

## How to participate

Since CIRCA is an application based on Internet standards, only an Internet connection and a standard browser (such as the latest versions of Netscape, Internet Explorer, Firefox or Opera) are necessary to access CIRCA. Access to a particular work group is granted by the respective work group leader.

In order to get CIRCA software:

- ▣ Administrations will have to enter into a third party licence agreement with the European Commission.
- ▣ They will subsequently receive the software to be installed on a server running SUN Solaris or LINUX RedHat 9 (in the latter case, a 1 GHz PC with 512 MB RAM will be sufficient to start).

Access licences, new releases or general information can be requested from [circadevelopment@cec.eu.int](mailto:circadevelopment@cec.eu.int).

More information about CIRCA developments and opportunities can be found in the library of the CIRCA Forum IG at <http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/ida/ircforum/home>.

## About us

CIRCA is an infrastructure service supported by the IDABC Programme. Management of the project is carried out in cooperation with the Commission's Informatics Directorate-General (DIGIT) and a stakeholder steering committee. DIGIT hosts the application and ensures development, help desk and general support services in cooperation with IDABC.

More information about IDABC and CIRCA can be found at [www.europa.eu.int/idabc](http://www.europa.eu.int/idabc) or by sending an e-mail to [idabc@cec.eu.int](mailto:idabc@cec.eu.int).

**The Internet not only offers the potential to post static information online but, more importantly, a new means of sharing it interactively through the formation of online communities that can collaborate and work together.**

**CIRCA (Communication and Information Resource Centre for Administrations) exploits this potential by providing software and services to European Union administrations. This allows interest groups to build collaborative workspaces where they can share resources and work together remotely.**

## What is CIRCA?

CIRCA is a simple and effective Internet-based groupware application that creates common virtual spaces for user workgroups to facilitate collaboration and the sharing of resources and documents. It is characterised by:

- ▣ A user-friendly web interface.
- ▣ Interactivity and dynamic page creation.
- ▣ Discussions in newsgroups and in virtual meetings.
- ▣ Distribution of documents and files of any type (multilingual) and with version control.
- ▣ Integrated services that are fine-tuned to the needs of public administrations.
- ▣ Powerful customisation.
- ▣ A low cost solution (users only need to have a browser and Internet access and the application needs to be installed on a server).
- ▣ A sophisticated access control mechanism.
- ▣ Security through SSL and Certificates (Secured log-on and transmission of documents).
- ▣ Decentralised and seamless management of the individual workspace.

CIRCA offers the following functionalities:

- ▣ A "Zero HTML" principle: None of the CIRCA operations (from the upload and creation of sections to queries and customisation) require any HTML editing or programming knowledge. The pages are automatically and dynamically created through the use of interactive forms.
- ▣ *Multilingualism*: CIRCA automatically adapts to the user's linguistic preferences. The user interface is currently available in five languages (German, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese), and additional languages can easily be added. CIRCA can also be used as a multilingual document repository.
- ▣ *Security*: With CIRCA, what you see is what you have access to. The User Interface is automatically mapped onto a user's access rights so that only the features and information she/he is granted access to are visible. Moreover, CIRCA supports secure log-on and ensures that sensitive documents are transmitted in a protected way.

CIRCA software is offered with a free licence to any Member State public administration or Community institution that wishes to install it and use it for its own needs. Beside its main installation in the European Commission, there are currently 30 licensed installations of CIRCA operated by the European Environment Agency and about 50 licensed installations run by Member State administrations. Only within the European Commission, CIRCA was being used by over 1,300 working groups and/or committees, counted over 40,000 registered users and had more than 850 Gigabytes of data transferred in 2004. In addition, CIRCA is increasingly being used by IDABC sectoral projects or Projects of Common Interest (PCIs).

The further development and maintenance of CIRCA is currently done by the European Commission with a view to making it open source in the future. A helpdesk provides support service to the community of CIRCA users involved in European Commission workgroups.

## Objectives

The objective of CIRCA is to offer a reliable, secure and efficient collaborative software application that facilitates the management of group work activities in a modular, scalable and open (standardised interface to external applications) manner.

## How does CIRCA work?

The CIRCA group work space contains the following services:

- ▣ **A library:** The library is organised in sections and subsections that contain documents and related metadata uploaded by authorised users. Documents can be viewed, downloaded or sent by e-mail. In addition, users can be automatically notified by e-mail when a new document has been uploaded.
- ▣ **News Groups:** These groups provide a forum for discussion among members of workgroups or project partners.
- ▣ **Directories:** The directories contain information on the users that have been authorised to access a particular Interest Group.
- ▣ **Meeting spaces:** A meeting space is made available for announcements, agendas and participants lists, including a chat room to host virtual meetings.
- ▣ **Information pages:** Pages in the form of HTML enable users to present data in an attractive format.

CIRCA is organised around **Interest Groups (IGs)**, which are private workspaces for groups of people that need to collaborate to achieve common objectives and tasks. Although all IGs have access to the same set of functionalities, the environment is fully customisable for a given IG and is restricted to the members of that group.

Consideration is also now being given to whether CIRCA should remain limited to EU administrations. The goal is to provide it as open source software in the future.

### A practical example of CIRCA Implementation: RASSF (Rapid Alert System for Food) used by the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection (DG SANCO)

Back in 1999, DG SANCO wanted a system that was able to store alert notifications coming from Member State administrations on products produced locally or imported from third countries and notify all other Member States about these alerts.

CIRCA was selected to gather and store all of the alert and information notifications from the Member States that are further analysed and assessed by the Commission. On average, about twenty notifications are received daily, processed by Commission experts and uploaded in CIRCA.

Member State representatives registered in this IG are then automatically notified via e-mail and can download the documents. CIRCA presents an overview table that enables members of this group to have an instant view of all notifications that have been uploaded. Linked to this, a database is maintained by DG SANCO. The database is automatically uploaded every day at midnight and Member State representatives can get a daily update of the database content.

CIRCA has saved DG SANCO enormous amounts of time and provides all its stakeholders in the Member States with a unique and structured view on alert notifications.

Speed, time-savings and a single, accurate and structured source of information are the benefits offered by CIRCA.

In today's knowledge-based society, sharing information has become as important as obtaining it. CIRCA provides all you need for efficient information sharing.