

ASTRA: the ECB platform for exchanging information with external institutions and partners.

1. A description of ASTRA

ASTRA¹ is the platform used by the European Central Bank (ECB) to exchange document-based information and communications with external (i.e. non-ESCB/SSM) institutions and partners.

The platform provides a user-friendly and highly secure environment in which the ECB, the SSM and external users of the platform can access existing information and upload new documents or versions. Another feature of the system is that it can send notifications to users to alert them when relevant information is available for them to access.

ASTRA has been implemented in order to improve and secure the external electronic transmission of documents. It has been endorsed by the ECB's Legal and IT departments as suitable for the exchange of information classified up to ECB-CONFIDENTIAL level.

2. The benefits of ASTRA

ASTRA is based on a simple and easy to understand file and folder structure, which ensures that end users do not require specific training on how to use the system. Nevertheless, an information guide is available within the platform to all ASTRA users and may be accessed in the folder entitled "How to use ASTRA".

The platform offers the main document management functionalities, including search, version management and audit trail visibility. Notifications can be sent to inform users when new content has been made available.

ASTRA can be accessed from anywhere using just a web browser and an internet connection – there is no need for any special device or software. Further technical details are provided below.

¹ <https://astra.ecb.europa.eu>

3. How to gain access to ASTRA

ASTRA can be accessed in two different ways.

- Trusted organisations may be authorised to administer their users' credentials in a number of ECB applications, including ASTRA. For such organisations the power to create user accounts is delegated by the ECB to a local role – referred to as the “Delegated User Administrator” – with the knowledge and the tools needed to create accounts for local users. Under this modality, and depending on the type of collaboration involved, the ECB might either ask the Delegated User Administrator to create an account, or it might ask the user requiring access to ASTRA to approach their local Delegated User Administrator themselves.
- For all other organisations without a local Delegated User Administrator, accounts are created directly by the ECB.

For both of these two modalities, access to specific areas of ASTRA is always managed centrally by the ECB, in accordance with the business needs.

Once an account has been created the user receives an email from the ECB with instructions on registering a secure password, which is needed to access ASTRA along with a one-time code which is sent via text message or an automated voice call to the telephone number registered by the user.

4. How to get support

For business-related matters, users should contact their ECB counterparts.

For technical issues related to the local computer or network, support should be requested from the local service desk.

For technical support on ASTRA-related matters, users should contact the ECB Service Desk (email: supportcenter@ecb.europa.eu; phone: +49 69 1344 7766).

For access-related matters, users can reset their password or change their registered phone number themselves. For additional operations related to access, users should contact the ECB Service Desk or the local Delegated User Administrator. The ECB cannot put ASTRA users in touch with their local Delegated User Administrator – depending on the internal processes of the organisation in question, it should be possible to contact the Delegated User Administrator via the local intranet or the local service desk.

5. The use and protection of personal data

ASTRA is based on platforms from two software providers specialising in security and information management solutions. The ECB approved the use of ASTRA for information exchanges with external parties after conducting all necessary legal, data privacy and IT security due diligence.

ASTRA users' personal data are processed by the ECB in its capacity as data controller, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725².

In order to grant access to ASTRA, as well as for audit and information management purposes, the ECB processes users' names and contact details. Data regarding their use of ASTRA (log files) and users' actions in respect of items (audit trail) are stored in ASTRA.

Please see Annex 1 for the complete terms and conditions governing the use of ASTRA.

6. Technical specifications

ASTRA has been designed in accordance with the highest security standards and the strictest ECB architectural principles. It offers a high degree of protection to the networks, devices and information of the ECB, the European System of Central Banks (ESCB), the SSM and ASTRA users.

The main characteristics of the platform are listed below.

- It is hosted on very secure data centres located in the EU.
- As a cloud-based system, it is closely monitored 24 hours a day by highly specialised services.
- It is protected by multiple layers of security, as described by the ECB's IT security requirements and reviewed by the ECB's IT department, so that:
 - data are fully encrypted at rest and in transit;
 - all stored and processed content is sanitised to eliminate viruses and malware;
 - user access to the platform is secured by multi-factor authentication;
 - content is segregated across various user communities at infrastructure, application, identity and access-management levels;
 - the accessing of content is fully traceable at individual document and individual user levels.

² Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC, OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 39.

- The system architecture is designed to offer high availability, guaranteed by the absence of single points of failure for critical components and by stringent service level agreements in place with the platform's service providers.
- Rapid onboarding of ASTRA users is facilitated by:
 - web-based access, without any need for local configurations or deployments;
 - an intuitive interface, reducing to a minimum any need for training, guidance or support;
 - users without a business mobile phone who are not willing to provide details of their personal phone still being able to receive a one-time authentication code via an automated voice call to a landline phone;
 - the acceptance of files of up to 2 GB in any format, with additional preview functionalities for the most common formats.

Given its web-based nature, and its compatibility with all standard modern browsers, using ASTRA should not give rise to specific technical problems other than those of a normal website. Nevertheless, the following list presents four situations that might require action from either the local IT department in the case of the first three, or the individual user in the case of the last one:

- local antivirus software or firewall blocking access – can be solved by adding `astra.ecb.europa.eu` and `id.ecb.europa.eu` to the list of trusted sites;
- local email client forwarding ASTRA notifications to junk email – can be solved by adding `astra.ecb.europa.eu` and `id.ecb.europa.eu` to the list of safe senders;
- unexpected expiration of session or timeouts while operating with large files – review local network performance and bandwidth;
- no access on devices with a screen size of less than seven inches – changing the browser to “Desktop Mode” should be sufficient to access the system; otherwise, use a device with a larger screen.