

European Commission: Progress report on cultural heritage digitisation

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On 24 September 2014, the European Commission published its report 'Cultural Heritage: Digitisation, Online Accessibility and Digital Preservation'. This is the first progress report on the implementation of the European Commission's 2011 Recommendation on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (see IRIS 2012-1/4) and the EU Council Conclusions of the same name (see IRIS 2012-7/4). The report reviews and assesses the overall progress achieved in the EU in this field from 2011 to 2013.

The report is mainly based on a set of national reports of 32 countries (28 EU Member States, 3 EEA countries: Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) submitted in late 2013, and early 2014. The areas covered by the reports are: organisation and funding of digitisation, digitisation and online accessibility of public domain material and material protected by copyright (orphan and out-of-commerce works), Europeana (the European digital library) and digital preservation.

The report notes that digitisation of cultural material still remains a challenge, with only approximately 12% on average of the libraries' collections and less than 3% of films digitised so far. This observation reflects the overall assessment of the Member States' progress, which is echoed throughout the report.

The European Commission observes that digitisation strategies have mostly local, sector- or institution-specific characters. Moreover, the digitisation itself largely relies on public funds, both national and those of European Structural Funds.

As regards cultural material in the public domain, the European Commission concludes that its web visibility has improved. However, statutory and contractual limitations persist for digitisation of public domain works, for example, with legal uncertainty regarding the legal status of their digital reproductions.

The report shows that the part of the Recommendation on bringing online copyrighted material, as well as the Orphan Works Directive of 2012 (see IRIS 2012-10/1), have had a very limited effect. The transposition of the Directive and the implementation of legally backed collective licensing solutions for wide-scale digitisation of out-of-commerce works called upon by the Recommendation,

remain an exception rather than the rule. The same holds for the implementation of rights information databases, such as ARROW or FORWARD.

With respect to Europeana, the report points out that it has exceeded its 2015 target of 30 million digitised objects ahead of schedule. However, the progress has been much slower in relation to masterpieces and sound or audiovisual material.

In the area of digital preservation of cultural material, the report notes the adoption of a wide variety of long-term preservation strategies or schemes. However, much remains to be done when it comes to legislative provisions for multiple copying, format migration or web-harvesting, elimination of technical hindrances to long-term preservation of digital-born material or prevention of wide variations of legal deposit arrangements.

In conclusion, the European Commission acknowledges that progress has been made during the first two years of implementation of the Recommendation. However, 'the overall picture of cultural heritage digitisation remains fragmented and patchy', 'widely dependent' on cultural institution initiative or funding, 'with a limited overview of digitisation activities across sectors and borders'. The Commission refrains from giving any clear recommendations. It merely identifies the weaknesses, which require further attention and action.

European Commission, Implementation of Commission Recommendation on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation: Progress report 2011-2013, Working document, September 2014

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/image/recommendation-2011-2013_progress%20report-final-clean-shared%20with%20eac-ga%20approved-22-09-2014_7065.pdf

