

Summary

Background and objective of the process evaluation of civil registry electronic services

Under the Civil Registry (Electronic Services) Act, municipalities have been permitted— but not required — since 1 January 2020 to switch to an electronic service for registering the births of children. The introduction of the option of registering births digitally marked the final stage in the phased introduction of electronic services for what is termed the civil registry front office. Funeral businesses have been able to register deaths electronically since 1 July 2015 (Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees 2015, 181). This was followed on 1 July 2016 by the option of reporting an intended marriage or partnership registration electronically (Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees 2016, 131). In addition to electronic registration, the Civil Registry (Electronic Services) Act also provides for preparations for the digitalisation of civil registry back offices.

When the Civil Registry (Electronic Services) Act (Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees 2019, 419) came partially into effect, an undertaking was given to evaluate the Act. This process evaluation aims to allow the Lower House of Parliament to be informed of the state of affairs concerning the introduction and implementation of the option for electronic registration of births and deaths and reporting intended marriages and registered partnerships. A second aim is to consider how to learn from these experiences in the further implementation of the Civil Registry (Electronic Services) Act. The idea here is that information about the experiences when introducing and implementing electronic registration in municipalities' front offices could also be useful information in implementing the Civil Registry (Electronic Services) Act with regard to the further digitalisation of municipal back offices.

Broad approach

We used a phased approach for this process evaluation, comprising phase 1: exploratory study; phase 2: broad, targeted data collection; and phase 3: in-depth analysis. In these phases, we used a wide range of research methods: a literature study, exploratory interviews (n=8), web scraping and text mining (techniques for automated searches of municipalities' websites), a questionnaire sent to all 342 municipalities (response n=122), a questionnaire sent to funeral businesses (n=48), focus-group sessions with municipalities (n=10) and in-depth interviews (n=3), plus two case-study discussions. Finally, we processed the data to draw up a concise report that answers all the research questions.

Most municipalities offer one or more forms of electronic services

The desire to improve the quality of the service is the main reason why municipalities decided to introduce one or more forms of electronic services. Figure 1 shows that 90% of the municipalities (n=308) offer one or more of the possible digital services (registration of deaths and births, and reports of intended marriages and registered partnerships). Half of all municipalities (n=177) offer digital registration and reporting for births, deaths *and* intended marriages and registered partnerships. Ninety municipalities offer two forms of digital services, 40 municipalities offer one form of digital services and 34 municipalities do not yet offer any of the possible forms of digital services. If we look at the different types of service offered (Figure 2), we see that the option offered by most municipalities is the digital registration of deaths (n=290), followed by the registration of births (n=236) and finally the reporting of intended marriages and registered partnerships (n=226). Municipalities that do not (as yet) make use of the option of digital registration and reporting say



that they have not yet had time for the implementation and/or their organisation is not yet ready for this step. Furthermore, the costs of implementation are often disproportionately high (for small municipalities) in comparison with the low numbers of registrations and reports per year.

% digital registrations/reports excluding requests for extracts and copies of deeds



Figure 1. Overview of municipalities that offer one or more forms of digital services. The darker the colour, the more forms of digital registration and reporting are offered by the municipality. (Source: web scraping, measured in July 2023)

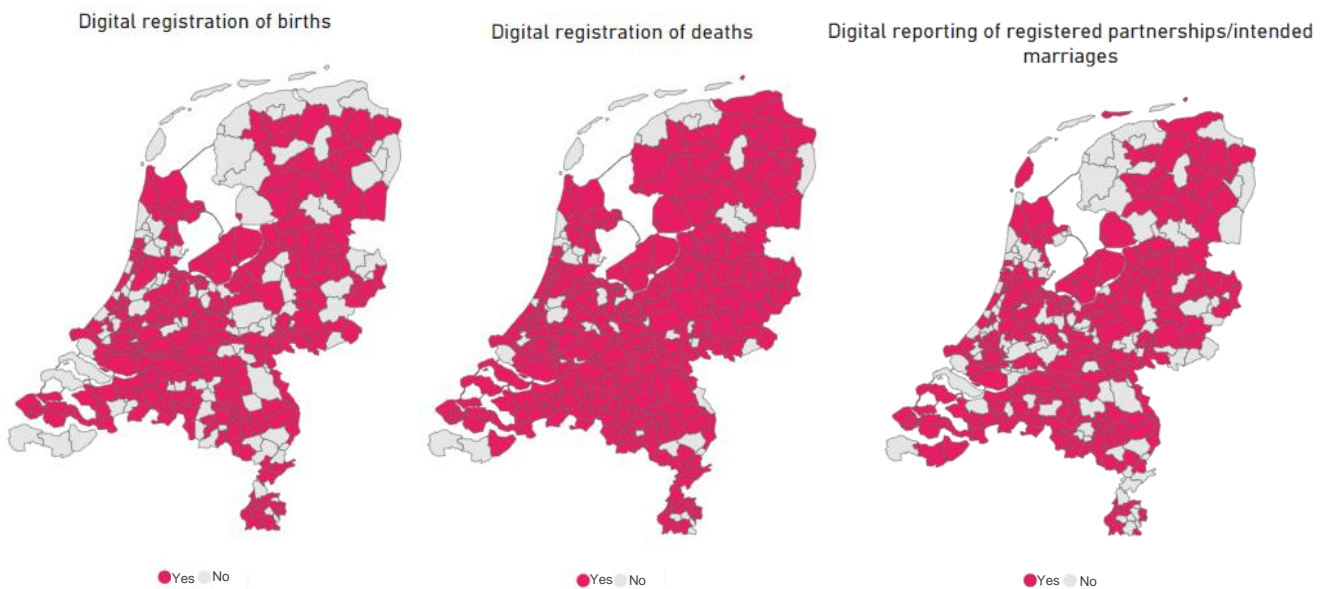


Figure 2. Municipalities that offer digital registration of births and deaths and digital reporting for intended marriages/registered partnerships. (Source: web scraping, measured in July 2023)



Municipalities are generally satisfied or very satisfied with the implementation and operation of electronic services, but the introduction does not save costs directly

The survey among municipalities showed that most are satisfied or very satisfied with the implementation of the digital services. The municipalities use the modules offered by their current software vendors (Centric, PinkRoccade or Procura). According to the people involved, all these modules comply with the legislation and regulations. Usage numbers, and therefore utilisation of the digital services, are high according to municipalities. For most municipalities, digital registrations and reports account for between 70% and 90% of all registrations and reports. In addition, the municipalities said they had received little in the way of feedback or complaints from members of the public about the use of the services.

Municipalities said that the introduction of electronic services for the civil registry has saved time for the government officials responsible for the civil registry. However, this saving in time has not resulted in cost savings because the government officials use the time that is freed up to work on other tasks related to the registrations, for example to focus more on detecting fraud or on rectifications. In conclusion, introducing and implementing electronic services leads to a shift in the tasks of the civil registry officials. Funeral businesses also report time savings from the introduction of the digital registration of deaths as they no longer spend time travelling to the municipality and waiting there.

The future: municipalities do not foresee obstacles to the further enactment of the Civil Registry (Electronic Services) Act

Municipalities say they are satisfied with the current electronic services. They do not see any obstacles to extending the services to include the electronic provision of civil-registry extracts and copies of deeds¹ and consequently the further enactment of the Civil Registry (Electronic Services) Act. Municipalities believe this will further improve the quality of services for the public. However, it is important to make sure the digital documents have a sound digital watermark (e.g. a QR code). A few municipalities have been experimenting with providing extracts and copies of deeds from the civil registry digitally, and they have not experienced any problems. Finally, it is important that the further implementation takes into account developments in digitalisation in associated legislation and regulations, at both the national and European levels.

¹ Articles 3 and 4 of the Civil Registry (Electronic Services) Act have not yet come into effect.