DIGITAL
Belgium

Status June 2017

Belgium's Federal Government launched **Digital Belgium** in April 2015, with the objective to make Belgium a **digital front-runner in Europe**.

Digital Belgium was developed and is being implemented with the support of the **Digital Minds for Belgium**, an informal steering committee comprising CEO of digital companies, entrepreneurs, investors and academics.

This document outlines some of **the key achievements** of Digital Belgium

DIGITAL ECONOMY

According to calculations by the Lisbon Council, over the next few years digital innovations will be responsible for creating five new jobs for every two that disappear. Digitization encourages people to be entrepreneurial and brings new players into the field. The result is **more robust competition, more innovation and increased quality of service**.

"Digital Belgium" supports an approach, which boosts the digital economy and expands the **prospect of jobs and growth**.

GIVE FUEL TO NEW BUSINESS MODELS

1. A transparent fiscal & social regime for the sharing economy

Since early 2017, Belgians providing occasional services (up to 5100€ gross revenue/year) via an app or digital peer-to-peer platform benefit from a clear and simple fiscal and social regime. No administrative procedure is required from the service providers, and their revenues are taxed at the time of the transaction at a reduced rate of 10%, as long as the transactions are made via certified platforms. As of May 2017, twelve platforms have already been approved. Please find more information here

2. Tax Shelter for investments in start-ups

Equity investors in companies that are less than four years old can benefit from a 30% to 45% tax reduction on their invested amounts, up to 100,000€ investments per individual and fiscal year. Investments can be made via three channels: direct investments, investments via funds and via crowdfunding platforms.

This fiscal incentive has been giving a significant boost to seed and very early-stage investments in start-ups, by sharing the risks between investors and government, while letting investors in the lead to identify and select the projects.

Starters can also now count on a reduction in wage costs, including a full exemption of social contributions for first employee hired. Please find more information here

3. Mobile Health sandbox programme

Mobile technologies are transforming the delivery of health care, the approach towards prevention and following up treatments. They can provide important advantages both for patients, health care practitioners and the health economy.

At the end of 2016, the Belgian Federal government has launched a 3M€ sandbox programme: 24 pilot applications in 5 medical fields have been selected (Cardiovascular disorders, cerebral vascular accidents, chronic pain, diabetes, mental health).   They are being tested and remunerated in real-life conditions during a full year, paving the way for potential adaptations of reimbursement schemes.

The list of the 24 selected projects can be found here

STIMULATE TRANSITION OF EXISTING PLAYERS

1. Tournée Digitale

Tournée Digitale are evening sessions aimed to inspire and inform SME owners on the opportunities provided by new digital technologies. The sessions are centered around successful local examples and concrete tips. The sessions are co-organized with the employers federations and private partners, and detailed follow-on trainings are made available. Sixteen editions have already taken place, with an estimate number of 2000 attendees.
More information about upcoming editions can be found here

2. Broader tax incentives on innovation

Since July 2016, the patent income deduction has been replaced by a broader innovation deduction. Under this new scheme, the qualifying IP assets have been extended to copyright-protected software and other IP rights.

The economic potential of the digital economy is not only in digital startups and in the ICT sector, but also in many other traditional sectors. The tax deduction for innovation income makes it more attractive for Belgian companies to develop their innovative software in Belgium.
More information can be found here

3. Digital Act

In summer 2016, the Belgium government passed the Digital Act, a law that enforces the equivalence between paper and digital formats. With the Digital Act, Belgium has among the first countries to implement the EIDAS European regulation.

The concrete impact for private and public organizations are numerous and significant, as the Digital Act provides a modern framework for:

- Online archiving
- Online registered communication
- Electronic signature
- Electronic authentication
- Electronic stample

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DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

THE STIMULUS FOR ULTRA-FAST INTERNET

Ultrafast internet is crucial for the growth of the digital economy and to allow the digital society to flourish. Mobile traffic doubles every year and Internet traffic every two to three years. "Digital Belgium" wishes to continue to advance the pioneer role that Belgium plays in rolling out new technologies for ultra-fast internet.

1. Every Belgian connected

"Digital Belgium" has ambitious broadband targets. By 2020 at least half of the connections in Belgium must achieve Internet speeds of up to 1 Gbps.

New coverage maps for fixed broadband and mobile broadband were made available to identify the areas where a high-performance infrastructure is not yet present (white zones) and together with the local governments additional measures are being developed to stimulate roll-out of connectivity in those areas. Using a mix of technologies, we ensure that everyone can access the internet.

2. Stimulate roll-out of new technologies

By reducing administrative burdens and lowering roll-out costs of network operators, the government is stimulating the roll-out of new broadband technologies (fiber, LTE advanced, 5G). For example every house that is being built or renovated in the future will need to be fiber ready.

Moreover, a proactive 5G framework will ensure "Digital Belgium" is in the lead when the Internet-of-everything is rolled out. The attribution of mobile licences in the 700MHz and 3600MHz bands are being publicly consulted at the moment and will be attributed in 2018 or 2019.

This is part of the plan for ultrafast internet in Belgium, that can be found here.

DYNAMIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS MARKET

Competition in the telecoms sector ensures that citizens and businesses can take advantage of interesting and innovative services at the right prices.

1. Easy Switch

Digital customers must be able to change operator easily. The new procedure decreases the administrative burden for customers while switching from one operator to the other. The new operator will arrange all the administrative details with the old operator.

2. Better informed customer

Consumer protection measures were improved in order to give customers more transparency regarding quality of service and available speeds when looking for a new subscription and when signing a new contract.

The customer is also better informed about its consumption patterns by his operator so that it's easier to find a new subscription fit-for-purpose.

The tariff simulator besttariff.be helps the customer in comparing the different subscriptions available on the market.

DIGITAL SKILLS AND JOBS

According to the European Commission, nine out of ten jobs will require at least basic digital skills by 2020. Governments, along with private players, must ensure that as many citizens as possible, irrespective of their age and background, can take advantage of the necessary digital opportunities. Digital skills are tomorrow's infrastructure.

1. Funding: the Digital Belgium Skills Fund

The Digital Belgium Skills Fund has been launched in April 2017 to finance projects that enhance the digital skills of socially vulnerable children, young people and (young) adults. The fund will invest 18M€ over a period of three years. The selection of the projects is carried out by an independent philanthropic fund manager, the King Baudouin Foundation. As a pilot for this project, the Belgian Federal Government supported the launch and first year of Molengeek, a tech incubator and coding school located in Molenbeek.

2. An iconic hub

A collective bringing together key figures in the digital field in Belgium have launched BeCentral, a unique place where children, young people and adults can upgrade their digital skills. In a first phase, BeCentral will occupy more than 2,000 square meters at the Brussels-Central railway station, where empty spaces will be converted into digital laboratories, reading rooms, meeting and work areas. BeCentral will thus play a major role in bridging the digital divide and will provide at least 10,000 people with digital skills. The official opening of BeCentral will take place in October 2017. Yet, permanent and temporary projects are already occurring during the renovation works, such as Becode.org, Belgium's largest free coding school.

3. A community: digitalchampions.be

Following the Grand Coalition on ICT jobs at European level, Belgium has set up "DigitalChampions.be". DigitalChampions.be is an alliance bringing together stakeholders from various governments, education and the private sector. It undertakes initiatives so that all citizens, irrespective of their age and background, are given the opportunity to strengthen their digital skills. Digitalchampions organized in May 2017 the first-of-its-kind Digital Skills Fair, bringing together more than fifty different projects.

More information on digitalchampions.be here.

DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

Needs and expectations from citizens and companies evolve with changes in technologies. They expect mobile-first, seamless interactions with the administration. Therefore, Digital Belgium is continuing the efforts to implemenet a digital transformation of the federal government, aiming at digital-by-default end-to-end interactions with citizens and organizations.

1. Mobile ID (itsme®)

Itsme is the mobile version of a physical ID (which it complements). This mobile app allows every Belgian to unequivocally prove his identity online, hence replacing card readers and the many passwords on the Internet. Itsme can be used for example to make a payment in a webshop, to sign an online document or access governmental services online.

Itsme® is the result of a unique collaboration between the four major banks and the three major mobile network operators in the country that bundled their powers in the Belgian Mobile ID consortium. The Belgian Federal Government recognizes itsme as a trusted authentication mechanism to access its online services (and will recognize other private players who offer similar security level).

More information can be found here.

2. Government Cloud (G-cloud)

The G-Cloud is a hybrid cloud that uses services offered by private companies in public cloud environments and services housed in state-owned data centers. The G-Cloud catalogue is managed by the State, allowing for significant cost savings while facilitating roll-out of new applications and technologies. For the development and operational functioning, the private sector is widely used.

The service catalogue of G-cloud ranges from shared physical infrastructure (storage, virtual machines,…) to platforms (business intelligence and data analytics, or applications (web content management, authentication services,…). The range of services is gradually extended and improved according to the actual needs of the participating institutions.

3. Open Data

Public data belonging to the federal government must be accessible, with a few exceptions based on privacy and security. Transparent access to data means a better democratic process. That is why we will ensure that this data is accessible in a user-friendly manner using a single open data portal.

The federal open data strategy includes an ambitious view on open data and several concrete action points by 2020. A bill that supports this strategy and regulates the reuse of government information.

The law is at the same time the transposition of the 2013 European PSI Directive, an important part of the European Open Data Strategy and Digital Agenda.

DIGITAL CONFIDENCE AND DIGITAL SECURITY

In order to be able to grow, the digital economy needs confidence and security. That means **respecting rights** and **strategically and effectively tackling illegal practices**. Only when citizens and businesses have full confidence that their data is safe online, can the digital economy achieve its full potential.

1. Tackling illegal content and practices

We are building a modern legal framework, which protects citizens and businesses against illegal content and activities on the net. New measures such as online resolution of consumer disputes or efficient procedures against illegal online content ensure that the same protection applies online as offline.

2. Safe and privacy-friendly online environment

Technology and its associated risks are evolving at breakneck speed. Everyone needs to realize that an online front door also needs to be properly locked. We are supporting initiatives to raise awareness amongst children, adults and businesses about how they can use the Internet in a safe and privacy-friendly manner.

3. Cyber Security

The Federal Government established in 2014 its Center for Cybersecurity (CCB), and its organization has been reinforced over the last year.

In May 2017, it was decided to accelerate the efforts undertaken in the field of cyber security, with a comprehensive package of concrete measures under 6 priorities outlined below.

24/7 callcenter for sme's & companies

Sensitization campaigns

Protection of critical public infrastructure

***Early warning* system critical infrastructure**

Web tool for cybercrisis analysis

International cooperation