
- Multinational organizations working on access to justice for all and e-justice.

Everyone is invited to participate!

Find all the information about this event and the rest of the justice government's agenda at <https://eu2021.justica.gov.pt/>

