



13th International Forum on the electronic Apostille Programme (e-APP)

Conclusions & Recommendations (C&R)

- 1 On 21 and 22 October 2024, the 13th International Forum on the electronic Apostille Programme (e-APP) took place in Astana, Kazakhstan. The Forum was jointly organised by the HCCH, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Maqsut Narikbayev University. Notably, the Forum was the first to be held in Central Asia.
- 2 The Forum was conducted in a hybrid format and attended by over 300 participants, representing 70 Contracting Parties and three non-Contracting Parties to the *Convention of 5 October 1961 Abolishing the Requirement of Legalisation for Foreign Public Documents* (Apostille Convention). The Forum was also attended by members of the public, private companies and organisations directly and indirectly connected to the Apostille Convention and the e-APP.
- 3 The e-APP Forum provides a unique international platform for governments, organisations, and the private sector to learn more about the benefits of the Apostille Convention and the e-APP, to promote its effective implementation, and to discuss the latest developments in relation to the e-APP worldwide. Fourteen Contracting Parties,¹ at various stages of the e-APP implementation process, gave presentations on the status of the e-APP in their State and participated in panel discussions.
- 4 The 13th International Forum on the e-APP adopted the following C&R:
 1. **Global significance and continuous promotion of the e-APP**
- 5 Participants noted the growing global interest in both the Apostille Convention and the e-APP. At the time of the Forum, the Apostille Convention had 127 Contracting Parties. Fifty-six Contracting Parties had implemented the e-Register component of the e-APP; 35 among them were also issuing e-Apostilles. Competent Authorities of current and future Contracting Parties to the Apostille Convention were strongly encouraged to consider implementing both components of the e-APP.
- 6 The presentations at the Forum emphasised the crucial role played by the e-APP in modernising and streamlining the process of obtaining Apostilles. Participants highlighted the pressing need to incorporate technology into the operation of the Apostille Convention, as digital solutions not only improve the issuance and verification of Apostilles but also facilitate accessibility for users worldwide. Discussions demonstrated that by transitioning from traditional paper-based methods to electronic systems, the e-APP enhances efficiency, reduces costs, and minimises the risk of document fraud.
- 7 Participants highlighted that further promotion of the benefits of the e-APP among Contracting Parties is necessary. Sharing experiences between Contracting Parties can

¹ Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China (People's Republic of), Colombia, El Salvador, Greece, Israel, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

also provide valuable insights into best practices and innovations, and assist in fostering a collaborative approach to the implementation of the e-APP.

8 Competent Authorities were encouraged to communicate and share their experiences in relation to the implementation and operation of the e-APP with other Contracting Parties in the region or across the globe.

9 Building on Conclusion & Decision No 59 of the 2024 meeting of the Council on General Affairs and Policy of the HCCH, Competent Authorities were further encouraged to record statistical data, and to share it with the Permanent Bureau (PB) of the HCCH on an annual basis. This information should include the number of Apostilles and e-Apostilles issued annually. If possible, Competent Authorities are also invited to include information relating to the type of underlying documents. Furthermore, if such information is available to them, Competent Authorities are invited to share with the PB information relating to the savings made in terms of time and resources, as compared to previous Apostille procedures (e.g., paper issuance / verification) and traditional legalisation.

2. Implementation of the e-APP

a. e-Apostille

10 The e-Apostille component of the e-APP also provides significant advantages that enhance the efficiency and reliability of the Apostille process. By implementing this component, Competent Authorities expedite the issuance of Apostilles. Participants noted that e-Apostilles reduce the administrative burden on Competent Authorities and minimise delays often associated with traditional paper-based methods. Participants agreed that the integration of user-friendly interfaces simplifies the application process, making it accessible to a broader audience. Moreover, it was observed that the digital format facilitates better tracking and record-keeping, ensuring that Apostille information is easily retrievable and verifiable.

b. e-Register

11 Participants recalled that e-Registers offer numerous benefits that significantly enhance the operation of the Apostille Convention. One of the key advantages continues to be the increased accessibility, as e-Registers allow users to verify Apostilles directly without needing assistance from the issuing Competent Authority. It was noted that this self-service capability empowers users and streamlines the verification process.

12 Additionally, it was agreed that e-Registers ensure timely access regardless of business hours or time zone differences. Contracting Parties were encouraged to implement multilingual interfaces, as they help overcome language barriers, making it easier for users from diverse backgrounds and Contracting Parties to verify Apostilles. Furthermore, e-Registers reduce the need for manual responses to enquiries about Apostilles, freeing up valuable resources and allowing authorities to focus on other critical tasks. Finally, participants concurred that the digital nature of e-Registers ensures the longevity and accessibility of records, safeguarding essential information for future use.

3. Education and training

13 Participants further reiterated that based on the principle of functional equivalence, validly issued e-Apostilles must be accepted by all Contracting Parties in the same way that paper Apostilles are accepted. Participants agreed that greater efforts to promote and educate receiving authorities on the importance of accepting e-Apostilles is crucial.

14 Accordingly, educational and promotional measures should be integrated throughout the process – prior to, during, and after implementation of the e-APP. Participants also recognised that training is essential for officials at the Competent Authority, ensuring that

they are proficient in operating both the e-Apostille and e-Register components. It was also noted that raising awareness among other stakeholders, including members of the public, is important. By prioritising correct training and promotion, the Apostille Convention and the e-APP can achieve their full operational potential, leading to a more efficient and trustworthy international document authentication process.

- 15 Participants recalled the valuable guidance contained in the document entitled [“The e-APP: Key Principles and Good Practices”](#). Contracting Parties were encouraged to disseminate this document domestically to relevant agencies and other users of the e-APP to assist with education and training.

4. Visions for the future

- 16 Noting Principle 5 of the Key Principles and Good Practices mentioned above, participants stressed the importance for Competent Authorities to regularly update and upgrade their e-APP infrastructure and to consider whether technical and security developments, including relevant regional and international standards, can improve existing technology. Participants recommended that Competent Authorities which are considering e-APP implementation explore the use of the latest technological developments and solutions. Participants further recommended that Competent Authorities which have already implemented the e-APP monitor developments and consider, where possible, updating or upgrading their e-APP infrastructure as appropriate, to keep pace with technology.
- 17 When either component of the e-APP is implemented, or if Contracting Parties make changes to e-APP practices or procedures, the importance of informing the PB, other Contracting Parties (and in circumstances where there is a change in designated Competent Authority(ies)), the depositary for the Convention, *i.e.*, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands) was recalled, as well as making information available for the general public.

5. Next Forum

- 18 Participants agreed that the e-APP Forum was a valuable opportunity for officials to meet and connect to share experiences on the e-APP and welcomed the suggestion for a further Forum at an appropriate time.