



Brussels, 13.7.2022
SWD(2022) 196 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

**of DIRECTIVE 2007/2/EC establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the
European Community (INSPIRE)**

{SWD(2022) 195 final}

INTRODUCTION

Directive 2007/02/EC establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE) aims to create a European Union spatial data infrastructure for the purposes of EU environmental policies and other policies or activities which may have an impact on the environment. The INSPIRE Directive came into force on 15 May 2007 and was required to be implemented in various stages, with full implementation required by end of 2021. INSPIRE builds on the infrastructures for spatial information already established and operated by the Member States of the European Union and requires Member States to:

1. set up coordination structures and adopt and implement legal measures to remove procedural obstacles to the sharing of spatial data;
2. identify their spatial data relevant to environmental policies and those actions with an environment impact;
3. document the spatial data so that they can be accessed by authorities and the public on the internet together with other information;
4. implement online services allowing the discovery, visualisation and download of spatial data;
5. gradually organise and publish the spatial data in common data models.

The Directive is a crucial framework for data management in the EU and in Member States and it complements other EU instruments facilitating access to and dissemination of environmental information. Although the Directive was designed as an environmental policy instrument, its implementation has demonstrated its value for implementing other policies, even where there is no legal requirement. This is for the following reasons:

- The principles and protocols on which INSPIRE is built are based on internationally recognised standards for disseminating geospatial data.
- The quantity of data becomes ever more abundant, which provides significant opportunities for better policies, implementation, environmental protection and commercial applications.
- Today's societal challenges call for cross-cutting interventions and many EU policies are so interwoven that new policies inevitably must aim to achieve multiple objectives, notably the European Green Deal. This calls for better data sharing to underpin better policy at less cost.
- The currency of the modern data economy is data and, as highlighted in the EU digital strategy, INSPIRE is a front-runner instrument.

It is therefore even more important to evaluate the Directive to ascertain how it functions, formally and on the ground. This evaluation's evidence and much of the analysis builds on a comprehensive external contractor report, which includes information from literature/desk research, targeted consultation activities in seven representative Member States and four relevant sectors (environment, marine, spatial data, agriculture) and a 12-week public consultation. A workshop was also organised to discuss and validate the findings of the report.

The evaluation also takes stock of the experiences gained in the implementation of INSPIRE and its coherence with other relevant instruments notably the Public Access to Environmental Information Directive.

MAIN FINDINGS

Compared to the baseline situation in 2007, when hardly any spatial data was electronically shared between public administrations, considerable progress has been made. INSPIRE has improved efficiency by creating a framework for distributing spatial data according to FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) principles. The main direct added value of the INSPIRE Directive consists of promoting data sharing as a common principle, the establishment of governance structures, EU-wide interoperability, unlocking public data, improving transparency and creating a pool of EU-level expertise. EU added value of the INSPIRE Directive can be maintained and further enhanced through its effective positioning in the emerging European data governance landscape and becoming one of the key drivers for the upcoming Green Deal data space, supporting the implementation of Green Deal strategies and supporting environmental democracy through a higher level of transparency.

Still, implementation gaps remain and the implementation of the INSPIRE Directive as well as the sharing and reuse of existing spatial data face barriers of technical and organisational nature. The evaluation finds that the INSPIRE Directive's technical over-specification renders the legal framework less fit for the future in the light of technological evolution and affects its capacity to fulfil its full potential. Interoperability (of data and services) was identified as the most important cost factor in the INSPIRE implementation. There is a simplification potential of the implementation in terms of addressing the too detailed interoperability requirements. This would also allow to make the legal framework technology neutral and increase the cost-effectiveness by allowing implementers to use off-the-shelf tools for the implementation of the INSPIRE Directive. Moreover, some discretion in application of data specifications should be allowed. INSPIRE on its own is not sufficient to ensure cross-border and cross-sector interoperability. Extra effort is needed to render spatial data into usable information for end-users as exemplified by the European Marine, Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) for the marine domain.

In those Member States where detailed cost-benefit analysis were conducted, the results achieved so far are in line with the ones expected from the ex-ante evaluation of INSPIRE. As implementation is still in progress, results cannot be fully assessed yet. Most costs related to the implementation of the Directive are largely borne by national governments. Users of the spatial data infrastructure do not perceive extraordinary costs.

INSPIRE was found legally coherent with environmental legislation and with other relevant areas of EU policy with spatial data needs. The INSPIRE Directive has been designed to be consistent with the EU legal framework on data sharing and dissemination and can support implementation of Public Access to Environmental Information Directive and the Open Data Directive. Synergies between the three Directives could however be better exploited. In particular, INSPIRE can be useful in further supporting active dissemination of information under the aforementioned two Directives.

In conclusion, the evaluation demonstrated that the INSPIRE Directive is still very relevant for addressing data sharing obstacles from the past and data needs for the future. Against this increasing relevance, it was also shown that the legal framework can be improved in terms of its effectiveness. Modernisation supported by improved implementation will render the intervention a key instrument to make the necessary data available needed to address environmental challenges (A Green Deal for Europe), increase environmental democracy and strengthen the emerging data economy (European Common Data Spaces).