Open data

The European Commission's policies focus on generating value for the economy and society through the reuse of public sector information.

In the EU, the public sector is one of the most data-intensive sectors. Public sector bodies produce, collect and pay for vast amounts of data, known as public sector information (PSI), or government data. Examples include geographical information, statistics, weather data, data from publicly funded researched projects, and digitised books from libraries. 'Open' public data refers to PSI that can be readily and widely accessed and reused, sometimes under non-restrictive conditions.

The EU open data market is a key building block of the overall EU data economy. According to the study supporting the impact assessment carried out to provide input to the review of the PSI Directive (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/impact-assessment-support-study-revision-public-sector-information-directive), the total direct economic value of PSI is expected to increase from a baseline of €52 billion in 2018 for the EU27 + UK, to €194 billion in 2030.

Open data policy is linked with open research data policy (https://ec.europa.eu/research/openscience/index.cfm?pg=openaccess) since both address publicly funded data or their data results from public funding. Therefore, this data should be openly accessible and reuseable.
Allowing public sector data to be reused for other purposes, including commercial ones, can:

- stimulate economic growth and spur innovation: public data has significant potential for re-use in new products and services;
- help address societal challenges with the development of innovative solutions such as in healthcare or in transport;
- enhance evidence-based policymaking and increase efficiency in public administrations;
- become a critical asset for the development of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), which require the processing of vast amounts of high-quality data;
- foster the participation of citizens in political and social life and increase the transparency of government.

In 2003, the European Commission set up a legal framework to allow the reuse of public sector information through the ‘PSI Directive’ (Directive 2003/98/EC), subsequently revised by Directive 2013/37/EU. This Directive is built around two pillars of the internal market: transparency and fair competition. It focuses on the economic aspects of the re-use of information.

The European Commission performed a review of the PSI Directive, on the basis of a public online consultation, fulfilling the periodic review obligation foreseen in the Directive. Building on the results of this consultation, together with an extensive evaluation of the Directive and an impact assessment, the European Commission proposed a revision of the PSI Directive as part of a package of measures aiming to facilitate the creation of a common data space in the EU.

As a result of this process, the new Directive (EU) 2019/1024 on open data and the reuse of PSI was adopted and published on 20 June 2019, and should be implemented by Member States by 16 July 2021.

The new Directive introduces the concept of high-value datasets, defined as data that is associated with important benefits for the society and economy when reused. High-value data sets are subject to a separate set of rules ensuring their availability free of charge, in machine readable formats, provided via application programming interfaces (APIs) and, where relevant, as bulk download.

The thematic scope of high-value datasets is provided in an annex to the Directive. Within these limits, and with the assistance of a Committee composed of representatives of EU countries, the Commission will adopt a list of specific high-value datasets by way of an implementing act, following an impact assessment.

In addition to the Open Data Directive, a number of non-legislative measures support the opening up of public sector information, such as the Public Sector Information expert group (PSI Group).

Since 2015, the European Commission has funded the European data portal through the Connecting Europe Facility. The data portal is a pan-European repository of public sector information open for reuse in the EU. This portal also features a training centre on how to reuse open data and a database of success stories from European and international re-users.
The Commission leads by example, with a solid legal framework for the re-use of its own data and a Communication on open data (COM (2011) 882), complemented by an EU Open Data Portal where re-users can find datasets from the Commission, as well as from the other EU institutions and agencies.

European Data Portal


Commission decision on the reuse of Commission documents
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The European Commission has just decided to refer Belgium, Bulgaria, Latvia and the Netherlands to the Court of Justice of the European Union for failing to transpose EU rules on open data and the re-use of public sector data (Directive EU 2019/1024, referred to as the Open Data Directive) into national law.

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The European Commission works to overcome the barriers limiting the reuse of public sector information through non-legislative measures.

Implementation of the Public Sector Information Directive

The Commission has created a detailed list on how different countries have implemented the Public Sector Information (PSI) directive

From the Public Sector Information (PSI) Directive to the Open Data Directive

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