



Simple Access to Official Documents in the Swiss Federal Administration

In 2006, the Federal Act on Freedom of Information in the Administration came into force. According to this law, every citizen has the right to request access to official documents without having to state a specific reason. However, in these last six years, the Swiss people have not made use of their new right on many occasions, since the procedure of locating and requesting a record has been rather cumbersome.

Within the project 'Single Point of Orientation', the Swiss Federal Archives have sought an innovative solution to offer the public a clear overview of the existing documents within the Federal Administration and to facilitate the procedure of placing a request. The pilot project has been successfully carried out from early 2011 until January 2012 and has received a high level of attention by the Swiss Federal Council who set SPO as an official aim for the years 2011 and 2012.

The outcome of the project consists of a data base with search function which contains the metadata extracted from the classification systems of several collaborating Federal Offices.

By entering search terms, users of the application can find titles of documents or dossiers as search results as well as corresponding information on the classification system of the office that produced the record. Search filters help the users to narrow down their queries. Thus, a search request could be made only within a particular Federal Office or concerning only documents of a specific creation date. Furthermore, the users are given the possibility to directly send an electronic request for access within the application, which will be forwarded to the Federal Authority in charge.

Given the political will, SPO could be further developed to include more metadata of higher quality. In the end, the clear central register created within the project SPO could prove beneficial for both the Swiss citizens as well as for public employees.