

OFE Comment -27/11/2012

OFE welcomes Portugal's choice of open standards, especially its choice of ODF over OOXML

OpenForum Europe (OFE) welcomes the Portuguese government's National Digital Interoperability Regulation published last week. It defines a list of open standards to be adopted in the Portuguese public administration, and is a vital follow-on to that country's law on open standards passed last year.

One of the aims of the Portuguese government's push for open standards is to save an estimated half a billion euros per year in the public procurement of IT, at a time when austerity measures are making huge cuts into almost every government budget.

They also expect the move towards open standards to provide a stimulus to Portugal's domestic SMEs as contracts will no longer automatically go to large international IT firms.

“The publication of this list of open standards confirms Portugal's position on the A-list of enlightened European governments when it comes to IT procurement policy,” said Graham Taylor, CEO of OFE. “Portugal is following a very similar line to the UK. We hope other countries follow their lead,” he added.

Like many countries in Europe, Portugal's public sector has remained largely locked into expensive, proprietary computer systems until now, but that is set to change with the passing of the new law and this list of open standards.

The decision to exclude OOXML and instead opt for ODF for editable standards is a pragmatic one. ODF is implemented by numerous different vendors in both open and proprietary applications.

The decision to include only ODF reflects increasing evidence of the cost of trying to maintain directly competing standards (see “To Select or Not? - Dealing with Competing Standards in Public IT Procurement” by Tineke M. Egyedi on the [OFA](#) website.)

“This is a choice that will save the Portuguese government money and avoid vendor lock-in. We wholeheartedly support Portugal's choice of open standards,” said Taylor.

For further information about Portugal's embracing of open standards please visit Portuguese open source association [ESOP](#)'s website and a [blog](#) posting by OpenForum Academy Fellow and leading open standards authority, Andy Updegrave.

The Portuguese Government has published the National Digital Interoperability Regulation [2], which defines the list of open standards to be adopted in the Portuguese public administration. This framework brings to life the existing Law of Open Standards [1]. It is part of the larger ICT reform program that aims to save 500M EUR/year while providing stimulus to the local economy.

We must stress the importance of the whole open standards adoption process and declare our explicit support for the way the interoperability regulation was designed. On one hand, there is some pragmatism to be noticed: the list of open standards is relatively short with priority given to functions where interoperability problems are a large concern.

On the other hand, pragmatism didn't mean lost of insight: there is no more than one open standard per functional category. This is something ESOP has always defended, as a measure to prevent incompatibilities that could bring the adoption process to a failure.

Choices have been made and ODF is the chosen open standard for editable documents. We think this is appropriate since ODF is implemented by several different vendors, in both open source and proprietary applications, across multiple operating systems. As a truly open standard, it can be implemented by any vendor that wishes to do so. This is a choice that will save money and avoid vendor lock in.

Other standards for formats and protocols include PDF, XML, XMPP, IMAP, SMTP, CALDAV and LDAP.

The existing Law of Open Standards (Law 36/2011) sends a clear message to the market: from now on only open standards compliant products will be purchased by the public administration. ESOP has informed its members they must ensure compliance in order to bid on public tenders.

Now that the legal framework is in place we hope that the implementation of open standards in Portugal contributes to a better functioning IT market with more competition, lower prices and new opportunities for local SMEs.