How does the European Commission support e-signatures in Europe?

Introduction to the eSignature building block

The eSignature building block helps public administrations and businesses to accelerate the creation and verification of electronic signatures. The deployment of solutions based on this building block in a Member State facilitates the mutual recognition and cross-border interoperability of e-signatures. This means that public administrations and businesses can trust and use e-signatures that are valid and structured in EU-interoperable formats. The provision of many online services requires exchange of documents whose signature can be recognised across border. It therefore constitutes a key building block for the European Digital Single Market.

eSignature is a building block of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). These building blocks are reusable specifications, software and services that will form part of a wide variety of IT systems in different policy domains of the EU. The promotion of common building blocks is a way to lower barriers for technical integration and provide tried and tested solution components that will speed up the delivery of online services that work across borders, in a cost-efficient manner.

What is CEF eSignature trying to achieve?

The eSignature building block supports the use of cross-border interoperable electronic signatures in Europe. This means, for example, that a Greek entrepreneur can sign a permit application in Helsinki and expect it to be recognized by public authorities in Dublin.

What does CEF eSignature offer?

The CEF eSignature building block consists of several services managed by the European Commission. These include:

- The Digital Signature Services (DSS) open-source library for the creation and validation of e-signatures.
- The Trusted List Manager, which helps the Member States' Trusted List Scheme Operators (TLSOs) create and edit a Trusted List in a standard, machine-readable format.
- Technical specifications and associated standards (maintained by ETSI), which outline the requirements laid out by the eIDAS Regulation in regard to e-signatures and e-seals.
- DSS Conformance Testing (maintained by ETSI), to help service providers and public administrations test interoperability and conformity of their e-signature solution.

A complete overview of CEF eSignature's services can be found [here](#).

A brief history of CEF eSignature
The eSignature Directive (1999/93/EC), effective as of January of 2000, first provided recognition of legal effectiveness to electronic signatures, thus establishing the legal framework at European level for electronic signatures and certification services.

ISA action 1.9 aimed to make it easy for Member States and their e-Government managers to use and accept electronic signatures by providing them with the necessary technical tools, in response to the 2006 Services Directive (2006/123/EC). This Directive stated that service providers from any Member State willing to create and run a business in another Member State, were entitled to carry out all relevant administrative procedures and formalities via Points of Single Contact and by electronic means, including across borders.


Read more on the legislative background of eSignature.

In response to these legislative developments, the eSignature building block has been operationalised and rolled-out by the CEF programme since the end of 2014, resulting in the set of tools and services available today. The following EU bodies currently manage CEF eSignature:

- The European Commission's Directorate General for Informatics (DG DIGIT) is responsible for the technical management of CEF eSignature.
- The European Commission's Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT) is responsible for the implementation of EU policy directly related to eSignature.
- The Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA) is responsible for the implementation of the CEF Telecom programme grants in cooperation with the European Commission.

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