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IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Accompanying the document

**Proposal for a regulation of the European parliament and of the Council
on establishing a single digital gateway to provide information, procedures, assistance
and problem solving services and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012**

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ANNEX 1: PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

1.1 Identification

Lead DG: DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW)

Agenda planning/Work programme references: The single digital gateway is part of the Single Market Strategy of the Commission (Upgrading the Single Market: more opportunities for people and business, COM (2015) 550 final) and was included under reference 2017/GROW/012 in the agenda planning.

1.2 Organisation and timing

An Inter-Service Steering Group was set up early in 2016. In total, four meetings were organised: on 24 February, 26 April, 9 November and 7 December 2016.

The following Directorates-General, Agencies and services participated in the ISSG or were consulted: SG, SJ, COMM, EMPL, CNECT, REGIO, TAXUD, EAC, SANTE, JUST, HR, DIGIT, BUDG, OLAF and the EDPS. The feedback received from these Directorates-General and services has been taken into account.

The Inception Impact Assessment was published on 05/07/2016.

The ISSG of 7 December 2016 agreed to the submission of the Impact Assessment Report to the Regulatory Scrutiny Board.

1.3 Consultation of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board:

The Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB) of the European Commission assessed a draft version of the impact assessment and issued its opinion on 20/01/2017. The Board made several recommendations. Those were addressed in the revised IA report as follows:

RSB opinion	Follow-up
(B) Overall assessment and main issues The Board gives a negative opinion, because the report contains important shortcomings that need to be addressed, notably the following: (1) The report sets very high ambitions for online information and electronic procedures without identifying precisely what the portal should cover and the obstacles the initiative needs to overcome to deliver; (2) The report does not explain why and how this initiative will be more successful than similar earlier initiatives; (3) The report is unnecessarily complex in that it does not match the problems with the objectives and options;	(1) New chapter 1.4 on the scope of the initiative has been added explaining in detail the envisaged coverage of the single digital gateway. New section 2.2.3 explains the gaps that exist for each Member State regarding a) information coverage, b) coverage in English, c) procedures online and d) procedures accessible for foreign users. (2) Detailed explanation has been added in section 7.3 "Benefits of the preferred option- why will it succeed"? (3) Annex 7 on the intervention logic includes a table with a full overview of problem drivers, problems, specific objectives and different options. This structure has been followed throughout the document, in the problem tree in section 2.1, and in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

RSB opinion	Follow-up
(4) The options are not true alternatives but mostly a list of complementary measures. Their design and articulation is confusing and does not correspond to the five specific objectives; (5) The report lists benefits and quantifies some costs. But estimates seem to be on the low side and are not differentiated across Member States.	(4) The options have been presented as three alternative packages. An overview table is included in section 5.1. The table includes the links with the different problems to be addressed. New tables are included in section 7.1 linking each of the options with the specific objectives. (5) On the basis of a gap analysis for information coverage and online procedures, a new table with cost estimates has been included for each of the Member States (see Annex 4). For the overall cost estimates, an average has been used.
(C) Adjustment requirements and other recommendations for improvement (1) Context and scope: The report should clarify the background of the initiative, outlining existing services stemming from EU law or soft measures, as well as trends and good practices in Member States in developing user-centric portals illustrated by examples. It should recall the 2015 request from seventeen Member States to regulate in this area. In particular, it should explain how the scope of the information services to be covered by the single digital gateway was determined and whether they are all relevant for the single market. Furthermore, the impact assessment should clarify the extensions beyond the existing portals. The report should make clear what the existing Commission and Member State commitments are, in particular in terms of resources.	1) A new chapter 1 on the context and the scope has been added explaining the current situation (section 1.1), the various calls from MS and stakeholders for this initiative (section 1.2), the trends and good practices in the MS (section 1.3 and Annex 13) and how the scope of the initiative was defined (section 1.4). Annex 4 includes a detailed analysis of the extensions required in all MS both for information and for procedures. Annex 18 includes a full overview of the human and financial resources currently allocated for the whole range of existing services that will be covered by the single digital gateway
(2) Problem definition: Existing evidence should be better used, including from the previous initiatives. Given that the gateway focuses on improving EU level coordination and tools and imposing legal obligations on Member States, it should demonstrate that these two elements will correct failure of the past and address the main problem drivers of quality and reliability of information and services, cost, complexity, intra-EU divergence or lack of service orientation of national administrations as described in the problem tree.	The evaluation in Annex 3 has been adapted to clarify the problem drivers responsible for the partial success of the existing information and assistance services. Section 7.3 describes why the legal provisions as proposed are very likely to correct the failures of the past.
(3) Intervention logic: The report should simplify the intervention logic by streamlining and restructuring the problem definition, objectives and options.	See new table in Annex 7, this logic is followed throughout the main document.
(4) Options: The report should either group key actions into alternative packages clearly linked to the specific objectives or identify genuine alternative actions within each objective-area in order to eventually identify the preferred package. The options should include more concrete information on covered services, and explain in more detail the related "project plans" in terms of their content, governance, resources and timing of roll-out. It should be made clear what will be required from all concerned actors – i.e. EU versus Member States' level.	The options have been presented in three alternative packages. See section 5. A new Annex 12 has been added to outline the project plan for implementing the preferred option. The plan also indicates in detail what is required from the different actors.

RSB opinion	Follow-up
(5) Impact analysis: The report should detail and substantiate some costs (one-off costs, administrative burdens, compliance costs and clarify whether funding only covers IT costs (development and maintenance) or the full cost of expanding and running information services (information collection, updates, processing user's queries and feedbacks). The analysis of impacts should refer to experience from existing single market e-Government tools, risks involved, and make realistic estimates for resource implications both for the Commission and for different Member States. The criteria for comparing the options should be clarified. For the preferred option, the cumulative cost on the Commission and the Member States should be presented.	The cost table in section 7.4.1 has been clarified to cover these remarks. More cost figures were obtained from some of the Member States. They confirmed that the cost range chosen was realistic. Nevertheless, for the overall calculation a cost figure on the very high end has now been used to make sure that the costs for digitalising procedures (the main cost component) will, in any case, not be underestimated. Section 7.1 includes three new tables with detailed criteria for comparing the three options. Cost table in section 7.4.1. has been adapted accordingly.
(6) Monitoring of implementation: The report should be clearer about the project plan for the single digital gateway, how it will be monitored and what criteria will be used to measure its success. Especially, expected high risk areas of implementation should be pointed out.	A project plan is now included in Annex 12. The criteria for monitoring achievement of objectives, the exact tools for measuring this, and high risks have been clarified in chapter 8.

In its positive opinion on 7 March 2017, the Regulatory Scrutiny Board requested further changes. These have been addressed in the final IA report as follows:

RSB opinion	Follow-up
(1) Problem definition The report should provide more analysis and data on the size of the problem. It should also elaborate on the potential for cost savings and benefits for business and citizens: the report could aggregate the data presented in section 2.2 to indicate orders of magnitude or the range of benefits for business and citizens.	Additional supporting evidence has been added to chapters 2.2, 2.3, annex 4 (section 4.3) and annex 5 (section 5.7). Data on potential cost savings for business and citizens were included for each option (6.1.11, 6.2.10., 6.3.8.).
(2) Options. Each option includes and builds upon already existing Member State and Commission digital services and procedures. Therefore, the presentation of the options should make clearer what exactly the options provide in addition to what is not in place today. Moreover, the report should bring out an estimate of the resources and timing needed for the implementation of each option. The report does not aggregate nor compare costs in a transparent manner. It should further elaborate on the actual costs of the different options for the Commission and the Member States. The report has clarified the criteria to assess the options. But it should introduce a clearer link between the ratings of the options and the available evidence about impacts (benefits, costs, savings, implementation issues, timing, demand, etc.).	Further details have been added to each option description. Detailed tables listing the administrative costs (including human resources) and savings per Member State and the Commission have been included for each option (tables 6.3., 6.8., 6.11.). Further sections were added for each option spelling out the time needed for implementation and the ease of implementation. Thus, a clearer link has been established between the ratings of the options and the available evidence about impacts.

RSB opinion	Follow-up
(3) Preferred option Table 7.4 summarises the cost of the preferred option. It assumes that the various steps are either the responsibility of Member States or of the Commission and it estimates costs accordingly. But in practice each step is likely to have coordination or implementation costs at both national and EU level (e.g. 10+10 procedures or the availability of websites in English). The overall final costs will therefore be possibly higher, in particular in terms of FTE necessary to develop the SDG. This should be reflected at the subsequent stage of finalisation of the proposal. The report should give indications of the accuracy of the estimates.	The cost table of the preferred option has been revised and made more detailed, including on coordination and implementation costs. Indications of the accuracy of the estimates have been provided.

1.4 Evidence and sources used for the IA

The impact assessment was prepared using diversified sources of information, including wide consultation of stakeholders, input from external experts, market reviews, sources of statistics, external studies, and surveys.

The following external studies were undertaken in support of the impact assessment:

- Study about administrative formalities of important procedures and administrative burden for businesses, Ecorys, 2017²³⁴
- Study on information and assistance needs of businesses operating cross-border within the EU, including gap and cost analysis, Ernest & Young, 2017²³⁵

1.5 External expertise used for the IA

EXTERNAL REFERENCES IN THE REPORT	
" EU Citizenship: Share your opinion on our common values, rights and democratic participation ", Public consultation 2015	2015
"Towards a Digital Single Market Act", European Parliament http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2015/2147(INI)	2015
24 Years of EU Citizenship: Removing the obstacles to full potential, ECAS (European Citizen Action Service)	2016
A European Single Point of Contact , European Parliament	2013
Digital Service Standards https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/assets/documents/digital-service-standard.pdf	
Digitizing Public Sector Services, Norwegian E-government Program, 2012	2012
EUROCHAMBRES Economic Survey 2016 https://magic.piktochart.com/output/9670584-ees2016	2016
High-level Group on Business Services	
European Parliament Report on Non-Tariff Barriers in the Single Market,	2016

²³⁴ Draft version of 5 April 2017 used for this impact assessment.

²³⁵ Idem.

EXTERNAL REFERENCES IN THE REPORT	
German Chambers of Commerce annual member survey, "Obstacles in the EU Single Market for Services 2016"	2016
German Chambers of Commerce annual member survey, "Obstacles in the EU Single Market for Services 2015"	2015
GPSD Business Application	
Highlight findings, Netherlands Chamber of Commerce European internal market panel survey June 2016 https://www.kvk.nl/download/Highlights%20KvK%20entrepreneurs%20panel%20Internal%20Market%20Survey%20June%202016%20(English)_tcm109-421509.pdf	2016
https://www.kvk.nl/download/Highlights%20KvK%20entrepreneurs%20panel%20Internal%20Market%20Survey%20June%202016%20(English)_tcm109-421509.pdf	
Ministerial Declaration on e-government, Malmö, Sweden	2009
Commission consultation on the e-government action plan https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/public-consultation-egovernment-action-plan-2016-2020-contributions-businesses	2016
Mutual Recognition Regulation (764/2008) ,	2008
Public consultation on mutual recognition http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=8831	
Report on Non-Tariff Barriers in the Single Market - European Parliament	2016
Report public consultation on EU Citizenship 2015, 2016 http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/2015_public_consultation_booklet_en.pdf http://ec.europa.eu/COMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/search/citizenship/surveyKy/2130	2015
Results of Council of the Regions consultation on obstacles to investments at local and regional level - Secretariat of the Commission for Economic Policy (ECON)	9/2016
Trade Export Helpdesk	
UK Digital Efficiency Report, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-efficiency-report/digital-efficiency-report	2012
World Bank, Doing Business 2016.	2016

REPORTS COMMISSIONED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION	
Analysis on the implementation of the Construction Products Regulation	2015
Charter for the electronic Points of Single Contact under the Services Directive	
Construction Products Regulation, Final Report, 2015 – RPA Risk and Policy Analysts for DG GROW	2015
Consumer Conditions Scoreboard	2015
"Development of an EU VAT web-portal – Feasibility study of the options for development, implementation and maintenance", Final Report, 2016 – A study carried out by Deloitte for DG TAXUD	2016
ECAS - Your Europe Advice survey: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/csdays2016---workshop-5---claire-damilano---ecas.pdf	2016
EU citizenship consultation 2015 : Common values, rights and democratic participation"	2015
EU citizenship consultation EU citizenship 2016 http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/2016-flash-eurobarometer-430-citizenship_en.pdf	2016
EU Internal Market Barriers and Solutions: The Business Perspective	2015
EU-wide digital once-only principle for citizens and businesses: Policy options and their impacts, SMART 2015/0062, GNK Consult et al.	2016
Evaluation of Internal Market Legislation for Industrial Products , Centre for Strategic and Evaluation Services	2014
Evaluation of the European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net), report by CPEC (CIVIC Consulting, Van Dijk Management Consultants, GHK) for DG SANTE	2011
Flash Eurobarometer 413: Future of Europe TNS Political & Social	2014
Flash Eurobarometer 421: Internationalisation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises , TNS Political & Social	2015
Flash Eurobarometer 430 , European Union Citizenship, TNS Political & Social	2016
" Future-proofing eGovernment for the Digital Single Market – An assessment of digital public service delivery in Europe ", Capgemini, IDC, Sogeti and Politecnico di Milano. Background Report prepared for the Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology.	2015
High-Level Group on Business Services, Final Report	2014
Internationalisation of European SMEs, Final Report, European Commission 2010	2010
Performance of the Points of Single Contact http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/points_of_single_contact/index_en.htm#maincontentSec2	2016
Special Eurobarometer 425, Patients' rights in cross-border healthcare in the European Union, 2015.	2015
Study on Analysis of the Needs for Cross-Border Services and Assessment of the Organisational, Legal, Technical and Semantic Barriers , Final Report, Capgemini, Tech4i2, Time.lex, Universiteit van Antwerpen, European Commission 2013.	2013

REPORTS COMMISSIONED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION	
The e-government benchmark report, Delivering the European Advantage? ‘How European governments can and should benefit from innovative public services’ https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/eu-egovernment-report-2014-shows-usability-online-public-services-improving-not-fast Capgemini, Rand Europe, SOGETI, IDC, Danish Technological Institute.	2014
The European Commission eGovernment Benchmark 2015: More Digital Transformation of European public services needed to drive the EU Digital Single Market – Capgemini https://www.capgemini.com/news/the-european-commission-egovernment-benchmark-2015-more-digital-transformation-of-european	2015
Inventory of Contact Points (PCP, PCPC), Ecorys	2017
Study about administrative formalities of important procedures and administrative burden for businesses, Ecorys (<i>ongoing</i>).	2017

ANNEX 2: SYNOPSIS REPORT OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

2.1 Overview of the consultation process

The overall consultation process on the single digital gateway (SDG) started in November 2015 and closed in December 2016.

It included a dedicated stakeholders' workshop, an online public consultation targeting businesses, citizens and public authorities, meetings with stakeholder representatives, as well as exchanges with Member States (MS). Considering the scope of and responses to these activities it was decided not to launch a specific consultation targeting SMEs and start-ups.

The results of the consultation process constitute a key source of information and evidence for the impact assessment of the single digital gateway. The main outcomes of each consultation activity are analysed below.

2.2 Results of the consultation activities

2.2.1 Conclusions from the single digital gateway stakeholders' workshop

A dedicated workshop on the single digital gateway was organised in March 2016 in Brussels. Participants included representatives of the Points of Single Contact (PSCs), chambers of commerce and national authorities.

Participants were presented with ideas concerning the development of the single digital gateway and asked to express their views and experience concerning the main issues.

In the participants' views, many problems exist in terms of access to information, availability of e-procedures and access to assistance services. They appear to be due to gaps in legislation, a lack of information or assistance, as well as unsatisfactory implementation by national and local authorities.

2.2.2 Online information on applicable EU and national rules

Participants claimed that it is complicated, costly and burdensome for businesses to make use of their Single Market rights, whether it relates to establishing, providing services or selling goods across borders. Either there is no online information or where it exists, it is difficult to find or understand, mostly due to lack of alternative languages and the widespread use of jargon. Moreover, when only general information is offered, it cannot be applied to a particular case. Participants recommended using high quality standards for online information. The content and presentation of information should be constantly improved on the basis of user feedback.

2.2.3 E-procedures to comply with national rules

Participants pointed out that it is very difficult to use e-procedures across borders. Although some Member States have made impressive progress in terms of e-government domestically, the recognition of foreign e-Signature and eIDs is still very limited. As a consequence, access to e-procedures for foreign users is impossible.

2.2.4 Services for personalised assistance and advice

Access to assistance and problem-solving services is still limited due to low awareness of their existence and to language obstacles. In the participants' views, a useful single digital gateway should offer personalised information services and assistance in both the national language and in English, with the response in a reasonably short time.

2.2.5 Input from the online public consultation

The public consultation was open from 28 August 2016, until 28 November 2016. Target groups were businesses (including companies, self-employed and business representative organisations), citizens (including private individuals, organisations representing citizens or consumers and academics) and public authorities.

Table 2.1: Distribution of respondents

Type of respondent	N° of answers	% of answers
Self-employed	33	9%
Company	94	26%
Of which:		
- SME (1 to 249 employees)	87	93% of respondent companies
- Firm with more than 250 employees	7	7% of respondent companies
Business representative organisation	35	10%
Total for business category	162	45%
Private individual	147	40%
Organisation representing citizens / consumers	11	3%
Academic / research institution	8	2%
Total for citizens	166	45%
Public authority (including government)	39	10%
Total for Public authority (including government)	39	10%
TOTAL NUMBER OF REPLIES	367	100%

A detailed analysis of the results is available in Annex 15 of the IA.

It highlighted a strong consensus among business and citizens around the importance of the main pillars in terms of content of the single digital gateway, notably:

- the need for online information about rules and procedures in other EU countries: 93% of business respondents and 92% of citizens respondents consider it very important or important;
- access to e-procedures: 94% of business respondents and 92 % of citizens respondents consider it very important or important;
- Access to services providing assistance upon request: 88% of business respondents and 87% of citizen respondents consider it very important or important.

Online information on applicable EU and national rules

Businesses and citizens expressed very similar concerns with regards to online information on applicable EU and national rules. Most respondents in both categories would use the internet as the first source of information on these issues (74% of businesses and 80% of citizens). Most of them have tried to find such information online (78% and 70% respectively) but state that it was difficult (80% and 60% respectively). The main difficulties for both groups are the lack of findability (48% and 43% respectively), the quality of the information (40% in both cases) and the language in which the information was presented (24% and 13% respectively).

This is reflected in the opinions of respondents concerning quality criteria for online information. For both categories, the top three elements are that information should be findable (82% and 72% respectively), relevant, practical and up-to-date (77% and 69% respectively) and available in another EU language (72% and 64% respectively). 91% of responding businesses and 87% of responding citizens can understand information in a different EU language, the most common one being English (88% and 78% respectively), followed by French and German.

Being up-to-date, being run by an official authority and containing contact details to be considered trustworthy re considered the three most important indicators of trustworthiness for a website by both groups of respondents.

When it comes to improving information provision specifically for cross-border users respondents consider to a great extent that it should be mandatory for authorities to provide minimum information for citizens to carry out cross-border activities (80% in both cases) and that this information should be provided in at least one other EU language (77% and 72% respectively). The most effective means to prevent information gaps is for national authorities in each EU country to provide all (77% of business and 63% of citizens consider it very effective) or at least minimum information necessary for cross-border users (68% of businesses consider it very effective) and in at least one other language (72% and 63% of businesses and citizens respectively consider it very effective). Most public authorities consider that minimum information is already being provided (50%), while only 5% consider it unfeasible or too costly. Most of them consider it challenging but feasible to provide all information needed for cross-border activities (50%), information in a centralised EU database (48%) and information in at least one other EU language.

As far as existing national sources of information for rules and procedures applying to products and services are concerned, a majority of businesses (81%) would be in favour of merging the contact points for goods and services. This could be a realistic option for respondent public authorities, 70% of which consider it desirable or very desirable, despite considering this integration difficult or somewhat difficult (28% and 48% respectively).

E-procedures to comply with national rules

About half of responding businesses and citizens have tried carrying out an e-procedure in another EU/EEA country. The main problems faced by businesses are the use of too much jargon, the lack of full transactionality and the need to translate or certify documents. For citizens the main problems are the lack of full transactionality, the lack of findability of the procedure and problems with the languages available. Issues relating to languages and documents provision were identified as the most urgent to address by both groups of respondents.

The most important quality elements of e-procedures for both groups are the online transactionality of procedures (69% of businesses and 72% of citizens), the ease of navigation and presence of step-by-step guidance (80% and 72% respectively), the possibility to carry out the procedure in at least another EU language (65% and 67% respectively) and the presence of a helpdesk (51% and 63% respectively).

The three priority procedures to be put online for businesses are 1) registration of business activity, 2) VAT registration and 3) VAT return, while for citizens they are 1) requesting or renewing an ID or passport, 2) requesting the recognition of professional qualifications and 3) registering a change of address.

When asked which actions would help in improving the provision of e-procedures, respondents agree that it should be mandatory to make procedures available in at least another EU language (78% of businesses, 73% of citizens and 55% of public authorities) and that at least the most important (67%, 69% and 70% respectively) or any procedures relevant for cross-border users required under future European law (69%, 67% and 48% respectively) should mandatorily be fully online.

Making the availability of at least one foreign language (77% and 67% respectively) the full transactionality of any relevant procedure required under future EU law (69% of citizens) or at least the most important procedures (65% of businesses) mandatory are considering as the most effective measures in encouraging the transition to e-procedures. Half of the responding public authorities consider these actions as challenging but feasible, the other half being split between those that consider that such procedures are already in place and those that consider them unfeasible or unnecessary.

Most public authorities see their transition to e-government as neutral (50%) or positive (30%). They are evenly split among those that consider making more procedures available online, and in that case they would be fully transactional in 83% of cases and they would be in place over the coming two years, and those that do not.

Services for personalised assistance and advice

Respondents were asked about the most important quality criteria for personalised assistance services and flagged that replies should be quick (70% of businesses and 63% of citizens), answer the specific question/query (75% and 79% respectively), be reliable and legally sound (69% and 60% respectively), clear, simple and in non-legalistic language (64% of businesses), services should be able to receive and process queries in a foreign language (68% and 58% respectively) and users should be able to access the service through different channels (35% of citizens).

Feedback mechanism

A majority of citizens (76%) and businesses (55%) would be willing to give feedback on their experience with the Single Market, so as to orient policy-making.

2.2.6 Meetings and exchanges with business and citizens stakeholders

Several meetings with stakeholders have been organised.

Key inputs include:

- The hearing "EU Citizenship in practice" in March 2016;
- Discussion at the Annual SME Assembly in Luxembourg in November 2015; discussion with the SME Envoys in June and October 2016;
- Consultations with several organisations representing business and consumers on a bilateral basis throughout 2016 (Eurochambres, Eurocommerce, BUSINESSEUROPE, national chambers of commerce, CEA-PME, Startup City Alliance Europe, etc.), as well as some businesses operating in most EU countries;
- Discussions at Commission expert groups, including those on e-government, on the right to free movement of persons, on the right of unrepresented citizens to consular protection abroad, and the EU Citizenship Inter-Service Group;
- Discussions at Commission expert groups and networks such as the committee on horizontal questions concerning trade in processed agricultural products, the REFIT platform, the Single Market Forum, the implementation of the services directive expert group, the Small Business Act regular meetings;
- Position papers sent by business and consumers associations in reply to the online public consultation;
- Presentation and discussion at expert groups of existing tools, including Your Europe Editorial Board, Your Europe Advice, SOLVIT network, EU-GO network (Points of Single Contact), Europe Direct Contact Centres etc.

2.2.7 Online information on applicable EU and national rules

Stakeholder meetings have confirmed that information about applicable rules when operating abroad is needed and difficult to find.

One of the Centres for European Consumers highlights that MS should provide all the information necessary for citizens to engage in cross-border business or private activities and that information should be provided in at least one foreign language.

Some business stakeholders point out that the information provided needs to be sufficient to legally engage in cross-border activities, including detailed technical and regulatory requirements applying to testing and reporting, as well as information on taxation and social security, amongst others.

They have also stressed that information, besides being findable, should be of high quality, complete, reliable and updated. It also needs to be trustworthy so that users can rely on its legal value and accuracy.

Eurochambres contributed results of an internal survey that identified top single market obstacles and proposed solutions. Among the main obstacles were the inaccessibility of information on rules and requirements (81%) and different national product/service rules (81%).

A big company present in almost all MS pointed out that the mapping of legal requirements applying to their products in a new country takes at least 2 years before starting operations. They devote considerable resources to this process.

In their position papers, various business organisations (e.g. Eurocommerce, European Roundtable of Industrialists, and BusinessEurope) consider it more useful to streamline all online information tools under one single umbrella. Some encourage a common architecture

for information across Member States. This will assist information providers in identifying the information they are obliged to make accessible and facilitate the search process for users.

E-procedures to comply with national rules

Most business stakeholders argue that all procedures should be fully available online, avoiding a waste of resources in terms of time and money. Some are willing to accept exceptions only when security is at stake.

Some business associations' regret that only a limited number of procedures are available for online completion and only for certain sectors which can be found on current PSCs. They encourage the linking of contact points in order to make them more useful and efficient. Some stakeholders suggest that the Commission should coordinate and enforce shared compulsory quality criteria by Member States and improved interoperability between national portals through cross-border e-signatures and user-friendly eIDs.

Some stakeholders highlighted that local authority permits are hard to obtain electronically, due to incompatibility among systems.

Some businesses would find it useful to have a glossary to help them find the authority in charge of a specific procedure in another country, since competences are often distributed in different ways.

A majority of business representatives support the idea of common forms and more harmonisation across MS for e-procedures and rules. The layout and navigation of the single digital gateway should fall under this compliance.

Procedures identified as a priority for cross-border transactionality by BusinessEurope are: company establishment, fiscal registration, submission of tax forms and e-procurement.

Services for personalised assistance and advice

SMEs associations have highlighted the need for good quality assistance services, in particular for finding and understanding national requirements. Even bigger businesses have highlighted that affordable assistance should be made available to guide users through all steps of their cross-border endeavour, to ensure compliance with local requirements. Representatives of smaller sectors argue that they do not have national associations that could help them expand to new markets.

Most of the consulted stakeholders stressed that assistance services should be available in at least one language that is commonly understood across Member States, e.g. English. Some even suggest a shared European electronic service providing answers from a country in all languages.

2.2.8 Consultation with Member State administrations

Member States have been consulted through the Expert Group on Services Directive, the Mutual Recognition Committee, as well as through bilateral meetings with national authorities and their representation offices in Brussels. Some MS have also submitted position papers in reply to the online public consultation.

In addition, 17 Member States have issued a position paper calling for a network of digital single gateways (fully functioning e-government portals) to help business to start up, scale up and trade across borders by providing all the information needed to operate in another Member State. They also support the idea that businesses should only have to go through one digital process to set up and operate anywhere in the EU.

2.2.9 Governance of the single digital gateway

Most MS argue for a clear distribution of responsibilities between the national level and the EU. All respondents have highlighted that content ownership and management should be a national responsibility. Most of them would like the European Commission to take a strong coordination role, aiming at the definition of objectives in terms of updates, content, usefulness, etc. Some support the creation of a stronger coordination body compared to that existing for the EUGO network, for example. Many support the idea of enforcement measures when agreed quality standards are lacking. MS also stressed the need to keep their autonomy when it comes to national initiatives.

MS have also pointed out the need to further integrate initiatives and portals at EU level.

Most stakeholders in this category are in favour of collecting data and user feedback for improving services.

Online information on applicable EU and national rules

Most MS are in favour of providing basic information concerning cross-border operations.

A majority of MS stress the importance of quality and user-friendliness of the websites that will be part of the single digital gateway and support the proposal to use a quality label. Most also support the idea of merging or linking existing points of contact and of mandating information provision in at least another commonly used EU language.

E-procedures to comply with national rules

It was observed that putting procedures online requires substantial investments, which sometimes slows down their adoption. Nevertheless, some Member States have pointed out that when ensuring an efficient distribution of responsibilities, the single digital gateway should lead to more efficient communication and data-sharing among the European Commission and MS. This will allow identification and further rationalisation of the most used procedures across MS. Some MS favour a digital-by-default principle for future EU legislation and its national implementation.

A majority of MS stressed the importance of interoperability and the challenges posed by identification, authentication and electronic signature.

Services for personalised assistance and advice

Some Member States are concerned about the impact that the creation of a single digital gateway can have on the investment already made for the creation of the PSCs and other contact points as well as chambers of commerce portals. Most would prefer the single digital gateway to build on existing systems, so that past investments are not lost, but rather capitalized on.

2.3 Conclusions

The main elements that emerge from the consultation are the need to tackle the quantity and quality of single market-related information, e-procedures and assistance services available, a broad support for the aims of the initiative and a high level of interest concerning the concrete implementation by stakeholders.

Businesses and citizens consider that having access to all applicable information would be useful to make informed decisions. Member States consider that minimum information is already being offered and that it would be challenging to offer all information online.

A majority of respondents would like to carry out cross-border procedures online. They consider it important to remove some of the remaining obstacles in the single market.

Member States have concerns with regards to feasibility, notably regarding authentication and mutual recognition of e-signatures and regarding potential cost of putting all procedures online.

In the participants' views, a useful single digital gateway should offer personalised information services and assistance in both the national language and in English, within a short response time. The quality of the information and services is crucial for all stakeholders involved.

Some Member States are concerned about the impact that the creation of a single digital gateway can have on the investment already made for the creation of the PSCs and other contact points and chambers of commerce portals. Most of them would like to make sure that the single digital gateway builds on the existing systems.

These results are fully reflected in the proposed preferred option presented in the impact assessment, which aims at striking a delicate balance between achieving an ambitious project that meets the expectations of users while taking into account issues linked to technical obstacles and limited resources available among MS.

ANNEX 3: EVALUATION**Ex-Post evaluation of existing (regulatory and non-regulatory) framework of relevance to the single digital gateway****3.1 Purpose and scope of the evaluation**

The purpose of this annex is to summarise the results of existing evaluations, studies and public consultations insofar as they relate to the kind of services that are of relevance for the impact assessment prepared for a possible future single digital gateway. This annex will list and present the conclusions of these documents that cover nine different instruments. These instruments are regularly evaluated individually.

The evaluation will focus on a number of elements that are particularly important for businesses and citizens with respect to their rights and obligations concerning the Single Market: information, assistance and problem-solving services, online procedures, quality criteria for such services, (online) findability and visibility of services, as well as one element that is important for the Commission as guardian of the Single Market, namely the collection of case feedback to inform policy making. It will not consider other elements or functionalities of the instruments.

This evaluation aims at analysing how these services are performing together, and to what extent they are reaching the objectives to deliver to businesses and citizens the information, assistance and procedures they need in relation with their EU rights and obligations. In turn, this contributes to a better functioning Single Market, increased cross-border activities, more competition, jobs and growth.

The table on the next page shows which elements of the gateway the nine services cover, and where they are situated (national/EU level) as well as how they are funded.

(More detailed information on funding and resources of each instrument is provided in annex 18.)

The results of this evaluation will provide the basis for an impact assessment accompanying a future legislative initiative for a "single digital gateway". This initiative intends to streamline, complete and improve the existing instruments and to propose a feedback tool for the comprehensive collection and analysis of feedback from citizens and businesses.

Table 3.1

Elements assessed Instruments covered	Responsibility	Funding	Information (upfront on website)	Assistance (tailor-made, on request)	Online procedures	Quality criteria	Online findability	Case feedback
Points of Single Contact	National	National	x	x	x	x	x	
Product Contact Points	National	National		x		x	x	
Product Contact Points for Construction	National	National		x		x	x	
SOLVIT	National	National		x		x	x	x
Your Europe	EC + national	EC	x			x	x	
Your Europe Advice	EC	EC		x		x	x	x
Enterprise Europe Network	National	EC with national co- funding		x		x	x	x
EURES	National	EC with national co- funding	x	x		x	x	
European Consumer Centres Network	National	EC with national co- funding	x	x		x	x	x

3.2 Description of the existing framework and its objectives

This section presents the main instruments already in place at EU and national level in terms of what their frameworks foresee: general aims and – where applicable - for each the elements of the potential future single digital gateway: information, assistance, online procedures, quality criteria, findability and case feedback to policy-makers. The intervention logic in appendix 2 and the overview on page 4 provide further details. Taken together, the evaluated services provide:

- online information about on all relevant EU and national rights, obligations and rules applicable to EU citizens and businesses in the (broad) Single Market Area;
- assistance or problem-solving services which EU citizens and businesses can refer to with Single Market-related questions or problems about rights, rules or procedures;
- access to procedures established at EU or national level for the implementation of (broad) Single Market rights, obligations and rules;
- a register of all queries and problems handled, that can be used for policy-making.

Information on the implementation and usage of the instruments can be found in appendix 3.

3.2.1 Points of Single Contact under the Services Directive

The	Services	Directive
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²³⁶ aims to contribute to a genuine Internal Market in Services so that businesses and consumers can make full use of the opportunities it presents and benefit from the fundamental freedoms guaranteed in Articles 49 and 56 of the Treaty. Full implementation of the Directive should remove red tape and significantly facilitate the establishment of service providers both at home and abroad. It should also facilitate the cross-border (temporary) provision of services. The Directive was adopted in 2006 and its transposition deadline was December 2009. The Services Directive contains provisions on information, assistance, online procedures and quality.

Information

The Directive established "Points of single contact" (PSCs): e-government portals for entrepreneurs active in the service sector, which should assist businesses by providing comprehensive information on the procedures necessary to offer and provide services, and by allowing them to complete formalities online. Article 7 "Right to information" refers to information that Member States should provide through the Points of Single Contact, such as applicable requirements, contact details of competent authorities and of associations or organisations for practical assistance, available means of redress and means of accessing public registers and databases. Article 21 lists information recipients can obtain in their Member State of residence.

Assistance

The Services Directive stipulates in Article 7 that Member States shall ensure that service providers and recipients can receive, at their request, assistance from the competent authorities. Article 21 allows Member States to confer responsibility for this task on the points

^{236.} Directive 2006/123/EC

of single contact or any other body, such as centres of the European Consumer Centres Network, consumer associations or Euro Info Centres.

Online procedures

The Services Directive's Article 8 establishes electronic procedures, through the relevant point of single contact and with the relevant competent authorities. Electronic means have to be available for the whole administrative process, from the service provider's initial submission of documents to the final reply, if required, from the relevant competent authority. Documents from other Member States generally have to be accepted without requiring production of the documents in their original form or as a certified copy or a certified translation (Art 5(3)).

Quality criteria

The Services Directive contains a large number of quality criteria applying to information and online procedures. Information needs to be provided in a clear and unambiguous manner, easily accessible at a distance and by electronic means, and kept up to date.

Member States shall ensure that the PSCs and the competent authorities respond as quickly as possible to any request for information or assistance. PSCs are encouraged to make the information available in other Community languages.

Authorisation procedures and formalities shall provide applicants with a guarantee that their application will be processed as quickly as possible and, in any event, within a reasonable period which is fixed and made public in advance. The period shall run only from the time when all documentation has been submitted. When justified by the complexity of the issue, the time period may be extended once, by the competent authority, for a limited time. The extension and its duration shall be duly motivated and shall be notified to the applicant before the original period has expired.

All applications for authorisation shall be acknowledged as quickly as possible. In the case of an incomplete application, the applicant shall be informed as quickly as possible of the need to supply any additional documentation, as well as of any possible effects on deadlines. When a request is rejected because it fails to comply with the required procedures or formalities, the applicant shall be informed of the rejection as quickly as possible.

Additional quality criteria, though of a voluntary nature, were included in the "PSC Charter"²³⁷ of 2013. These cover the quality and availability of information provided on PSCs, completion of e-procedures, accessibility of PSCs for cross-border users, and usability of PSCs.

Findability

The Points of Single Contact should provide procedures "at a distance and by electronic means". In practice, all Member States have set up online (e-government) PSCs. A central (Commission-level) website²³⁸ provides links to all of them.

²³⁷ Charter for the electronic Points of Single Contact under the Services Directive, 2013, <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/14950/attachments/1/translations>

²³⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/eu-go/index_en.htm

3.2.2 Product Contact Points under Regulation (EC) 764/2008

The Regulation²³⁹ aims to guarantee the free movement of goods in the internal market, in the absence of harmonised rules. It lays down procedures to be followed by Member States when denying market access to a product lawfully marketed in a Member State. Another goal is to increase awareness of the mutual recognition principle, which allows for products lawfully marketed in another Member State to be sold in other Member States, despite the fact that this product complies with different national technical rules, ensuring legal certainty for national authorities and businesses and improving administrative cooperation between national authorities.

Assistance

As the application of the mutual recognition principle is not automatic, certain national technical regulations may prevail. Economic operators may wish to know about the applicable national rules before entering a market. The Regulation contains the obligation for Member States to establish national Product Contact Points ("PCPs"). These provide, upon request, information on the national technical rules applicable to a specific product, the contact details of the competent authorities in charge of supervising the implementation of the technical rules in question and remedies available in case of dispute between the economic operator and the competent authority. The scope of the PCPs is limited to the non-harmonised sector²⁴⁰. They therefore qualify as "assistance services".

Quality criteria

The Regulation contains a limited number of quality criteria, mostly voluntary. The only "hard" criterion is that PCPs should reply to requests within 15 working days of receiving them. According to a recital, PCPs should be adequately equipped and resourced, and are encouraged to make the information available online and in other Community languages. The provision of information in the scope of the Regulation should be free of charge. For additional information PCPs may charge proportionate fees.

Findability

Recital 30 encourages Member States to make the information available through a website – but this is voluntary. The Commission publishes and keeps up-to-date the list online with the contact details of the PCPs. 25 Member States have set up PCP websites.

Case feedback

No information is available on whether PCPs are recording the enquiries (and replies sent) in a database. However, Member States need to report to the Commission on this. A study²⁴¹ suggests that some PCPs do not, but no details are available.

²³⁹ Regulation 764/2008

²⁴⁰ As opposed to the (EU) harmonised sector, for which the PCPs are not responsible.

²⁴¹ Evaluation of the Application of the mutual recognition principle in the field of goods, Technopolis, 2015, section 5.3.1.

3.2.3 *Product Contact Points for Construction under Regulation 305/2011*

The aim of the Construction Products Regulation²⁴² (CPR) is to facilitate the free movement of construction products.

Assistance

Member States had to set up Product Contact Points for Construction ("PCPCs") that should provide information on technical rules for construction products, contact details of authorities and information on remedies at the request of the economic operator. They cover the harmonised and non-harmonised sector. They qualify as "assistance services" for the purposes of the single digital gateway, as they offer a personalised service. A website with information is voluntary.

Quality criteria

The quality provisions for the PCPCs have been modelled on those applying to the PCPs under the Mutual Recognition Regulation (MRR) that was adopted three years earlier. For example, the 15 working-day deadline also applies to requests made to the PCPCs. However, many of the voluntary quality recommendations of the MRR have been weakened or dropped. The only quality criterion that the CPR contains and the MRR doesn't is that information shall be provided using "transparent and easily understandable terms".

Findability

Whereas the MRR encouraged the provision of information through a website and the use of other Community languages, this is missing from the CPR. The Commission publishes a list online with the contact details of the PCPCs. 25 Member States have created PCPC websites.

Case feedback

No information is available on whether PCPCs are recording the enquiries (and replies sent) in a database.

3.2.4 *SOLVIT*

SOLVIT²⁴³ was launched on the basis of a Commission Recommendation in July 2002²⁴⁴ and has developed significantly since, most lately through a Commission Recommendation of 2013²⁴⁵ (replacing the initial 2001 Recommendation). SOLVIT is as an informal problem solving network within Member States, coordinated by the Commission. The general objective of SOLVIT is to deliver fast, effective and informal solutions to problems individuals and businesses encounter when their EU rights in the internal market are being denied by public authorities and to contribute to a better functioning Single Market by

²⁴² Regulation 305/2011

²⁴³ This evaluation assesses SOLVIT only for the purposes of the 'single digital gateway' initiative. For a current evaluation on SOLVIT based on the 5 evaluation criteria reference should be made to the evaluative annex accompanying the initiative on the 'Action Plan to reinforce SOLVIT'.

²⁴⁴ Commission Recommendation of 7 December 2001 on principles for using "SOLVIT" – the Internal Market Problem Solving Network.

²⁴⁵ Commission Recommendation of 17 September 2013 on the principles governing SOLVIT (2013/461/EU), OJ L 249, 19.9.2013, p. 10–15 and 2001/893/EC of 7 December 2001.

fostering and promoting better compliance with Union law. The 2013 Recommendation sets out specific qualitative objectives to achieve the general purpose of SOLVIT that relate to three main areas: (i) the handling, follow-up and reporting of 'structural problems' linked to breach of EU law by the Member States, (ii) the quality of the service and (iii) the use of SOLVIT.

SOLVIT aims to find solutions within 10 weeks – starting on the day the case is taken on by the SOLVIT centre in the country where the problem occurred. Submitting a case to SOLVIT doesn't suspend any formal or administrative deadlines under national law.

The role of the Commission is to coordinate and facilitate the network, while the actual problem-solving is done by the national SOLVIT centres. The Commission provides informal legal advice at the request of SOLVIT centres and legal training at regular training and networking events with the SOLVIT centres.

Assistance

SOLVIT is an assistance service, open to both citizens and businesses and is free of charge. It helps citizens and businesses when they encounter a cross-border problem caused by a potential breach of Union law by a public authority.

Quality criteria

The SOLVIT Recommendation contains several quality criteria for the service offered. SOLVIT centres should be available by telephone and email; should reply promptly and respect deadlines which are detailed in the Recommendation. When a problem cannot be taken up as a SOLVIT case, applicants should be given the reasons and advised of another possible course of action, including sign-posting or transferring the problem to another network or competent authority. Applicants should be informed of the informal nature of SOLVIT, the procedures and timeframes that apply and that SOLVIT is free of charge.

SOLVIT Centres are required to have sufficient and well-trained, multilingual staff, have adequate legal expertise or relevant experience and should have sufficient authority within the national administration.

In addition to the central (Commission) SOLVIT website, Member States should ensure user-friendly information and easy access to the SOLVIT services, in particular on all relevant websites of the public administration.

SOLVIT centres and the Commission should conduct regular quality control of cases handled. The Commission regularly reports on the quality and performance of SOLVIT²⁴⁶.

Findability

The Commission Recommendation also contains provisions on the visibility of the network. The Commission should promote SOLVIT with European stakeholder organisations and Union institutions and runs a SOLVIT central website²⁴⁷. Member States should ensure user-

²⁴⁶ This is done via the online Single Market Scoreboard:
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/solvit/index_en.htm

²⁴⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/>

friendly information and easy access to the SOLVIT services, in particular on all relevant websites of the public administration. They should also raise awareness about SOLVIT amongst its stakeholders, supported by the Commission.

The main channel for findability of SOLVIT is the Your Europe portal, followed by the cooperation with other networks and intermediary organisations.

Case feedback

SOLVIT is receiving more than 2000 eligible cases every year, which are fed into a central database as part of the Commission IT infrastructure. The cases in the SOLVIT database are also used for feedback on how the Single Market functions in practice. This is done through the annual reporting and on an ad hoc basis upon request. Following the Single Market Strategy the Commission is now exploring the possibilities to develop a more systematic reporting in particular about the structural and recurrent issues as detected through SOLVIT (see SOLVIT action plan of 2017).

3.2.5 Your Europe

The "Your Europe" (YE) portal has been created under the IDABC initiative²⁴⁸ and was first launched in 2005. The 2013 Commission Communication on an "Action Plan for boosting Your Europe in cooperation with the Member States" was positively welcomed by both the EP and the Council.

Information

The portal is part of the inter-institutional "Europa" website²⁴⁹ and contains practical and user-friendly information, in 23 languages, for citizens and businesses on rights and opportunities in the Single Market. The portal is divided into a Citizens section and a Business section.

As it is essential for people to find out about EU rights and how to exercise them in a particular country, Your Europe is a joint project of the Commission and the Member States. Visitors find EU level information provided by the Commission as well as the respective national information and implementation provided by the Member States through an Editorial Board, if not already collected through other expert groups/networks. Your Europe is divided up into topical sections that present EU-level content (EU rights) and national content, including through links to Member States' pages.

Your Europe also links to relevant assistance and problem-solving services (Your Europe Advice, Europe Direct, SOLVIT, EEC-Net, Enterprise Europe Network, etc.), other EU portals (e.g. e-justice, Euraxess, EURES), Commission websites, national contact and enforcement bodies, relevant forms and to relevant EU law and a few e-procedures (European Professional Card, Online Dispute Resolution).

²⁴⁸ Decision 2004/387/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on interoperable delivery of pan-European e-government services to public administrations, businesses and citizens (IDABC).

²⁴⁹ <http://europa.eu/youreurope>

Quality criteria

As part of the Europa platform of the Commission, Your Europe respects the corporate "Information Providers Guide"²⁵⁰, i.e. the Europa-specific quality standards on content (definition, drafting, SEO, ...) and design (structure, layout, usability, accessibility, ...). Your Europe is a multilingual portal covering currently 23 languages²⁵¹ for the EU-level content. Information is provided in plain language, avoiding legal and administrative jargon. The portal is adapted for use through mobile devices and complies with corporate standards for web accessibility.

Findability

Your Europe invests in findability of its content, mainly through search engine optimisation, online promotion and social media activities. Further measures include interlinking with national government webpages and promotion of Your Europe as part of EU and national awareness-raising campaigns on issues covered by Your Europe.

3.2.6 Your Europe Advice

"Your Europe Advice" (YEA)²⁵² is a Europe-wide service funded and supported by the Commission that offers citizens and businesses tailored information and advice on their EU rights (mainly internal market rights), free of charge and in all 24 EU languages. The service is outsourced to an external contractor that manages a network of about 65 legal experts with EU law background and expertise and experience in national law and administration in all Member States. YEA is mentioned in the Your Europe Action Plan of 2013. The objective of YEA is to provide a fast, high-quality, personalised legal advice service to citizens and businesses free of charge.

Assistance

YEA is intended to be an extension of the practical information provided on the Your Europe portal. The Your Europe portal offers a link to YEA whenever citizens need personalised and specialised advice. In their replies YEA advice experts also signpost to other information and advice services, including, but not limited to, the Scadplus website, EURES, ECC Net and other EU and national level information services. YEA has a mandate to respond to enquiries submitted by EU or EEA citizens or their family members who are entitled to benefit from EU rights.

Quality criteria

Citizens and businesses receive comprehensive advice within one week and are directed or "signposted", when appropriate, to the authority or other body (local, national or European) best placed to solve their problem. The contract with the contractor specifies the speed of replies to enquiries (within 72 hours), and how the deadlines are calculated. Deadline compliance is monitored by the contractor and the Commission. A large number of quality criteria apply to the replies. Some refer to substance, such as relevance, accuracy, completeness, legal reference and sign-posting, where possible. Others refer to style, e.g. the

²⁵⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/index_en.htm

²⁵¹ All official EU languages but Irish, the business sections also covers Norwegian.

²⁵² http://europa.eu/youreurope/advice/about_en.htm

requirement for the replies to be polite, personalized and tailor-made; in clear, simple, non-technical and non-legalistic terms and easily understandable for "normal" citizens without legal knowledge. The legal experts must also live up to quality criteria as regards their qualification, experience and communication skills.

Findability

Users find YEA through links from the Your Europe portal or other assistance services with whom YEA cooperates, such as SOLVIT and Europe Direct.

Case feedback

Apart from its core activity – provision of legal advice to citizens – the service has a number of other functions. Among these is the provision of feedback about the cases and the problems experienced by EU citizens in the various Member States through quarterly feedback reports to the Commission. Enquiries are analysed and regular reports are sent to the Commission. These reports provide an up-to-date picture of where obstacles to exercising EU rights persist. The YEA database with more than 200 000 real life cases constitutes a wealth of information which can be exploited by Commission services for policy shaping or impact assessments.

3.2.7 Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

The Enterprise Europe Network was launched in February 2008 by the European Commission. It is co-financed under COSME (Competitiveness of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) — an EU funding programme designed to encourage the competitiveness of European enterprises. According to the EEN call for proposals for the period 2015-2020 the Network is established "to contribute to the objectives of the COSME programme by facilitating access to European and international markets for European SMEs and by providing growth-oriented integrated business and innovation support services that help strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of European Enterprises." The Enterprise Europe Network is the world's largest support network for small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) with international ambitions. It has 3,000 experts across 600 member organisations in more than 60 countries. Member organisations include chambers of commerce and industry, technology centres, and research institutes. These member organizations co-finance the network's activities. The Commission Executive Agency for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (EASME) takes care of operational and financial matters concerning the management of the network for the Commission.

Assistance

The Network helps SMEs innovate and grow internationally. It provides international business expertise with local knowledge in three areas: partnership services²⁵³, innovation support (including important services supported under the Horizon 2020 programme) and other advisory services. , Part of the Network's advisory services are of relevance to the single digital gateway, in particular practical and customised advice on doing business in another country and national legal requirements applying to the marketing of goods and the provision of services, advice on intellectual property and information and advice on EU law and standards and the Internal Market more generally. SMEs can contact domestic EEN partners,

²⁵³ The Network manages Europe's largest database of business cooperation opportunities.

which get in touch with relevant EEN partners in the target country and receive information and advice from them.

The EEN also signposts to other suitable providers of SME-oriented services. This is called the "no wrong door" principle.

Quality criteria

The performance of the network is monitored through "Key Performance Indicators". Performance is defined as growth in turnover and employment of SMEs. More specific guidelines apply to advisory services, as specified in the EEN's "Achievement Guidelines on Advisory Services Outcomes" of June 2015. As a starting-point, the network partner should agree an "advisory plan" with the client. This plan should be a short and clear document defining the actions to address the gaps and needs, identify other service providers where relevant, and schedule the actions. All provided services need to be documented in the Customer Relations Management or internal documentation. This could cover emails exchange and documentation forwarded to the client, client confirmation on the advisory plan implementation, etc.

All achievements must be reported on in the achievement report, to be submitted to EASME's Achievements Database in the Network IT Platform. The achievements report has to contain a short section on the advice given and the advisory plan, how the plan was implemented and what initial and longer-term impacts on the client are expected. The documentation of outputs is to be kept at the premises of the Network partners and should be available to EASME or auditors upon request. Quality checks are performed regularly to verify the quality and eligibility of registered achievement reports. The Network will assess the impact of the implemented advisory plan through the impact assessment procedure of the Network. The EASME Project Adviser in charge of partner reporting can perform in-depth evaluations of achievements and can put achievement reports on hold or reject them.

Findability

EASME, (the executive agency dealing with operational and financial aspects of the network) runs a central website that guides to local support services by its partners. Partner organizations should also give visibility to the EEN brand. Your Europe enables the submission of questions to EEN partners through an online form.

Case feedback

Enterprise Europe Network partners make use of the SME Feedback database to record problems or cases faced by SMEs in the internal market. Some broad headings are provided²⁵⁴ to facilitate the analysis, and businesses are asked to quantify the loss of time and loss of income (additional costs) caused by the problem. Businesses can also provide details on how the problem could be solved. European Commission officials can check the database.

²⁵⁴ Lack of detail in the text of the European legislation/programme, national requirements in a cross border activity avoid correct functioning of the Internal Market, severe difficulties to find European information needed to carry out the activity, the wording of the European legislation/programme or the procedure negatively affects in particular SMEs, and wrong interpretation at national level of a European text, other.

3.2.8 EURES

The recently adopted Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of 13 April 2016 on a European network of employment services (EURES), workers' access to mobility services and the further integration of labour markets amended Regulations (EU) 492/2011²⁵⁵ and 1296/2013. The objective of this Regulation is to establish a common framework for cooperation between Member States to bring together job vacancies and the possibility of applying for those job vacancies and to facilitate the achievement of a balance between supply and demand in the employment market.

The European Employment Services (EURES) was established in 1993 in order to improve mobility in the European labour market and to strengthen the integration of employment services of the Member States as a means to achieve this goal. The purpose of EURES is to provide information, recruitment, matching and placement services for the benefit of workers and employers, as well as any citizen wishing to benefit from the principle of the free movement of workers. The network is primarily based on the public employment services (PES) of the EU/EEA countries. Each Member State has established a National Coordination Office (NCO) to facilitate the cooperation on its territory and with the other Member States.

Information

The member organisations of the network provide workers and employers with basic information concerning the EURES portal, including the job-application and CV database, and the EURES network, including contact details of relevant EURES member organisations at national level, information on the recruitment channels that they use (e-services, personalised services, location of contact points) and the relevant web links, in an easily accessible and user-friendly manner.

For the purpose of publication, in particular on the EURES portal, in the interest of workers and employers, each NCO shall make available, regularly update and disseminate in a timely manner, information and guidance available at national level relating to the situation in the Member State concerning: (a) living and working conditions, including general information on social security and tax payments; (b) the relevant administrative procedures regarding employment, and the rules applicable to workers upon taking up employment; (c) its national regulatory framework for apprenticeships and traineeships and existing Union rules and instruments; (d) without prejudice to point (b) of Article 17(2), access to vocational education and training; (e) the situation of frontier workers in particular in cross-border regions; (f) post-recruitment assistance in general and information about where to obtain such assistance within and, if such information is available, outside the EURES network. Where appropriate, NCOs may make available and disseminate the information in cooperation with other information and advisory services and networks and appropriate bodies at national level.

Assistance

At both national and regional level the EURES network has an extensive human network of advisers and assistants, which have the primary task of delivery of support services to target

²⁵⁵ Regulation 492/2011 obliges the Commission and the Member States to exchange vacancies and applications for employment, share information concerning living and work conditions and background information on the state and trends of the labour markets, and cooperate together towards the resultant placement of workers.

groups. More than 950 EURES advisers provide information, guidance and placement services related to the European job market to both jobseekers and employers.

The member organisations work together on the basis of individual requests, specific projects and in the framework of job fairs and other events to assist individual job seekers and employers interested in mobility to match and place workers in jobs in another country.

Quality criteria

EURES member organisations need to clearly indicate to workers and employers the range of support services they provide, where and how those services are accessible and the conditions under which access is provided, using their information channels. That information is published on the EURES portal. Assistance shall be free of charge and that users of EURES have access to general information on how, when and where they can update, revise and withdraw the data concerned.

Quality criteria also apply to the registration on the EURES portal for individual job seekers and employers.

At the level of the member organisations, minimum common criteria (EURES Regulation, Annex I) apply to their service delivery for them to be able to participate in the EURES network, such as ability to provide services through one or more easily accessible channels, with at least an internet/website of the organisation accessible; existence of or commitment to ensuring the allocation of appropriate human resources for the respective tasks to be fulfilled; commitment to ensuring quality standards on staff and commitment to use the EURES trade mark only for services and activities relating to the EURES network.

Performance of the EURES network is being monitored through the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data at national level by Member States, including, where available, through customer satisfaction surveys. The Regulation provides a procedural framework for establishing uniform detailed specifications for the collection and analysis of the data.

Findability

The EURES network consists of two pillars: the portal and the (human) network in the Member States. Your Europe signposts to EURES whenever relevant. Communication activities are carried out to increase the visibility of EURES and disseminate information about labour market conditions and mobility opportunities.

3.2.9 European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net)

The European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net) aims at promoting consumer confidence by advising citizens on their rights as consumers and providing easy access to redress in cross border cases. Its objective is to help unlock the full economic potential of the internal market. ECC-Net is a network of 30 offices in the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland, providing free-of-charge help and advice to consumers on their cross-border purchases, whether online or on the spot within these 30 countries.

Information

ECC-Net centres individually have very informative websites on consumer rights. They also undertake promotional activities such as information campaigns, events etc. to raise awareness of the Network and consumer rights.

Assistance

ECC-Net centres respond to specific consumer enquiries about their rights when shopping across borders, and assist consumers with complaints and disputes. They advise on consumer rights and assist citizens to resolve a complaint against a trader based in another EU country, Iceland or Norway with the aim of achieving amicable outcomes. They also redirect citizens to an appropriate body if the ECC-Net cannot help.

Quality criteria

Certain quality criteria on complaint handling exist, which the ECCs try to respect. These are regulated in the ECC-Net case handling protocol, which is an internal document, making the commitment neither formal nor public. These quality criteria also serve as the benchmark for evaluating the efficiency of the centres.

Findability

A central ECC-Net website on Europa guides users to local support in their countries. Your Europe signposts users to ECC whenever relevant.

An ECC-Net Travel App provides legal knowledge on consumer rights and language support in 23 EU languages plus Norwegian and Icelandic.

Case feedback

The ECC have a database for collecting complaint information on cross-border complaints. This database provides information on cross border consumer complaints for the EEA (including what are the problems, what are the most frequent problems, on which purchasing channel, which economic sector and which law applies).

The ECCs' capacity to act as an observatory of trends and issues arising in the Single Market is based on statistics derived from their case databases, and from specific studies they regularly undertake. For example, the 2014 ECC study on the non-discrimination clause in the Services Directive was an important piece of evidence used in the Commission's policy combatting geo-blocking. The study on the implementation of the small claims procedure contributed to its reform. Several studies on passenger rights were used by DG MOVE as input to a revision of those rights.

3.3 Methodology and evidence base

This evaluation builds on Commission and commissioned evaluations and studies²⁵⁶ over the past five years and related to the tools screened, as well as an impact assessment (for the 2016 EURES Regulation) carried out in the recent past. Up-to-date data of the last (July 2016)

²⁵⁶ These are listed in the annex.

Single Market Scoreboard was also used. Further evidence was drawn from several public consultations of the Commission on: the single digital gateway (2016), the Mutual Recognition Regulation (2016), the Services Card (2016), the Start-up initiative (2016) and European Citizenship (2015) as well as the REFIT Platform. Stakeholder positions have also been taken into consideration.

The existing quantitative evidence on the efficiency of the instruments is relatively scarce and inconclusive.

3.4 Evaluation of the existing framework

This chapter will examine the available evidence for each instrument as regards the effectiveness and efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value. On this basis, conclusions for the overall framework will be drawn.

3.4.1 The effectiveness of the existing framework

To what extent have the instruments in place been effective in allowing citizens and businesses to obtain relevant information, complete electronically all relevant procedures, benefit from high quality services that are easy to find?

Points of Single Contact

Overall, the Services Directive's Points of Single Contact have been a partial success, as will be elaborated in this section. Various analyses and studies²⁵⁷ have shown the varying level of ambition and quality of national PSCs. Weaknesses exist in terms of languages available for completing the administrative requirements, user-friendliness, acceptance of e-signatures, in particular from foreign users, and the extent to which they actually function as e-government portals. Scope is also an issue, as the Services Directive does not cover certain areas, sectors and procedures which are nevertheless of key importance to businesses, such as VAT, income taxes, social security, labour law-related requirements and procedures.

In 2013 the Commission developed, and the High-level Group of the Competitiveness Council endorsed, a voluntary instrument for improving the PSCs, i.e. the PSC Charter. This was meant to serve as a guideline for those countries that intend their PSCs to go beyond that which is legally required. It recommends that the information, procedures and assistance provided through the PSCs take a holistic approach in terms of scope, taking into account the businesses' needs (and not the limits of the Directive). The Charter contains a number of quality criteria topping those of the Directive, such as accessibility of the PSCs in other languages, the payment of relevant fees online and clarification of what is meant by user-friendliness (e.g. FAQ, lay out, search engine, navigation, tracking tools).

²⁵⁷ "The functioning and usability of the Points of Single Contact under the Services Directive – State of Play and Way Forward", Deloitte, 2012; J. Montesgudo, A. Rutkowski, D. Lorenzani, "Part 2: Assessing the economic impact of setting up Points of Single Contact: an approximation based on the Doing Business" in "The economic impact of the Services Directive: a first assessment following implementation", Economic Papers No 456, June 2012; "Services Directive implementation survey – the Chambers' perspective on the Points of Single Contact, Eurochambres, Policy Survey, 7th edition, January 2011; "Are the Points of Single Contact truly making things easier for European companies? – Services Directive implementation Report, Business Europe, November 2011.

The most recent assessment of the performance of the Points of Single Contact was done against the Charter criteria²⁵⁸. It showed that, while some progress had been made, performance is still mediocre with considerable room for improvement. On most PSC portals only a limited number of procedures are available for online completion, and only for certain service sectors. In general and across Member States, PSC performance is clearly the weakest when it comes to offering information and e-procedures to cross-border users. This is explained by the incompleteness of information in other than national languages, foreign e-IDs and means of payment not being accepted, form fields only accepting national data, and necessity to present original paper documents or certified documents. Where certain key procedures are offline, entrepreneurs still need to travel to the other country(ies) they want to do business with.

The study was conducted on the basis of mystery shopping assessing four business scenarios in 2014. For these four scenarios, the missing necessary national information was 60% for 1/3 of Member States, 50-40% for 1/3 of Member States, and 30% for 1/3 of Member States²⁵⁹. The scenarios covered 20 national procedures. With the exception of one procedure²⁶⁰, more than 80% of Member States did not provide even such basic information as the time estimation for the procedure.

The underlying reasons for the weak performance with respect to the foreign user are that PSCs are primarily being used for a domestic audience (analytics and other data prove this) and Member States do not want to incur translation and other costs for foreign users. Foreign users have "no voice" and are easily overlooked when national information and procedures are designed. Thus small but effective obstacles, such as online form fields only allowing for national data, creep in. A further major stumbling block is that the e-IDAS Regulation has not yet been fully implemented²⁶¹. The result is that very frequently, foreign e-IDs are not accepted. Also, the competencies of administrative levels vary greatly across Member States. Domestic citizens may be able to pinpoint the competent authority, but foreigners find this very difficult without proper guidance. More generally, national administrations lack service orientation and tend to not make the greatest effort to be user-friendly (e.g. as compared to commercial websites and applications). Many operate in "silos" and find cooperating with other administrations in order to offer more integrated, simpler and more user-friendly services difficult.

The REFIT Platform Stakeholder²⁶² Group stated in its background comments that "often, insufficient resources are allocated to the PSCs. (...) Member States regularly show political commitment and dedication in Council conclusions but this is often not translated into concrete action and improvement".

This general problem is also confirmed and highlighted by the Commission's yearly e-government benchmark reports²⁶³. The assessment showed that companies that want to go

²⁵⁸ "The Performance of the Points of Single Contact. An Assessment against the PSC Charter", Capgemini and Eurochambres, June 2015.

²⁵⁹ Idem, rough outcome of mystery shopping for four business scenarios.

²⁶⁰ General registration of economic activity.

²⁶¹ The deadline for full implementation is September 2018.

²⁶² Refit Platform Opinion on the submission by the Danish Business forum and BusinessEurope on the Point of Single Contact, 27/28 June 2016.

²⁶³ EE.g. 2016 report: The Business Mobility Benchmark indicates that 25% of services required of foreign entrepreneurs to start their business in another country is completely off-line: meaning there is no

cross-border face important linguistic and technical problems in completing administrative requirements online. Often only rudimentary information is provided in English or other foreign languages and online forms are merely available in local languages. Only the general business registration can be done fully online in more than 50% of the PSCs. For the more specific requirements (including sector specific requirements), greater in number and complexity, the PSCs still often only offer general information about the procedure or no information at all and few or no e-procedures.

The result is that foreign companies need to spend a lot of time and money in order to gather relevant information, understand what they need to do and carry out the necessary administrative procedures. More than half of SMEs say that administrative procedures related to exporting are too difficult to comply with and therefore deter many firms from marketing their products and services abroad²⁶⁴. This is confirmed by the Stakeholders' Consultation on the single digital gateway, where a significant majority of respondents claim that they find it very difficult both to find information online (78% of businesses and 70% of citizens), and most of those who tried to carry out procedures cross-border found it difficult or had to give up.

Based on the PSC study, the Commission launched 10 EU pilots²⁶⁵ in July 2015 because of two main issues: (1) the relevant PSC not offering the possibility to complete all administrative procedures electronically and at distance; (2) lack of accessibility of electronic procedures for foreign users. These EU Pilots are still ongoing.

A recent Court of Auditors report on the implementation of the Services Directive²⁶⁶ concludes that PSCs are difficult to find, and that there is low business awareness.

Conclusion: The Points of Single Contact which were established under the Services Directive have been partially effective in allowing businesses to complete all relevant procedures fully online. Often, necessary information is missing, quality is deficient and procedures cannot be carried out fully online. PSC performance is weakest when it comes to the cross-border user: offering him accessible information and e-procedures that he can conduct fully online from abroad is often deficient.

Product Contact Points

The Product Contact Points which the Regulation established have been partially successful in meeting their objective of providing businesses with information on the applicable rules and the application of the mutual recognition principle in the Member State where a business wants to market its product²⁶⁷.

information – let alone a service – available online. In contrast, entrepreneurs starting a business in their own country face such issues in only 2% of the cases.

²⁶⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 421: Internationalisation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Flash Eurobarometer 413.

²⁶⁵ EU Pilots are pre-infringement tools that allow an exchange of letters with the concerned Member State.

²⁶⁶ Court of Auditors Special Report No 5/2016 "Has the Commission ensured effective implementation of the Services Directive?"

²⁶⁷ The PCPs are also being evaluated in the framework of the Commission evaluation of the functioning of mutual recognition.

A general problem is awareness: companies' lack of awareness of the mutual recognition principle in general, and of the existence of the product contact points in particular. A company survey conducted during the evaluation of the mutual recognition principle²⁶⁸ showed that 54% of the companies interviewed did not know about the principle, or have heard of it but are not familiar with the details. Among them, more than 80% are SMEs. A European Business Test Panel²⁶⁹, conducted between May and September 2004, showed that only 46% of respondents were familiar with the principle. A recent public consultation²⁷⁰ with 91 business respondents had a more positive result: 70% of businesses declared being aware of the principle²⁷¹. However, 95% of businesses replied in the same consultation that awareness-raising about the principle was still necessary. This points to an information weakness: information about the mutual recognition principle has not reached the business community to a sufficient degree. Although the principle is explained in detail on Commission websites, including on Your Europe, this seems to not have reached the target audience.

This general lack of awareness of the mutual recognition principle, which is not automatic, can have an impact on the use of the Product Contact Points, as awareness of the existence of different national technical rules that may apply to a product is a pre-condition for a business to contact a Product Contact Point. Nevertheless, according to the 2016 public consultation on mutual recognition, 94% of businesses are checking the national rules before entering a new market. However, most of businesses never contacted a PCP in order to obtain information on applicable product rules, mainly because they were not aware of their existence.

In terms of quality of the PCP service, the majority of those that did contact a PCP preferred not to assess their experience (72%²⁷²) or not to mention why precisely they considered it as not satisfactory (79%).

A few Member States²⁷³ conducted national surveys on the usefulness of the PCPs, and the results show that economic operators are globally satisfied with the services. But generally, economic operators complain about the long time it takes for receiving an answer, the quality of the answer or even the absence of it. This issue is sometimes highlighted by the Member States in their annual reports. Often, PCPs receive questions which are not within their remit. This is not surprising since their remit is limited to the non-harmonised sector, but products are usually affected by both the harmonised and the non-harmonised sector. This constitutes a serious problem for businesses, as in most cases the PCPs cannot provide them with an exhaustive reply of which rules apply to their products.

Moreover, the variety of products falling under the scope of mutual recognition as well as the increasing number of national rules²⁷⁴ makes it difficult to easily identify the responsible persons having the necessary expertise. Very often, the PCPs have to send enquiries to the local level. This is one more reason why PCPs find the strict deadlines for replying to

²⁶⁸ Evaluation of the Application of the mutual recognition principle in the field of goods, Technopolis, 2015.

²⁶⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/impact/ia_carried_out/docs/ia_2007/sec_2007_0112_en.pdf.

²⁷⁰ Public consultation on mutual recognition, running from 1 June to 30 September 2016.

²⁷¹ There might be a selection bias: companies being aware of the principle and the regulation are more likely to answer to the open public consultation and are therefore likely to be overrepresented.

²⁷² Result of the 2016 public consultation on mutual recognition.

²⁷³ Annual reports from SE 2015, DE and FR 2013.

²⁷⁴ The complexity of the legal framework is a main reason for the lack of effectiveness of the PCPs. However, this is out of the scope of this exercise.

economic operators difficult to meet. According to a study²⁷⁵, the most frequent model for replying to requests to PCPs appears to be that the PCP sends the request to the responsible authority, which then replies directly to the company without involving the PCP. The PCP would then not be informed about the outcome of the query, rendering any monitoring of the quality of the reply impossible. Language issues²⁷⁶, especially when technical language is used, add further problems and delays. Both national and foreign companies use the product contact point system.

Although this is voluntary, most Member States have set up dedicated PCP webpages. According to a recent study²⁷⁷, Germany has two PCPs managed by different authorities; Romania runs 4 PCPs. 6 Member States do not list an email address on their webpages. In the case of Italy the email address is an online form which cannot be filled in online directly, but must be printed and later scanned. Only 15 countries provide the contact details of the competent authorities on their website/webpages, although this is a legal requirement. The remaining 13 Member States may not be in breach of the Regulation as it is not prescribed that information should be provided online. However, this would appear to be the easiest and most user-friendly means of fulfilling this requirement. The same applies to information on remedies, which is also required by law and which only half of the Member States (14) publish on their website.

In terms of content made available online, 22 Member States explain the Mutual Recognition Regulation. In their annual reports to the Commission, some Member States indicate that offering online information about mutual recognition and certain problematic sectors helped in optimising the functioning of the PCPs. 18 Member States present relevant national laws, to varying degrees of detail. 16 Member States provide information on technical product rules, though often not in an exhaustive way. 12 Member States display links to the NANDO database. 10 countries offer a FAQ section/guidelines online. Although this is "better than nothing", there is ample scope for every single Member State of improving (or even creating) PCP websites.

The majority of respondents to the public consultation considered that the PCP network is still useful and necessary, but needs to be further strengthened in order to be efficient as regards its objectives. Lack of awareness of the PCPs' existence may lie at the root of the quality problem, as this is responsible for the low demand. If the PCPs received more requests from economic operators, Member States would be more likely to supply them with more and good resources, or ensure a better functioning coordination mechanism within the country.

²⁷⁵ Evaluation of the Application of the Principle of Mutual Recognition in the Field of Goods, p. 62.

²⁷⁶ However, according to the recent Ecorys survey in which only 6 PCP and 11 PCPC participated, all PCPs and PCPCs declared being able to answer queries in English. But the participation rate is too low to be representative.

²⁷⁷ Screening Report on Member States' Product Contact Points and Product Contact Points for Construction, Ecorys, 2017.

Conclusion: The Mutual Recognition Regulation, under which the PCPs were set up, only encourages making information available through a website. While most Member States have set up PCP websites voluntarily, these websites are of varying quality (often not very user-friendly) and rarely list national technical rules per product. Businesses are mostly not aware of the existence of the PCPs, and therefore do not look for and solicit them. When they do, they often complain about response time and quality of the replies. It appears that the current PCP network – whilst considered necessary – is not functioning effectively for businesses.

Construction Products Regulation and Product Contact Points for Construction

According to the "Analysis of Implementation of the Construction Products Regulation" of July 2015, the awareness amongst companies about the existence of the PCPC is low, in particular as far as PCPCs in other EU countries are concerned. The number of requests put to PCPC is very low – between 15 for the Cypriot PCPC and 114 for the Croatian PCPCs²⁷⁸. Nothing is known about the quality of the replies provided. According to a recent study²⁷⁹, 20 Member States have set up dedicated webpages for their PCPC, and 5 have full websites. 15 countries have translated their website/webpage content into English. In most cases web content is only partially available in English.

The great majority (25 out of 28) of countries have created an ad hoc email address to contact PCPCs. For the Spanish and Greek PCPC, contact details can be found only on the EC list. In some other cases, contact details are not easy to find: the email address is provided only in the English version of the website/webpage, or can be found only in the FAQ section. In some countries, according to the study, there are reasons to believe that the email address attached to the PCP is not functioning properly.

In terms of actual online content of the PCPCs, all PCPCs except for Slovakia, Hungary and Poland provide information or link to information on CE marking. 16 PCPCs list the products falling under CE marking. Some countries like France and Hungary have developed a comprehensive database presenting the list of products and their related requirements. Otherwise, a link is provided to websites of other competent authorities. 24 countries mention the Declaration of Performance – some only mentioning it, others explaining it. 23 countries display or give access to a list of products affected by European or national legislation. 23 PCPCs mention harmonised European norms and provide links. 11 PCPCs or CPR websites display a link to the European Organisation for Technical Assessment. 19 online PCPCs include a Q&A/Guidelines section, to different degrees of detail (e.g. 3 Q&A's in the case of Bulgaria, and 73 in France). 4 countries display information on available remedies. Information is not always clearly displayed and well-structured. In some cases, introductory text is missing, including a clear explanation on the function of the national PCPC.

²⁷⁸ Outcome of a PCPC survey to which only 16 PCPC replied.

²⁷⁹ Screening Report on Member States' Product Contact Points and Product Contact Points for Construction, Ecorys, 2017.

Conclusion: Although a detailed analysis of effectiveness, including a PCPC user survey, has not been done until now, there are indications that the PCPCs are under-performing for businesses. There are of course country variations, but generally speaking the indicative number of requests submitted to the PCPCs appears to be very low and not in line with actual business demand. Business awareness of the PCPCs is low, in particular as far as PCPCs in other EU countries are concerned. While most Member States have set up PCPC websites voluntarily, these websites are of varying quality (often not very user-friendly) and rarely list national technical rules per product.

SOLVIT

The performance of SOLVIT and national SOLVIT centres has been reported yearly as of 2012²⁸⁰ in the Single Market Scoreboard.²⁸¹ In 2015, the SOLVIT caseload was 2 228 cases which was stable in comparison to the high increase in 2014 (2 368 cases). In 2015 SOLVIT also received an additional 2 500 complaints that were not within its remit (the figure for 2014 was 2 400). For those cases, SOLVIT helped complainants by explaining their EU rights in more detail or by finding another means of redress.

51% of cases were submitted online, 12% were transferred by Your Europe Advice and 1% were transferred by Europe Direct Contact Centre. The rest were submitted via other means (e-mail, phone, post, in person).

The overall performance of Member States is measured through their performance in four indicators: (1) initial contact with the applicant – the target deadline is 7 days maximum; (2) time taken to prepare cases for transfer to the SOLVIT centre in the Member State where the problem occurred – the target deadline is 30 days maximum; time taken to handle a case – the target deadline is 10 weeks maximum; resolution rate of cases.

In 2015, out of 31 SOLVIT centres, 16 performed above the average whilst 13 within the average. For two centres no assessment could be done as they had no cases.

The result of the 2015 assessment on staffing is that caseloads are rising – but staff numbers are static or even decreasing. In many cases, staff may be unable to cope with any further caseload increases. Many centres also seem to experience difficulties with communicating promptly (replying to e-mails, telephone calls etc.). High turnover in some centres makes business continuity and efficient case handling even more difficult. In addition, many SOLVIT centres often have to give priority to other tasks for their national administrations, leaving insufficient time for SOLVIT duties.

The 2013 Recommendation set out specific qualitative objectives to achieve the general purpose of SOLVIT that relate to three main areas: (i) the handling, follow-up and reporting of 'structural problems' linked to breach of EU law by the Member States, (ii) the quality of the service and (iii) the use of SOLVIT.

²⁸⁰ During the previous years, an individual report on SOLVIT was published. For an overview of the existing reports see http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/documents/index_en.htm.

²⁸¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/solvit/index_en.htm. The data for 2016 will be published in July 2017.

The resolution time and the resolution rate of so-called 'structural cases' is low. 'Structural cases' are usually highly complex as they are caused by breaches of EU law by Member States that are difficult to resolve (e.g. only by amendments to national laws, which usually takes longer than the SOLVIT 10 week deadline). The number of structural cases handled increased in 2015 to 97 cases (64 in 2014) and the cases closed within 10 weeks were 39%. The main legal areas concerned were free movement of people and residence rights (50), recognition of professional qualifications (14), free movement of workers (10) and social security (10).

In September 2015, all the Member States endorsed a policy paper (the so-called 'Lisbon paper') on the future of SOLVIT²⁸². The paper was presented to the Competitiveness Council in November 2015²⁸³. The Member States pointed out that SOLVIT is not living up to its full potential for businesses and citizens. They stressed that unresolved and repetitive cases are often rooted in difficulties with national implementation and application of EU law. A clear follow-up procedure for these unresolved cases is lacking. Neither SOLVIT centres nor complainants are informed about whether there will be a follow-up. Repetitive cases without structural solutions are not effectively dealt with by the Commission or referred to the Council and co-legislators. The paper stresses that citizens and businesses should not have to lodge their complaint again if their case is unresolved in SOLVIT as is the current situation. Moreover, it notes that the follow-up of the unresolved SOLVIT cases is not transparent and there is a lack of clear reporting and mechanism to the Member States and SOLVIT centres.

The 2013 SOLVIT Recommendation clarifies the level of service individuals and businesses can expect from SOLVIT and sets out minimum standards SOLVIT centres should comply with, in terms of organisation, legal expertise, and relations with other networks.²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, although the quality of the service is satisfactory, it varies across the network due to different factors.²⁸⁵ The quality check performed by the Commission SOLVIT team on a regular basis shows that there is scope for improvement in the handling of cases and respect of deadlines. Further work is required from governments in making sure that SOLVIT centres are adequately staffed, in enabling them to prioritise SOLVIT work, in ensuring a degree of staffing continuity and ensuring that national SOLVIT centres have sufficient authority within their national administration. In addition, further prioritization of the Member States' governments is needed as regards the follow-up of relevant structural issues detected through SOLVIT. In addition, as regards the SOLVIT centres, the focus on the quality of case handling should be strengthened, as well as efforts in meeting the recommended target times, keeping applicants informed on progress and ensuring access to expertise on issues of interest to business.

In 2015 SOLVIT also received an additional 2 500 complaints that were not within its remit (the figure for 2014 was 2 400). It is important to highlight that although these cases do not fall within SOLVIT's mandate, SOLVIT helped complainants by explaining their EU rights in more detail or by finding another means of redress. The proportion of in and out of scope

²⁸² The paper was the outcome of a conference on SOLVIT held in Lisbon and organized by 18 SOLVIT centres on 18 September 2015. It contains specific actions and calls for the reinforcement of SOLVIT through (i) its promotion as the first step in the enforcement of EU law, (ii) the systematic follow-up by the Commission services of unresolved and repetitive cases and (iii) the establishment of regular reporting for SOLVIT to the Council.

²⁸³ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/compet/2015/11/30-01/>

²⁸⁴ Commission Recommendation on principles governing SOLVIT, 17.9.2013, Brussels, C (2013) 5869 final.

²⁸⁵ See yearly evaluation of the performance of SOLVIT on: http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/solvit/index_en.htm.

cases (2 228 vs 2 500) cannot be considered satisfactory and deviates the reduced resources of the national SOLVIT centres from their main tasks. Another point as regards the use of SOLVIT is that although the number of the cases has increased significantly in the period 2012-2015, this is mainly due to the increase of submission of cases in two specific legal areas, namely social security and residence rights.

Moreover, over the years, businesses have submitted only a fraction of the number of cases compared with those submitted by individuals. In 2015, 107 out of 2 228 cases were submitted by business. A combination of factors appears to account for this, including the relatively low level of awareness of SOLVIT, complexity of business cases and businesses' preference for using formal legal channels that offer more leverage.

Conclusion: The general objective of SOLVIT has not been fully met: in 2015 12% of the cases could not be resolved, in 23% of the cases the applicants got their first reply after the deadline of 7 days, the preparation of cases as home centre took longer than the deadline of 30 days in 14% of the complaints and 34% of the accepted cases took longer than the aim of 10 weeks. Businesses are currently not using SOLVIT much. The main underlying reasons impeding SOLVIT's effectiveness are the lack of authority, adequacy of the staff and limited awareness of SOLVIT and the services it offers, especially for businesses and that there is not yet a fully operational systematic set-up for the handling, follow-up and reporting of 'structural problems' detected in SOLVIT.

Your Europe

Your Europe already functions as a "gateway". It is an online access point to EU-level and national information and certain services, and also signposts to a wide range of assistance services.

Data in the Single Market Scoreboard shows that use of the site has been continuously growing and reached over 1,4 million monthly visits in 2016 (up from 800,000 in 2014 and one million in 2015). No official evaluation of the Your Europe Portal has ever been carried out so far. Therefore, the only indications can be the online user surveys, which Your Europe conducts regularly. These show high levels of satisfaction, with more than 90% 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'. 70% say that they found the information they were looking for, fully or at least partially.

Your Europe is written in jargon-free language from a user-perspective. A page on Your Europe contains typically a text describing the rights, obligations and/or opportunities related to EU legislation, real life sample stories to illustrate how it works in practice, links to the related EU legislation (as the core text is drafted for non-specialists, Directives and Regulations are not spelled out there), links to the contacts points of national authorities and national websites for content, frequently asked questions and links to relevant assistance services available to answer additional questions. Content is constantly updated and revised. Your Europe is considered a "best practice" example of a Commission webpage and is often quoted as best practice in the context of the Commission's "digital transformation" project towards a new and improved (more user-centric) Europa site.

Your Europe uses tracking data (e.g. the most frequently sought information; number of unique visitors/visits, etc.) as well as user feedback from a targeted yearly survey to constantly improve the service.

However, there is scope for improvement. According to the 2013 Your Europe Action Plan, people not finding the information they need frequently said that this was due to navigation problems or to missing national-level information. The EU citizenship public consultation (2015) showed that the main source of information that citizens consulted prior to moving to another EU country were websites of public authorities of that country. 73% of respondents searching for information available online had used websites of authorities in the EU country to which they were planning to move, as compared to 35% who had consulted web portals of EU institutions. This suggests thinking about a better integration of EU and national websites.

The Your Europe citizen section is much more used than the business section (more than 2/3 of total visitors). This is linked to the fact that the target audience is different in size, but might also suggest that there is scope for improvement as far as the business section is concerned. Your Europe links to national content where it exists and when this is notified to it via the Editorial Board or other expert groups.

For several sections on Your Europe, national content has been requested to Editorial Board members, but has not been entirely delivered. This concerns information for parts of the following sections: residence formalities: 33% is missing, vehicles: 24%, VAT refunds: 19%, national contact points: 17%, travel: 15%, taxation: 15%, terms of employment: 13%, start & grow: 11%. The Business Section mainly links to national portals and assistance services and contains much less national-level information than the Citizens section. In an attempt to avoid overlaps it is relying on Member States to provide information through their own portals. Given the diverging quality of national portals, incomplete and missing national content is therefore Your Europe's biggest concern.

According to European Commission desk research conducted in January 2017 assessing availability of national-level information and assistance services for eight selected business areas²⁸⁶, in national language and in English, the results vary significantly according to Member State and area, and availability of information is, on average, 25% lower in English than in the national language (for the language difference, please see the graph on the next page; for the detailed Member State figures and gap analysis, please see annex 4).

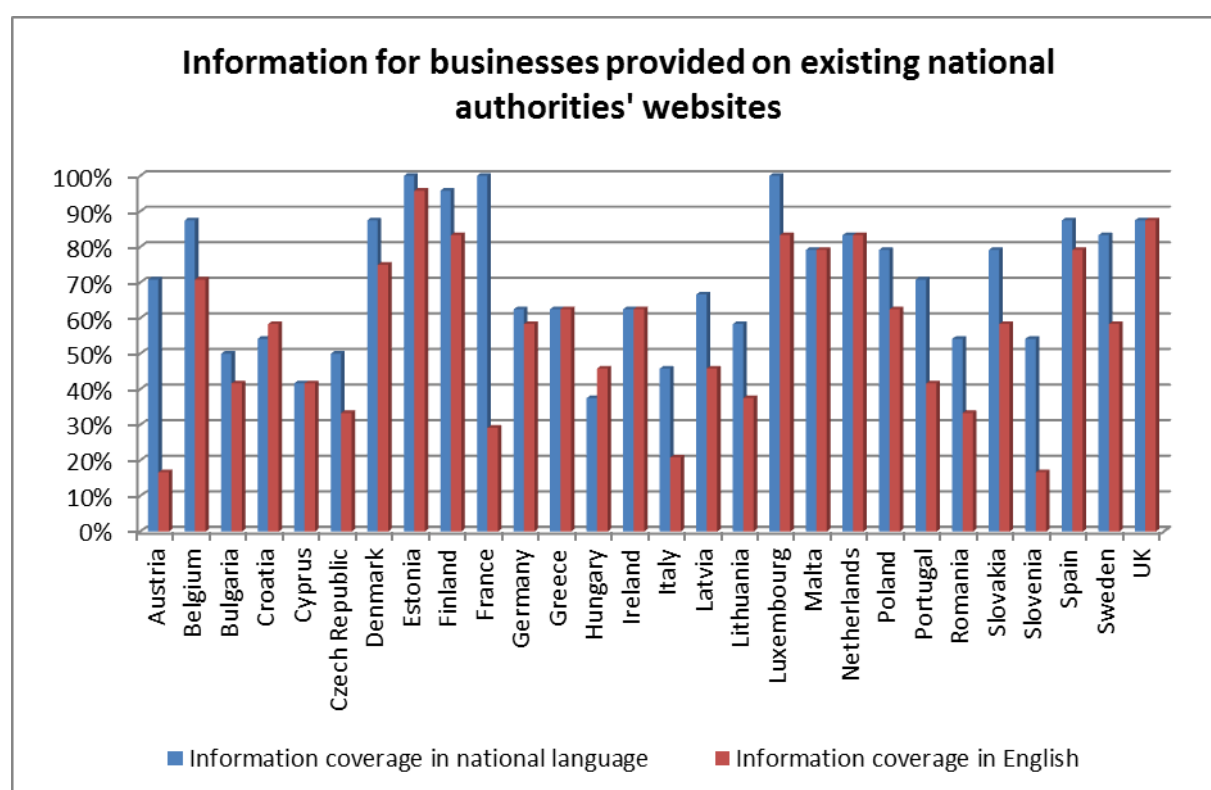
The biggest gaps can be found in the area of selling goods, complying with environmental rules and complying with health and safety conditions.

This lack of online availability of national information is then directly reflected via the Your Europe portal, where these parts become gaps (for certain Member States in any case). An ongoing study concludes that for specific national requirements and procedures, the portal refers users to the Point of Single Contact in the country of interest, where uneven levels of detail are provided²⁸⁷.

²⁸⁶ For each Member State, three questions were researched online for each of the following sections: 1) starting, running and closing a business, 2) hiring staff, 3) paying taxes, 4) selling goods, 5) providing services, 6) getting funds, 7) complying with environmental rules (certification and labels), 8) complying with health and safety conditions.

²⁸⁷ Study on information and assistance needs of businesses operating cross-border within the EU, including gap and cost analysis, Draft Final Report, January 2017.

Figure 3.1



The Commission tracks the contribution of Member States to Your Europe on the Single Market Scoreboard through three indicators: (1) answers received by the Editorial Board from their national administration, to request for information for Your Europe, (2) attendance at 2 Editorial Board meetings per year, and (3) traffic from government pages to Your Europe and promotional activity requested by members of the Editorial Board. The most recent (2015) available result is that the performance of 3 Member States was assessed as below average, 4 were average and the rest above average. Thus, overall, the cooperation with Member States is working effectively.

According to the Your Europe Action Plan, even where national information exists, it is often not tailored to the needs of those operating in a cross-border context. In addition, the quality of national content varies – sometimes national websites only exist in national language²⁸⁸, or no website is offered but only a summary of relevant national characteristics of the matter in question. The latter can seldom provide sufficient information in complex matters (e.g. in the business context).

User statistics indicate that visitors find Your Europe mainly through search engines and the europe.eu website.

²⁸⁸ An internal analysis of the language coverage of national citizen portals shows that 10 Member States run portals which, in addition to the national language(s), also exist fully in English. 11 Member States offer portals that are partly available in English, and 5 Member States' portals are only available in the national language. 4 countries have no citizens' portals. Business portals (e.g. PSCs) provide more English coverage, but often only partially and sometimes only using machine translation.

According to Search Engine Optimisation assessment, information on Your Europe is generally well ranked in search engines. Further improvement could be reached by eliminating duplication. For example, the topic of social security is covered by Your Europe, websites of DGs employment and SANCO, EURES, Missoc, and a multitude of national sites²⁸⁹. Your Europe, the EU Commission in Ireland, the European Parliament's website, the EEC-Net Belgium and Denmark all present information on air passenger rights on their websites. In the area of consumer rights, everything covered by Your Europe is also covered separately by all individual ECC-Net national centres. Both Your Europe and EURES overlap with regard to working in another EU country. Information on roaming is presented on Your Europe, DG CNECT and European Parliament websites. The digital transformation process within the Commission is currently addressing these concerns for all europa pages while no procedures are in place beyond this mandate.

Conclusion: Your Europe users are usually satisfied with the portal and able to find what they need. Overall, Member States are cooperating well and are delivering national content. The content of the EU-level (main) portal is being drawn up in a user-friendly and user-centric way. Main areas for improvement are filling the national-level information gaps, addressing overlaps and enhancing awareness about Your Europe.

Your Europe Advice

In 2016, the YEA service replied to some 24 000 enquiries, a number that has more than doubled since 2008.

Service effectiveness is measured by testing the quality of the replies through randomly selected samples of 10% of cases each month. Each sample case is assessed according to the substantial and formal quality criteria agreed with the Commission. According to the 2016 Single Market Scoreboard, replies are found to provide comprehensive and accurate advice on the issues in question.

According to the 2014 Evaluation of the Your Europe Advice Service, YEA meets the objective of providing a service that is fast, of high quality and offering advice that empowers its users. The reach of the service is however limited considering the number of EU citizens who may require personalised legal advice and assistance on their EU rights. Given budgetary limits to the total number of queries that can be handled in a year, the service is not actively promoted.

The YEA service meets the needs of a large majority of its current users. Only one sixth of all YEA users feel that the service did not fully meet their needs, mostly due to incomplete answers, unhelpful answers and replies that do not contain enough practical guidance.

The evaluation did not identify any unmet needs of the potential users of the YEA service that should be addressed by the service. However, the data gathered suggest that the citizens who

²⁸⁹ Another examples is air passenger rights, which is covered on Your Europe and also on the following websites:

EP: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU_5.6.2.html;

ECC-Net Belgium: <http://www.eccbelgium.be/themes/travel/travelling-by-plane>;

ECC-Net Denmark: <http://www.consumereurope.dk/Travel/When-you-travel/Airline-travel>.

submitted enquiries that were ineligible for the service could be better informed about the reasons why their case was rejected.

Users are overall satisfied with the quality of the replies. In total 80% are satisfied or very satisfied with the service received. Satisfaction was somewhat lower for enquiries related to tax and social security issues, mostly for lack of practical guidance, insufficient explanations of the relevant legislation and incomplete answers provided. Almost all YEA users receive replies in their preferred language and are satisfied with the time it took to obtain them.

The satisfaction with the signposting to national or EU level services was generally lower than with the other aspects of the service. Due to the characteristics of YEA a considerable share of responses lacks such signposting when it would have been relevant (45% of the responses do not include signposting to EU sources and 25% to national level sources).

Where a citizen is not satisfied with the service, relevant the Commission checks the reason for the dissatisfaction: delay, inaccuracy, unclear wording, false expectations. The following measures are taken: frequent delays are noted and the experts in question are reminded; for inaccurate or unclear replies revised replies are requested.

The Commission requires the contractor to signpost ineligible case to the Europe Direct Call Centres or other relevant assistance services within 24 hours.

The evaluation concludes that the quality control schemes applied by the Commission and the contractor are appropriate.

The evaluation points out that the YEA service is not easy to find. Most users either find the service through the Europa website or an internet search. The use of the service has evolved together with the increasing use of the Your Europe portal. This is intentional: following the rationale of the second line service, the YEA has not been the subject of extensive promotion. Information available online on the service is concentrate on the YEA website, which is part of the Europa website. Nevertheless, information on the service is also presented on various national, and to a smaller extent, regional and local stakeholders' websites as well as a host of private websites.

As a service that receives citizens' and businesses' enquiries on the application and misapplication of EU law, YEA is ideally placed to provide feedback to the various services of the Commission on the problem areas. Since 2012, YEA Quarterly Feedback Reports provide information on recurrent and new issues emerging in comparison to the previous quarter in each country as well as an overview of the main problem issues and 'problem countries'.

Conclusion: YEA meets the objective of providing a service that is fast, of high quality and offering advice that empowers its users. The quarterly feedback reports with recurrent and new issues are prepared for Commission policy-makers and contain useful information on how the Single Market is (not) working 'on the ground'. On purpose YEA is not easy to find online since the approach is to guide users to the Your Europe webpages to find answers to their questions. Too much publicity would lead to more queries than the current annual budget can handle. YEA should only step in where information is not available or not specific enough for the individual citizen's case. There is scope for improving signposting from YEA to other services from YEA .

Enterprise Europe Network

The most recent EEN Evaluation (focusing on the previous EEN network under the CIP programme)²⁹⁰ assessed the effectiveness of the various services of the network. The outcome was that the effect of information services is slightly lower than other services. This can be explained by the fact that these services are used by most SMEs at an early stage of the involvement in the Network, when impact of the Network may be less pronounced. More than 85 % of SMEs are satisfied with the advisory services of the EEN. As a consequence of this, the focus of the Enterprise Europe Network under the new COSME programme has shifted towards the provision of higher impact advisory and partnership services.

The "no wrong door principle", which is basically sign-posting, was evaluated as very efficient.

Very detailed quality criteria apply to the reporting of the advisory services, including services provided and resulting achievements. All achievement reports need to be stored in a central EASME database. Quality checks are performed regularly to verify the quality and eligibility of registered achievement reports.

The EEN has been effective in collecting very detailed and practical feedback from businesses about problems encountered in the Single Market and their negative impacts on the businesses in terms of additional costs or losses and loss of time caused by the problem. The database in which these cases are registered since 2008 includes more than 8000 such cases and the network has been effective in collecting these cases.

A key recommendation of the evaluation is that the visibility of the Network should be improved.

Conclusion: The EEN has been providing effective information and advisory services that have satisfied the large majority of SME clients. EEN partners' sign-posting activities are judged as very efficient. Effective achievement reporting standards and documentation through a central EU database are in place. The EEN has been effective in collecting feedback from businesses about problems encountered. One historic weakness has been low visibility, but according to most recent assessment reports this seems to be improving.

EURES

The EURES network has helped many jobseekers, workers and employers in realising mobility opportunities. Those who reach out to the EURES network and can use the services it offers generally appreciate it²⁹¹. Furthermore, EURES has contributed to building awareness on mobility, and by so doing to an improved balance between supply and demand of labour in the EU. EURES also contributes with indirect job searching assistance, in providing information on living and working conditions as well as other information about labour markets in other European countries.

As part of its activities, EURES provides information on issues such as social security, taxation, healthcare, pensions etc., which are important to workers and their family members

²⁹⁰ Final Evaluation of the impact of the Enterprise Europe Network – 2008-2014, Technopolis, 2015.

²⁹¹ Quote from the impact assessment for the EURES Regulation, SWD(2014) 9 final of 17/1/2014.

moving abroad. According to the EURES 2006-08 ex-post evaluation and monthly reports of EURES managers, EURES advisers spend 10% of their time on information and guidance on social security and taxation and 8% on information and guidance on living and working conditions. The impact assessment accompanying the 2014 proposal for the Regulation states that, because of these information activities, EURES advisers dedicate only a small part of their time to concrete, individualised assistance to bring about recruitment and placement. The way how information and advice on social security is provided, as part of EURES services, is listed as one of three types of limitations in the services and measures of the EURES network. Under the new EURES Regulation, EURES member organisations should signpost requests for specific information on the rights relating to social security, active labour market measures, taxation, issues relating to work contracts, pension entitlement and health insurance to the national competent authorities and, if applicable, other appropriate bodies at national level support.

An IT-based “matching” interface is to be developed under the new Regulation, with May 2018 as deadline.

Conclusion: Apart from direct job placement, which is its core aim, EURES has been effective in allowing workers to be better informed about living and working conditions in other European countries. However, this information could be more detailed and more practical for jobseekers. EURES could function more effectively if EURES advisers could dedicate more time to concrete, individualised assistance to bring about recruitment and placement instead of to more general information and advice on working and living conditions in other countries.

European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net)

According to the 2011 evaluation of the EEC-Net, further work of the ECC-Net centres is needed to conduct regular market research (including research via media monitoring) to identify goods and services where price differentials remain high and make this information available to policy makers and consumers.

Most users (74%) are satisfied with the quality of the service they receive from the Network. For example, following advice received from the ECCs, a majority of the ECC-Net users (67%) have either resolved the issue directly with the trader, used the European Small Claims procedure or pursued further action by contacting another organisation (e.g. bodies responsible for policy, enforcement or ADR). The minority (14%) who were not satisfied typically stressed the prolonged time taken in case handling and/or that their particular complaint was not resolved to their satisfaction. The inability of the ECCs to secure redress is a source of disappointment for many unsatisfied users.

Moreover, 87% of the respondents to the user survey (conducted as part of the ECC-Net evaluation), consider that the replies and assistance provided by the ECCs are relevant, tailored and useful. Case study analysis and mystery shopping results however, suggest that some ECCs could provide more tailored responses to customer enquiries.

The evidence points to growing demand for the services offered by the Network. The number of consumer enquiries (information requests, complaints and disputes) handled by the Network rose by 25% over the period 2005 to 2009.

However, the ECCs' actions are having a limited impact on consumer confidence in cross border shopping. Only 29% of the respondents to the user survey reported an increase in confidence as a result of contacting the ECCs; while 19% reported a fall in confidence. This is because a significant proportion of the cases handled by the ECCs are closed without any solution each year (27% in 2008 and 39% in 2009) or transferred to other organisations (11% in 2008 and 13% in 2009). The ECC-Net's ability to facilitate access to redress is constrained by a number of external and internal factors, such as the lack of willingness on the part of some traders to engage with the ECCs in resolution of consumer complaints, the lack of effective case handling protocols, limited resources spread too thinly across a range of activities, and the lack of effective performance management tools.

Overall, 79% of EU citizens do not know where to get information and advice about cross-border shopping in the EU. The overall visibility of the ECCs among the general population is low. Only 15% of European citizens (and 20% of the cross-border shoppers) have heard of the ECCs. However, this is not necessarily an issue where the ECCs have good linkages with relevant stakeholders (such as national consumer, enforcement and ADR bodies) that allow effective signposting of consumers and cross-referral of cases. Moreover, a survey conducted by the Commission (which was addressed to EU networks) suggests that the ECCs are more visible than other EU networks. According to available evidence, 11% of EU25 citizens had heard of the ECCs in 2006; whereas the visibility of other EU networks ranged from 2% - 6%.

Once consumers are aware of them, the ECCs are generally easy to access. Over 75% of the users stated the ECC was either 'very easy' or 'somewhat easy' to find. Less than one-tenth of users stated the ECC had been 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to find (7%).

The ECC websites are an important means of introducing the ECC to potential users. The majority of the users are satisfied with the quality (76%), content (76%) and layout (71%) of the ECC websites. However, relevant internet searches do not identify the sites as well as they might and there is scope to improve the quality of the websites of some ECCs. The ECC-Net evaluation suggests for the ECC websites to have common structures (for example, the availability of a web form for contact, up to date information, FAQs etc.).

ECC-Net centres also undertake promotional activities which reach hundreds of thousands of consumers across Europe each year. However, the extent of cooperation for promotional purposes with other stakeholders involved in the field of consumer protection varies across the EU depending upon national context. The main promotional activities undertaken by the ECCs are normally not coordinated with other EU networks as the focus of such activities tends to be on 'consumer' issues rather than 'EU' issues; although some examples of common promotional activities can be found in countries like Latvia, Slovenia and Germany. As regards cooperation with national stakeholders (e.g. host organisation, enforcement bodies etc.), the need for cooperation is strongest when promotional activities cover topics of common interest. This is already happening, albeit to a limited extent (e.g. Luxembourg). Systematic coordination of promotional activity with other stakeholders by the ECCs could be a source of economies of scale and would ensure delivery of consistent messages.

The evaluation of the ECC-Net calls for informing consumers from the first point of contact about the role and competences of the Network, for placing greater emphasis on consumer/business awareness campaigns of a preventative nature, and for consumer education initiatives to equip consumers with the skills and knowledge to participate in the internal market with confidence. Such campaigns could usefully be linked to developments in EU consumer policy. Moreover, the evaluation suggests that the ECCs should systematically

coordinate their promotional activities with relevant European and national stakeholders on topics of common interest in order to benefit from economies of scale and to ensure delivery of consistent messages to consumers/businesses.

Only partial information is available from feedback on complaint outcomes. In many cases, ECCs simply inform consumers about their rights, so they can contact the trader themselves. These consumers rarely come back to the ECC with feedback, so the ECC assume this is because they reached an agreement with the trader. In more complicated cases, where ECCs help consumers further by contacting the traders themselves, more information on the outcome is available.

In terms of quality, the evaluation points out inconsistencies in working practices e.g. response times and differences in the quality of the case handlers across the centres. It calls for putting in place effective quality control and quality assurance measures for ECCs joint projects and for maintaining efforts to improve case handling procedures by introducing common minimum standards of service across the Network. According to the 2016 edition of the Single Market Scoreboard, the priorities for the further development of the ECC-Net's work are to increase the visibility of the network and its outcomes for consumers, business and enforcement authorities, and to further develop the quality standards to ensure a high standard of service to consumers.

Conclusion: The ECC-Net has been effective in allowing the majority of its users (67%) to resolve their issues, with cross-border shopping still an issue of great concern. The overall visibility of the ECCs among the general population is low. Overall, 79% of EU citizens do not know where to get information and advice about cross-border shopping in the EU. Promotional campaigns could be better coordinated with relevant European and national stakeholders on topics of common interest. Relevant internet searches do not identify the sites as well as they might and there is scope to improve the quality of the websites of some ECCs. However, once they are found online, the ECCs are easy to access via the ECC websites. Only partial information is available from feedback on complaint outcomes. Quality standards (on complaint handling only) exist, but are not public or formal. Common minimum service standards across the Network do not exist.

To what extent have the instruments, taken together, been effective in allowing citizens and businesses to obtain relevant information and assistance, complete electronically all relevant procedures, benefit from high quality services that are easy to find?

Over the past 15 years, EU legislation has created legal requirements to set up information and assistance services aimed at helping citizens and businesses. Also, a large number of such services have been created in a non-legislative way. The individual effectiveness results of these services are mixed, but the overall effectiveness is even more worrying. There is no common recognisable brand under which they could operate. Many different brand names are used but citizens and businesses are not aware of them and are not using them in a systematic way²⁹². Nor is there a "one brand search engine" under which they could be found online. The closest to such a gateway is the Your Europe portal, which links to other services. However,

²⁹² According to the European Parliament study "A European Single Point of Contact" (2015), 91.6% of consumers and businesses are unaware of any online services at European level that they could turn to in case of problems.

the portal is not well-known either; national-level information is missing, and the sign-posting is often not reciprocal. For instance, while Your Europe is sign-posting to the PSCs, not many PSCs are sign-posting to Your Europe. Navigation of the various Single Market information portals is not always straightforward, and many EU citizens and businesses do not know where to get the information and assistance they need²⁹³.

It also appears that the voluntary approach has its clear limits. It has failed to ensure that all Member States set up PCP and PCPC websites on which they offer relevant information in an exhaustive way. It has also failed to constrain the mushrooming of contact points, which is confusing for the users who often need to visit more than one 'single' contact point for the task at hand. SOLVIT's suffers from lack of sufficient national resources. Those responsible for the different services at national level, indicate that it is difficult to obtain adequate resources for voluntary commitments, and that the absence of clear, legally binding rules makes it difficult to cooperate effectively with the ministries and local authorities that need to provide input. Most respondents to the online public consultation on the single digital gateway consider that the provision of information and procedures should be mandatory, regardless of whether it covers all or basic information.

No common quality criteria exist, which is detrimental to the usability and user-friendliness of the services as a whole. Badly functioning contact points undermine credibility for the network as a whole. The PSC Charter established quite far-reaching quality criteria for the PSCs, but as these are not mandatory, adherence is patchy. This is confirmed by a recent study²⁹⁴: the quality of the PSCs varies significantly. Other services, e.g. the ECCs, have the same experience with voluntary quality standards.

The Refit Platform Stakeholder Group asked the Commission to propose a Regulation to create a true online business portal for both goods and services to complement the text of the 2006 Services Directive and clearly indicate which minimum criteria for performance must apply to the PSCs. Information should be offered in English and/or the language(s) of the neighbouring countries. The Refit Platform Government Group recommended to the Commission to consider the integration of online information from PCPs and PCPCs, and SOLVIT with that of the PSC. This would indeed go a long way towards improving the situation. However, as the current evaluation shows, the PSCs, PCPs, PCPCs and SOLVIT are only part of the picture, and other EU and national-level Single Market tools need to be included as well. In March 2015 the Competitiveness Council called for a political commitment 'to strengthen and streamline Single Market tools (...) in order to better meet the needs of businesses and citizens in their cross-border activities'.

To what extent have the instruments in place been effective in providing policy-makers with evidence for policy-making?

The evidence from YEA, SOLVIT, ECC and the EEN cases has been used for policy-making but only on an ad hoc basis leaving a lot of untapped potential. For instance, the ECC Net's studies on passenger rights were used by the Commission as input to a revision of those rights. But case data from other sources (e.g. Your Europe Advice) could also have been used. The problem here is that these cases are not brought together and analysed collectively.

²⁹³ E.g. Evaluation of the ECC Net, 2011: 79% of EU citizens do not know where to get consumer information and advice.

²⁹⁴ "The Performance of the Points of Single Contact. An Assessment against the PSC Charter", Capgemini and Eurochambres, June 2015.

Overview of "effectiveness" conclusions

PSCs: The Points of Single Contact which were established under the Services Directive have been partially effective in allowing businesses to complete all relevant procedures fully online. Often, necessary information is missing, quality is deficient and procedures cannot be carried out fully online. PSC performance is weakest when it comes to the cross-border user: offering him accessible information and e-procedures that he can conduct fully online from abroad is often deficient.

PCPs: The Mutual Recognition Regulation, under which the PCPs were set up, only encourages making information available through a website. While most Member States have set up PCP websites voluntarily, these websites are of varying quality (often not very user-friendly) and rarely list national technical rules per product. Businesses are mostly unaware of the existence of the PCPs, and therefore do not look for and solicit them. When they do, they often complain about response times and the quality of the replies. It appears that the current PCP network – whilst considered necessary – is not functioning effectively for businesses.

PCPCs: Although a detailed analysis of effectiveness, including a PCPC user survey, has not been done, there are indications that the PCPC are under-performing for businesses. There are of course country variations, but generally speaking the indicative number of requests submitted to the PCPCs appears to be very low and not in line with actual business demand. Business awareness of the PCPCs is low, in particular as far as PCPCs in other EU countries are concerned. While most Member States have set up PCPC websites voluntarily, these websites are of varying quality (often not very user-friendly) and rarely list national technical rules per product.

SOLVIT: The general objective of SOLVIT has not been fully met: in 2015 12% of the cases could not be resolved, in 23% of the cases the applicants got their first reply after the deadline of 7 days, the preparation of cases as home centre took longer than the deadline of 30 days in 14% of the complaints and 34% of the accepted cases took longer than the aim of 10 weeks. Businesses are currently not using SOLVIT much. The main underlying reasons impeding SOLVIT's effectiveness are the lack of authority, adequacy of the staff and limited awareness of SOLVIT and the services it offers, especially for businesses and that there is not yet a fully operational systematic set-up for the handling, follow-up and reporting of 'structural problems' detected in SOLVIT.

Your Europe users are usually satisfied with the portal and able to find what they need. Overall, Member States are cooperating well and are delivering national content. The content of the EU-level (main) portal is being drawn up in a user-friendly and user-centric way. Main areas for improvement are filling the national-level information gaps, addressing overlaps and enhancing awareness about Your Europe.

YEA meets the objective of providing a service that is fast, of high quality and offering advice that empowers its users. The quarterly feedback reports with recurrent and new issues are prepared for Commission policy-makers and contain useful information on how the Single Market is (not) working 'on the ground'. Furthermore, the signposting to other services is not working as it should.

The **EEN** has been providing effective information and advisory services that have satisfied the large majority of SME clients. EEN partners' sign-posting activities are judged as very efficient. Effective achievement reporting standards and documentation through a central EU

database are in place. The EEN has been effective in collecting feedback from businesses about problems encountered. One historic weakness was low visibility, but according to most recent assessment reports this seems to be improving.

EURES: Apart from direct job placement, which is its core aim, EURES has been effective in allowing workers to be better informed about living and working conditions in other European countries. However, this information could be more detailed and more practical for jobseekers. EURES could function more effectively if EURES advisers could dedicate more time to concrete, individualised assistance to bring about recruitment and placement instead of to more general information and advice on working and living conditions in other countries.

The **ECC-Net** has been effective in allowing the majority of its users (67%) to resolve their issues, with cross-border shopping still an issue of great concern. The overall visibility of the ECCs among the general population is low. Overall, 79% of EU citizens do not know where to get information and advice about cross-border shopping in the EU. Promotional campaigns could be better coordinated with relevant European and national stakeholders on topics of common interest. Relevant internet searches do not identify the sites as well as they might and there is scope to improve the quality of the websites of some ECCs. However, once they are found online, the ECCs are easy to access via the ECC websites. Only partial information is available from feedback on complaint outcomes. Quality standards (on complaint handling only) exist, but are not public or formal. Common minimum service standards across the Network do not exist.

Taken together, the services have not been very effective in being perceived "as a whole" by citizens and businesses, as they are not operating under a common recognisable brand. This decreases their visibility and findability online – which is the key pre-condition for effectively delivering to the target group. Also, a common approach to quality is missing. Voluntary commitments and approaches have reached their limits and have not been effective in obtaining the necessary allocation of resources. The very interesting registers of cases and queries from the different services have not been linked up and analysed collectively by policy-makers.

3.4.2 The efficiency of the existing framework

To what extent have the instruments in place been successful in allowing citizens and businesses to obtain relevant information, to complete procedures electronically, to benefit from high-quality services that are easy to find at a reasonable cost to public administrations and to society at large?

Points of Single Contact

The Services Directive generates costs to public authorities, as it obliged them to set up and run online points of single contact. Often, the PSCs are embedded in countries' general e-government portals and IT infrastructure. Cost figures for even a minority of Member States' PSCs do not exist. Where they exist, they are of such variety, patchy and incomplete (e.g. missing user figures for the benefit side) that no conclusions on efficiency can be drawn²⁹⁵.

²⁹⁵ e.g. German Land of Hessen: yearly technical running costs excluding human resources and organisational costs: € 900,000; Land of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern: annual running costs of € 120,000. The German PSC

Product Contact Points

The Mutual Recognition Regulation generates costs for Member States as far as the establishment and operation of the PCPs is concerned. However, as stated in the Regulation, Member States may entrust the role of PCP to existing services within the public administration or to national SOLVIT centres, chambers of commerce, professional organisations and private bodies, in order not to increase administrative costs for enterprises and authorities. Member States have adopted different approaches, with some generating more costs than others. Most of the time, the PCP has been integrated in an already existing department dealing with internal market issues. Based on the annual reports, one person on average runs the PCP. However, only 50% of Member States have reported the number of staff involved. In a small number of Member States²⁹⁶, the PCP responsibilities are divided between 6-7 sector ministries or inspectorates. A rather extreme version of a decentralised set-up can be found in France and Italy, where the PCP is not a central unit in charge of the mutual recognition concept, but simply the contact point towards the Commission.

During the mutual recognition public consultation, national authorities ranked the costs linked to the implementation of the Regulation as average costs. A recent survey as part of a study²⁹⁷ asked Member States to estimate the costs of running the PCP in terms of Full-Time Equivalents (FTE). Very few Member States replied to this question. Member States indicated between 0.1 FTE (Ireland) and 2 FTE (Croatia). Slovenia's joint PCP/PCPC uses 1 FTE.

These FTE need to be compared to the number of requests dealt with. According to the same survey, in which only 6 PCP participated, the number of requests is very low and varies – from 15 per year for the Cypriot PCP to 100 for the Croatian PCP. However, figures are being calculated differently (some taking phone calls into account while others don't) and thus need to be treated with care. But they give an indication of the generally speaking very low number of requests. Furthermore, many businesses contact the competent authorities directly and do not go via the PCPs²⁹⁸, or PCPs act as coordinating bodies that simply forward the requests to the competent authorities, without playing any role as far as the substance of the request and the reply to the operator is concerned. Most likely, given the large magnitude of cross-border trading of products within the Single Market, there is a very large untapped potential for using the PCPs (much) more.

Most Member States (25) have – voluntarily – set up online portals that provide information on the role of the PCP and mutual recognition. 18 Member States provide this information (sometimes partially) in English. A number of Member States (e.g. UK, France, Denmark, Belgium) also provide national technical rules for products directly on their websites.

The availability of online information generates costs (website creation and keeping it up-to-date). However, these costs are easily counterbalanced by the potential reduction of the

set-up cannot be considered as cost-efficient as it consists of a multitude of PSCs. Most (with the exception of Austria) Member States have just created one national PSC, which limits the costs.

²⁹⁶ Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, according to the Evaluation of the Application of the Principle of Mutual Recognition in the Field of Goods.

²⁹⁷ Guidelines for improving consistency across PCPCs and PCP, Ecorys, 2017.

²⁹⁸ As stated in the "Evaluation of Internal Market Legislation for Industrial Products" (SWD(2014) 23 final, many economic operators request and receive information directly from national authorities, without going through the PCPs. This is often due to a lack of awareness of the existence of the PCPs.

number of "basic" enquiries to the PCP. A survey²⁹⁹ asked PCPs (and PCPCs) whether they saw advantages linked to the online publication of information on national technical product rules. 5 out of 6 surveyed PCPs and 10 out of 11 PCPCs did, mostly for transparency reasons, but in the case of two PCPs and all PCPCs except one, also for having fewer questions addressed to them.

As far as the administrative burden on businesses due to quality issues of the PCPs is concerned, companies may need to resort to consultants, lawyers or other private sector third parties to make up for the deficits, or may even lose market opportunities. This is actually the channel companies' use most often in order to receive information and advice about foreign market rules and requirements.

Conclusion: There is not enough information available on the efficiency of the PCPs. What can be said is that PCPs are only partially effective and are under-used by economic operators, who generally resort to much more expensive solutions to meet their needs. The (for many Member States) low quality of their PCP websites represents a missed opportunity for Member States in terms of the possibility to reduce the number of requests and to be even more cost-efficient.

Product Contact Points for Construction

According to a study feeding into the Construction Sector Fitness Check³⁰⁰, the PCPs created under the Construction Products Regulation may save the business: i) internal work, i.e. the time needed to familiarise with unknown or uncertain legal provisions, and retrieve information from national and local authorities; and (ii) external costs, i.e. when consultants are resorted to provide information on unknown or uncertain legal provisions. Companies are likely to use PCPC for small or medium-complexity requests; for very complex issues, a company is likely to resort to its own internal resources or to external consultants in any case. The time saved for each request is based on Consultants' expert assessment; the degree of complexity of the various requests to PCPC is assumed over three different scenarios.

Based on the number of requests as extrapolated from a study by RPA, the average hourly salary rate for a technician inclusive of overheads (EUR 23.2, source: Eurostat Earnings Statistics), the time saved per request and the scenarios, the **range of administrative cost savings for businesses linked to the use of the PCPC then ranges between EUR 760 000 and EUR 1.2 million**. However, this estimation of cost savings is based on a very low number of received requests for some countries, such as 100 for France, 50 for Spain and 60 for Sweden. (The corresponding figures are 500 requests for Norway and 672 requests for the Netherlands). Given the large magnitude of cross-border trading of goods within the Single Market, it is likely that the low figures for some countries do not represent the real business demand but are caused by low awareness of the PCPCs' existence amongst the business community. There may be large untapped demand which is not reflected and the savings potential for businesses may be much larger.

²⁹⁹ Guidelines for improving consistency across PCPCs and PCPs, Ecorys, 2017.

³⁰⁰ Supporting Study for the Fitness Check on the Construction Sector: EU internal market and energy efficiency legislation, 2016.

A recent survey as part of a study³⁰¹ asked Member States to estimate the costs of running the PCP and PCPC in terms of Full-Time Equivalents (FTE). Only very few Member States replied to this question. Estimated PCPCs' costs are between 0.25 FTE (Czech Republic) and 3 FTE (Poland), with Sweden and Ireland both dedicating 1 FTE. Bulgaria explained that the PCPC is being developed by European Structural Funds for the cost of 330 000 BGN (168 729 euros). Slovenia joint PCP/PCPC uses 1 FTE.

These FTE need to be compared to the number of requests dealt with. According to the same survey, in which only 10 PCPC participated, the number of requests is very low and varies – between 15 for the Cypriot PCPC and 114 for the Croatian PCPC. However, figures are being calculated differently (some taking phone calls into account while others don't) and thus need to be treated with care. But they give an indication of the generally speaking very low number of requests.

The Construction Products Regulation (CPR) contains the same recital as the Mutual Recognition Regulation (MRR) as regards the possibility to entrust the role of PCPC to existing contact points already established, to prevent the unnecessary proliferation of contact points. However, less than half of the Member States followed up on this and built the PCPC on an existing PCP.

Conclusion: There is not enough information available on the efficiency of the PCPCs. The use of the PCPC can save a business significant costs. However, this is currently rather theoretical, as most businesses are not using the PCPCs. The number of requests submitted to them is low and seems not in line with actual business demand. The conclusion reached for the PCPs is also valid for the PCPCs: the (for many Member States) low quality of their PCPC websites represents a missed opportunity for Member States in terms of the possibility to reduce the number of requests and to be even more cost-efficient.

SOLVIT

Whilst difficult to quantify, it is clear that by centralising expertise and providing an agreed framework, SOLVIT has been able to provide an efficient mechanism for the resolution of individual problems linked to potential breach of EU law to citizens and businesses, to Member States' administrations and to European Commission services. The most efficient alternative means of redress to SOLVIT are national courts proceedings and formal infringement procedures which are lengthy and costly. In December 2015, around 732 infringement proceedings were pending in the area of the Single Market. On average, infringement proceedings take 30 months to address the issues contested³⁰².

The staff numbers and therefore the staffing costs vary between the Member States. In 2015, the staffing levels for the SOLVIT centres were assessed (time to be spent on SOLVIT work) in relation to the caseload. The number of staff (FTEs or full-time equivalents) is determined by the caseload of the SOLVIT centres:

- small SOLVIT centres (16-50 cases) => 1 FTE
- medium SOLVIT centres (51-150 cases) => 2 FTEs
- large SOLVIT centres (151-300 cases) => 3 FTEs

³⁰¹ Guidelines for improving consistency across PCPCs and PCP, Ecorys, 2017.

³⁰² Idem.

- very large SOLVIT centres (over 300 cases) => 3.5 FTEs

Out of 8 small centres, 5 did not meet the target staffing. The same applies for 2 out of 10 medium centres, 4 out of 9 large centres and all 4 very large centres.

The cost of support from the Commission Services is also not easily quantifiable. The support is provided from the EC SOLVIT team within DG GROW and from case handlers in other DGs as SOLVIT covers the whole spectrum of the Single Market legislation (i.e. preparation of informal legal opinions). On the other hand, the benefits of the SOLVIT intervention in individual problems result in the release of Commission Services' resources from complaint handling and pursuit of formal infringement proceedings.

However, the benefits are considered to be significantly greater than the costs for citizens and businesses, Member States' administrations and to European Commission services.

It is even more difficult to quantify the costs and benefits of SOLVIT when contributing to a better functioning Single Market by fostering and promoting better compliance with Union law, as this entails reforms and changes in the administrative practice and legislation of Member States. In the 2015 Single Market Scoreboard, the number of infringement proceedings has slightly decreased over the last six months (-2%, from 749 to 732). This overall reduction of cases can in part be attributed to the implementation of a number of measures such as the introduction of EU-Pilot in April 2008. Since that time, the number of cases has gone down by 44%. Like SOLVIT, EU-Pilot facilitates cooperation between the Member States and the Commission to address non-compliance or the incorrect application of EU law before infringement proceedings are launched³⁰³

Finally, as regards the benefits of SOLVIT in terms of administrative burden, the use of IMI and the online SOLVIT database results in a reduction of the administrative burden in comparison to the use of off-line means of cooperation. Additionally, the services of administrative cooperation between the two Member States involved in handling a SOLVIT case, through the use of the IMI³⁰⁴ SOLVIT database, reduces the administrative burden for citizens and businesses in comparison to the scenario of dealing directly with the public authority in the Member State causing the problem.

Conclusion: SOLVIT is providing an efficient alternative dispute settlement mechanism that delivers benefits to (a) mostly citizens and to a much less extent businesses in comparison to costly and lengthy legal proceedings, (b) Member States that do have the obligation to implement EU law correctly and to ensure that it is correctly applied, as otherwise they would have to engage in costly and lengthy legal proceedings at the national level and formal infringement proceedings at the EU level and (c) Commission Services in their role as the guardian of the treaties, as otherwise they would have to engage in costly and lengthy formal infringement proceedings. The use of IMI for the handling of SOLVIT cases reduces the administrative burden for the SOLVIT centres. Moreover, the use of SOLVIT reduces the administrative burden for individuals and businesses engaged in cross-border activity.

³⁰³ See performance per governance tool at:
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/infringements/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/eu_pilot/index_en.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/solvit/index_en.htm

³⁰⁴ IMI (Internal Market Information System) is Commission-run.

Your Europe

No efficiency analysis of Your Europe has yet been done. With a yearly budget of € 650,000 (excluding promotion) and 4.5 Commission staff working on it full-time (this excludes resources that contribute to Your Europe from other departments of the Commission as well as agencies and Member States), the portal registers currently 17 million visits a year, with constantly increasing user figures. Online user surveys register very positive satisfaction levels with the portals, and 70% of users found, partially or fully, what they were looking for.

Conclusion: Your Europe has been successful in allowing citizens and businesses to obtain relevant information at a reasonable cost.

Your Europe Advice

The total costs of the YEA service have increased from EUR 1.49 million in 2011/2012 to about EUR 1.8 million in 2016, accounting for the growing number of enquiries handled by the service during these past years.

The evaluation replied to the question whether the direct and indirect costs (for the citizen and for the EU institutions) of YEA per reply are adequate in comparison to other comparable possibilities citizens have to get the same level of advice (e.g. ask a lawyer, send a question to the European Commission or a national administration). It concludes that the cost benchmarking between YEA and the Europe Direct Call Centres as well as a number of private services suggests that the cost of the YEA service to the Commission is overall reasonable.

In terms of the estimated normalised cost per hour (EUR 94.06) the YEA cost is somewhat higher than the estimated cost of the Europe Direct Call Centres (EUR 88.26), but this is to be expected, considering the more specialised nature of the YEA service.

The cost of YEA is favourable if the cost per hour is examined against the hourly fees charged by private legal service providers, with the YEA hourly cost in line with the lowest hourly fees collected from the new Member States³⁰⁵.

As regards processes and procedures in place (case handling IT tool, other tools, human resources, workflows and organisational solutions), these are judged to be overall adequate.

Service efficiency of Your Europe Advice is measured primarily by the speed of replies. The aim is to reply to enquiries within 3 working days. Over 95% of replies are sent within that deadline and over 99% within four working days. The increase in the number of enquiries handled by the service has not affected the efficiency nor effectiveness of the service. Users are overall satisfied with the quality of the replies. In total 80% are satisfied or very satisfied with the service received.

³⁰⁵ i.e. the 13 most recent EU enlargements.

Conclusion: YEA is an efficient service in terms of service delivery and service organisation, and is meeting the needs of most of its users. Its costs to the Commission are assessed to be appropriate if compared to similar possibilities citizens have to get the same level of legal advice.

Enterprise Europe Network

According to a 2015 publication about the network, it has answered 600 000 questions on EU issues since 2008 to the satisfaction of most client SMEs. The most recent evaluation of the EEN (based on the period 2008-2014, under the CIP programme) points out that the importance of "information" for the partners exceeded the allocation of resources for this activity. The EEN partners considered the budget for information well spent in terms of benefits for SMEs. However, the same evaluation also pointed out that SME clients attribute the highest importance to the higher end services of the Network, in particular business cooperation, innovation support and technology transfer.

In the context of the COSME programme, a strategic decision was taken to shift the focus of EEN services away from information, towards creating impact for businesses.

Conclusion: The EEN partners consider the budget for information well spent in terms of benefits for SMEs.

EURES

Within the EURES network about 1 500 persons are actively contributing to information and assistance, of which 950 are qualified by the individual member organizations as EURES advisers.

The overall envelope spent on EURES services in the Union is estimated to be around € 60 million, essentially covering the staff cost and related overheads. The EU budget spent on EURES is € 20-22 million per year, within the EaSI Programme.

Following the 2010 report on EURES activities, it was estimated that the EURES network provides around 150 000 recruitments/placements per year. Of these, 50 000 were attributed to the work of the EURES Advisers, and 100 000 were – based on estimations and extrapolation – attributed to the functioning of its portal³⁰⁶. Figures were further elaborated in the impact assessment accompanying the 2014 proposal.

The activities of the EURES network have been monitored since 2012 under the Single Market Scoreboard. It uses 5 indicators which inter alia provide information on the activities of EURES advisers and the vacancies posted on EURES as a proportion of national vacancies. The global indicator (all 5 indicators combined) shows that 3 countries are below average, 8 above average and the rest average.

Some examples of possible better cost efficiencies were referred to in reports provided by EURES member organisations and Cross Border Partnerships, including:

³⁰⁶ Figures come from the Impact Assessment for the 2016 EURES Regulation, SWD(2014) 9 final, 17/1/2014.

- Further integration/mainstreaming of EURES into the Public Employment Service (PES) through increased training: “An increased mainstreaming with PES will lead to increased efficiency; there is only a small number of EURES advisors, and if the rest of the PES staff could provide information on EURES and EURES-services there is a great possibility for higher efficiency”.
- The development of synergies through the joint EURES- and ESF-funded projects.
- The creation of one-stop-shops where clients can find all the information needed in one place.
- The increased use of modern technologies and communications.

Conclusion: According to the Single Market Scoreboard, most Member States' EURES services perform to an "average" benchmark of quality. Recommendations for how to turn EURES into a more cost effective service suggest that there is room for improvement.

European Consumer Centres Network

The Network is co-financed by the European Commission, the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland. The EU grant allocation to the ECCs for the year 2010 was EUR 4.5 million. With the addition of national co-financing, costs of running the ECC-Net amount to EUR 8 to 9 million per annum.

According to the evaluation³⁰⁷, monetary redress secured by consumers following ECC action is estimated to be over EUR 14 million for the period January to November 2010.

This means that the direct financial benefit accruing to consumers as a result of the ECCs' actions outweighs the cost to the tax payer of supporting the ECCs. The Network delivered direct financial benefits to consumers of at least 1.77 times its cost to the taxpayer during 2010.

According to data on the 2016 Single Market Scoreboard, the network had over **93 964** contacts from consumers in 2015. ECCs received over **38 048 complaints**. In 2015, the Network was able to help over half the complainants. 51% of complex cases (where more than one centre had to be involved) were resolved amicably. 16.35% of the closed complex complaints were transferred to other organisations (of which 26% were alternative dispute resolution entities; 11.1% to enforcement bodies and 27.8% to courts).

The ECC-Net evaluation suggests that some ECCs are adequately resourced; while others are not (particularly those hosted by NGOs). According to the results of the ECC survey, 52% (or 15 out of 29 ECCs) are of the opinion that they are adequately resourced; compared to 48% (or 14 ECCs) who think otherwise. Moreover, a vast majority of the ECCs (24 ECCs) indicate that they have little or no margin to deal with a sudden increase in the level of enquiries; and their present level of funding is too little to deliver additional promotional activity or an increased volume of consumer enquiries. A number of ECCs have experienced financial constraints and uncertainty (particularly those hosted by NGOs) as a result of the system of annual funding and uncertainties with respect to national co-financing. These pressures can be expected to worsen in the coming years as EU and national budgets come under increasing pressure and scrutiny.

³⁰⁷ Evaluation of the European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net), CPEC, 2011.

The ECC-Net evaluation suggests:

- Improving the results orientation of the Network by introducing measurable performance benchmarks and performance-based incentives, and making the continuation of funding conditional upon individual ECCs demonstrating a positive benefits-cost ratio;
- Ensuring that activities of individual centres particularly promotional activities, networking and feedback functions are underpinned by a clear intervention logic in order to justify support;
- Replacing the current system of annual grants with a system of framework partnership agreements.

Conclusion: The ECC Network has delivered direct financial benefits to consumers of at least 1.77 times its cost to the taxpayer during 2010. On this basis, the ECCs are operating efficiently. However, there is scope for improvement, and the evaluation recommends the introduction of measurable performance benchmarks and performance based incentives, and making positive results a condition for further funding. 48% of ECCs consider their funding insufficient.

To what extent have the instruments, taken together, been successful in allowing citizens and businesses to obtain relevant information, to complete procedures electronically, to benefit from high-quality services that are easy to find at a reasonable cost to public administrations and to society at large?

Since evidence and data for this section is incomplete (especially for the national level), it is difficult to draw any conclusions on the overall efficiency. However, it seems obvious that coordinated promotion of the instruments could lead to more cost savings and better user awareness than the individual actions. Your Europe has an annual promotion budget of around EUR 450 000. With a slight increase of that budget, the annual promotion effort at EU level could probably be fully covered – if done via one "umbrella brand" substituting individual EU-level promotion efforts.

Also, there is a certain potential overlap in scope and duplication of effort. On the EU level, content is duplicated on various websites. The scope of the advice services that are EU-level initiatives can overlap somewhat: YEA and the Europe Direct Call Centres are often receiving similar queries – but an active referral policy is in place where one or the other service is better suited to reply. A well performing single brand search engine, and/or a common online enquiry form on the national level³⁰⁸, could probably ensure even better that user requests are channelled immediately to the most suitable service.

Overview of "efficiency" conclusions

PSCs: The Services Directive generates costs to public authorities, as it obliged them to set up and run online points of single contact. Often, the PSCs are embedded in countries' general e-government portals and IT infrastructure. Reliable and comparable cost figures for PSCs do not exist. The figures that are available are divergent and incomplete (e.g. missing user figures for the benefit side) that no conclusions on efficiency can be drawn.

³⁰⁸ A common online enquiry form currently exists on the Your Europe portal and sign-posts users to the most suitable assistance service.

PCPs: There is not enough information available on the efficiency of the PCPs. What can be said is that PCPs are only partially effective and are under-used by economic operators, who generally resort to much more expensive solutions to meet their needs. The (for many Member States) low quality of their PCP websites represents a missed opportunity for Member States in terms of the possibility to reduce the number of requests and to be even more cost-efficient.

PCPCs: The use of the PCPC can save a business significant costs. However, this is currently rather theoretical, as most businesses are not using the PCPCs. The number of requests submitted to them is low and not in line with actual business demand. Member States have set up the PCPCs in a cost-efficient way. The conclusion reached for the PCPs is also valid for the PCPCs: the (for many Member States) low quality of their PCPC websites represents a missed opportunity for Member States in terms of the possibility to reduce the number of requests and to be even more cost-efficient.

SOLVIT is providing an efficient alternative dispute settlement mechanism that delivers benefits to (a) mostly citizens and to a much less extent businesses in comparison to costly and lengthy legal proceedings, (b) Member States that do have the obligation to implement EU law correctly and to ensure that it is correctly applied, as otherwise they would have to engage in costly and lengthy legal proceedings at the national level and formal infringement proceedings at the EU level and (c) Commission Services in their role as the guardian of the treaties, as otherwise they would have to engage in costly and lengthy formal infringement proceedings. The use of IMI for the handling of SOLVIT cases reduces the administrative burden for the SOLVIT centres. Moreover, the use of SOLVIT reduces the administrative burden for individuals and businesses engaged in cross-border activity.

Your Europe has been successful in allowing citizens and businesses to obtain relevant information at a reasonable cost.

YEA is an efficient service in terms of service delivery and service organisation, and is meeting the needs of most of its users. Its costs to the Commission are assessed to be appropriate if compared to similar possibilities citizens have to get the same level of legal advice.

The **EEN** partners consider the budget for information well spent in terms of benefits for SMEs.

EURES: According to the Single Market Scoreboard, most Member States' EURES services perform to an "average" benchmark of quality. Recommendations for how to turn EURES into a more cost effective service suggest that there is room for improvement.

The **ECC Network** has delivered direct financial benefits to consumers of at least 1.77 times its cost to the taxpayer during 2010. On this basis, the ECCs are operating efficiently. However, there is scope for improvement, and the evaluation recommends the introduction of measurable performance benchmarks and performance based incentives, and making positive results a condition for further funding. 48% of ECCs consider their funding insufficient.

Taken together, there is scope for more efficiency on the EU (and possibly also national) level through coordinated promotion of the services using a common name for co-branding. A well performing common brand search engine, and/or a common online enquiry form on the

national level, could probably better ensure that user requests are channels to the most suitable service immediately. This is currently not done in the most efficient way.

3.4.3 The relevance and coherence of the existing framework

Relevance: To what extent are the current services to businesses and citizens relevant? To what extent are they meeting their needs? To what extent are the current instruments in line with current trends of digitalisation?

Coherence: To what extent are the different instruments coherent with each other? To what extent does the existing framework promote synergies, work well together and or point towards tensions and overlaps? To what extent does the existing framework take account of the fact that services and products are increasingly part of the same value chain? Is there evidence of gaps, loopholes or inconsistencies across the existing framework?

Evaluations, public consultation results, studies and surveys conducted show that the instruments which form part of this evaluation are considered relevant by their target audiences. They cater to the need of citizens and businesses for information, assistance and procedures in order to more easily navigate the Single Market and engage in cross-border activities. An overwhelming majority of business and citizens participating in the online public consultation consider it important or very important to have online access to information about rules and procedures in other EU countries (93% of businesses and 92% of citizens), access to e-procedures cross-borders (94% and 92% respectively) and access to services providing assistance upon request (88% and 87% respectively). Most respondents would also look for information on the internet. Therefore the relevance of these initiatives is high.

Whilst most of the instruments have adapted to the digital trend and services are available online, this is not the case for all the PCPs and PCPCs. Some do not have an online presence, and where they do, the quality of the website may be very rudimentary. Others may be online, but are very difficult to find (e.g. through a google search and without knowing the exact name), such as Your Europe Advice and SOLVIT³⁰⁹. The issue of visibility, findability and awareness of the services is a cross-cutting problem.

The existing EU legal framework contains gaps. An obvious gap concerns the citizen side. Apart from the Health Contact Points providing information to citizens about other countries' health systems, and the European Job Mobility Portal informing citizens about living and working conditions, social security and tax payments, national employment rules and relevant administrative procedures, EU law does not oblige Member States to provide information to citizens. For the Your Europe portal the Commission works together with Member States on a voluntary basis in order to offer this information to citizens. The effectiveness of this approach depends very heavily on personal commitment and good will of individual persons with no guarantee for continuity and sustainability.

³⁰⁹ For the mentioned services this is intentional, as "second level support services" in line with the cascade approach.

There are also legal gaps on the business side. The Services Directive is not exhaustive, and several important fields are not part of it³¹⁰ and therefore formally need not be covered by the PSCs. However, many PSCs do cover at least some of these fields voluntarily (and this has also been the approach of the PSC Charter), but the Charter cannot be enforced and there are significant gaps in its implementation as shown in the most recent study on the PSCs.³¹¹

The scope of the PCPs is confined to the non-harmonised sector, which means that businesses are only receiving half of the answer to their question which rules (EU + national) are applying to their products. This, together with low visibility and quality issues, may explain why hardly any businesses are using the PCPs.

The existing legal framework promotes synergies. The legal instruments that established the PSCs, PCPs and PCPCs all foresee the possibility, and even encourage, that the contact points be established as parts of already existing contact points, networks, structures or even relevant private bodies. When the Professional Qualifications Directive ("PQD", of 2005, amended in 2013) set up professional qualifications contact points in 2013, with online information on requirements, procedures and formalities, it laid down that these were to be established on the (existing) Points of Single Contact of the Services Directive. However, where this was not provided in a legally binding way, most Member States have not acted upon this possibility (thus potentially also missing out on cost savings). A notable exception is Lithuania, which has set up its business contact points as part of one institution and one website. A recent study³¹² which analysed the inter-linkages between the PSC, PCP and PCPC websites found that even within the Member States, cross-linking of contact point websites is not done, let alone to other Member States' contact point websites.

This is all the more regrettable as businesses frequently require information on both services and product rules at the same time. The current trend of "servitisation" means that products and services are increasingly part of the same value chain. As stated in the Evaluation of Internal Market Legislation for Industrial Products, the distinction between product and services markets is becoming ever more blurred, in part because consumers increasingly demand high-quality after-sales services. "Instead of selling a product with a service, there is a tendency of selling a service with a product (e.g. mobile phones)". The results of the public consultation on the single digital gateway show that a majority of businesses (80.87%) would be in favour of merging the contact points for goods and services. 70% of respondent public authorities consider this as desirable or very desirable, with some considering this integration difficult or somewhat difficult (27.5% and 47.5% respectively).

³¹⁰ The Directive does not apply to the following services: financial services; electronic communications services with respect to matters covered by other EU instruments; transport services falling within the scope of Title VI of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU); healthcare services provided by health professionals to assess, maintain or restore the state of patients' health where those activities are reserved to a regulated health profession; temporary work agencies' services; private security services; audio-visual services; gambling; certain social services provided by the State, by providers mandated by the State or by charities recognised by the State; services provided by notaries and bailiffs appointed by an official act of government. The Directive does not apply in the field of taxation.

³¹¹ Business Europe concludes in its submission to the REFIT platform that the voluntary Charter approach "has not delivered the desired results".

³¹² Screening Report on Member States Product Contact Points and Product Contact Points for Construction by Ecorys, 2017.

The business representative organisation "BusinessEurope" has called on Member States to transform the existing Points of Single Contact into fully-fledged online business portals (for goods and services) offering companies all the information and assistance they need to operate across borders and on the home market, including offering the possibility to complete procedures entirely online³¹³. This is also one key demand of the REFIT stakeholder platform and mostly shared by the REFIT government group³¹⁴. Member States have not (or rarely) acted upon this trend in the set-up of their contact points for businesses. In a recent report³¹⁵ the European Parliament considered the implementation of the present system built around a diverse range of contact points, including Product Contact Points and Single Points of Contact as inconsistent across Member States and overly complex.

The EU-mandated assistance services have been actively promoting synergies between themselves through sign-posting mechanisms. YEA, SOLVIT, the EEN, the ECCs and EURES all sign-post requests, where relevant, to other services. The EEN has made this its official policy ("no wrong door policy"). Your Europe connects the EU and the national level and sign-posts to a large range of other services. It runs a "common intake form" in the form of a "help and advice" button that guides users to a large range of relevant (EU-mandated) assistance and problem-solving services, with some operating on the national level: SOLVIT, Your Europe Advice, Points of Single Contact, Product Contact Points, EURES, ECC-Net and Fin-net. The Your Europe "help and advice" signposting has helped to lower the number of cases that had been incorrectly directed to SOLVIT. Furthermore, Your Europe Advice is providing a supporting role to SOLVIT in terms of providing legal advice to fill current gaps.

The SOLVIT Recommendation contains provisions on cooperation with other networks and contact points. To ensure that applicants get effective help, SOLVIT centres should cooperate with other European and national information and help networks, such as Your Europe, Europe Direct, Your Europe Advice, the Enterprise Europe Network, European Consumer Centres, EURES, Fin-Net and the European Network of Ombudsmen. Cooperation between SOLVIT and other organisations predominantly takes the form of signposting cases from one organisation to the other. Complaints and questions can now be directly transferred from SOLVIT to Your Europe Advice and the Europe Direct Contact Centre and vice versa. In addition, SOLVIT is coherent with the European Commission's complaint handling and enforcement policy³¹⁶.

The evaluations, however, also point to inefficiencies resulting from lack of coherence. According to the YEA evaluation, around one fourth of the enquiries currently addressed by the YEA service could have been answered by the information readily available on the Your Europe portal. The evaluation data suggest that almost one fourth of all YEA users did not visit the Your Europe portal prior to submitting their case to YEA. On the EU level, a lot of other Commission services are duplicating on their websites information that is already being offered by Your Europe, which is not only inefficient but also confusing to the user.

³¹³ See for example the Business Europe Strategy Paper "Remaining obstacles to a true single market for services" of December 2014.

³¹⁴ REFIT Platform Opinion on the submission by the Danish Business Forum and BusinessEurope on the Point of Single Contact, June 2016. The government Group also recommended "one single entry point with clear information and coordinated services in each Member State".

³¹⁵ EP, Report on Non-Tariff Barriers in the Single Market, 2016.

³¹⁶ See 'Better Governance for the Single Market', European Commission Communication COM (2012) 259 final.

The YEA evaluation also shows that there is an overlap in scope of YEA with the mandates of the European Consumer Centres network, the EURES centres and the national contact points for professional qualifications.

A coherent "quality approach" to the instruments is lacking. There are "families" of instruments providing either or a mix of: information, assistance services and procedures. Whereas YEA and SOLVIT have very detailed (in the case of YEA even contractual) quality criteria the respect of which is being monitored, the ECC, EURES, the PCPs and PCPCs do not and this impacts on the quality of the service. The Services Directive (and PSC Charter) also contains a detailed list of quality provisions, but nothing comparable exists for the product side (PCPs and PCPCs). A coverage gap exists with regard to information: Your Europe lacks parts of Member State information on certain specific topics. The latter is due to the voluntary nature of information provision to YE and the resulting lack of leverage of the Commission.

Visibility of the instruments is another general concern. Target audiences are currently too unlikely to discover the appropriate assistance. The 'Smart Single Market Regulation' study of the European Parliament points out that the level of awareness of the various assistance services and the understanding of their scope and functions is very limited among European citizens and businesses. None of the tools was known by more than 25% of surveyed citizens, and the lowest awareness levels amounted to just 1% of survey respondent. Users often do not understand the complementarities and differences between the tools³¹⁷. Businesses participating in the online public consultation on the single digital gateway indicated that the first reason why they consider it difficult to find information is that it is hard to find the right website (48%).

All the instruments covered are relevant for and coherent with the current Commission's ten priorities, which includes a 'deeper and fairer Internal Market' and a 'connected Digital Single Market'. To ensure a fairer Single Market, the EU must address the concerns of both citizens and businesses. They must have the assurance that the Single Market works in practice and feel empowered to benefit from it.³¹⁸ In the context of ensuring practical delivery, the Single Market Strategy stresses the importance of a culture of compliance and smart enforcement to be achieved inter alia through strengthening and streamlining the Single Market problem-solving tools. Furthermore, the "start-up initiative" aims to remove administrative burdens to the starting and scaling-up of companies' activities, including through initiatives to facilitate the use of digital technologies. The Digital Single Market Strategy aims to create the right conditions for networks to flourish in the digital economy.

3.4.4 The utility and EU added value of the existing framework

What is the additional value resulting from current interventions at EU level when it comes to the services covered, compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national and/or regional level?

³¹⁷ According to the December 2015-January 2016 panel survey on the European Internal Market conducted by the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce, the 80% of Dutch entrepreneurs who are doing business in the internal market have never heard of the listed online information and advisory services.

³¹⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Upgrading the Single Market: more opportunities for people and business", Brussels, 28.10.2015 COM (2015) 550 final.

To what extent does this continue to require action at EU level? What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing current EU actions in the field?

Generally speaking, the impacts of the instruments covered by this evaluation have been positive (though to varying degrees) for citizens and businesses, and the EU has created added value. In this section, the (positive) "EU added value" will be described first, followed by a more critical assessment.

The Services Directive addresses issues which have a clear cross-border dimension. EU-level action has created legal certainty for service providers going cross-border, and the PSCs facilitate the required administrative process by requiring online procedures that can also be completed across borders.

The EU-mandated contact points all provide support for the implementation of EU legislation, and make other Member States' markets more accessible to businesses.

The wide mandate of SOLVIT covers all EU law governing the Single Market, including the four freedoms and supporting policies that have a direct impact on the Single Market. There is an EU added value due to the necessity on the one hand to provide fast and informal problem solving services to citizens and business when their EU rights are not respected by public authorities and on the other hand to contribute to a better functioning Single Market by fostering and promoting better compliance with EU law.

SOLVIT meets the need of EU citizens and businesses for an easy and informal out of court solution to their cross-border complaints regarding misapplication of EU law by national authorities. In terms of providing this kind of solution in the Internal Market area, SOLVIT is the only service provider currently covering this niche. With increasing numbers of EU citizens living in other Member States, there is growing demand for this service, and a growing SOLVIT caseload. SOLVIT fits a clear market segment which is supported by the user survey finding that the majority of citizens feel that no alternative service currently exists.

The same applies to the ECC Network, which provides help to citizens for their cross-border consumer problems with foreign traders. It is unlikely that Member States acting alone would have (been able to) set up this Network. The EEN and YEA – two services which are appreciated highly by mobile EU citizens and businesses – would not exist without EU funding.

EURES has become a pan-EU cooperation mechanism of employment services that needed EU legislation in order to succeed. There is no earmarked or specifically allocated budget nationally to support mobility, and overall it appears very unlikely that national funding sources could have enabled a similar scope and scale of activities. In addition, the funding provided through EURES has strengthened the network of EURES advisers, which in turn led to initiatives and joint activities between countries, thereby further integrating the European labour market.

Your Europe presents information for mobile businesses and citizens covering the EU and the national level. This kind of "information partnership" between the Commission and Member States can only be brokered and implemented through EU-level coordination action.

However, the potential "network effect" that could be achieved by closer collaboration of all the individual instruments presented in this evaluation, could be very much higher. All these instruments are important to businesses and citizens exploiting the opportunities of the Single Market. Yet they are not presented as a whole anywhere online, but in isolation³¹⁹. If the services functioned as a network, they should also live up to common quality standards, proposed by the Commission and agreed by Member States, which is currently not the case. In this respect, coherence is missing.

This logic also applies to the individual cases databases operated by YEA, SOLVIT, EEN and the ECC. All these case databases contain significant evidence of problems citizens and businesses experience with the internal market 'on the ground'. However, these cases are not brought together in a single database (per broad topic), not analysed collectively and not exploited for global internal market policy-making.

This is confirmed by the study 'Smart Single Market Regulation' of London Economics for the European Parliament³²⁰, which highlights that the Single Market tools potentially offer valuable information about the issues hindering a successful implementation of the different Single Market areas. This information could be used to inform new policy priorities and adjustments to existing programmes and policies. Conversely, policy adjustments might be able to address those factors that impair the effectiveness of assistance tools.

The study 'Smart Single Market Regulation' of London Economics for the European Parliament³²¹ also notes that demand for the services provided by the Single Market governance tools (which are all covered in this evaluation) has been continuously rising in the last decade. However, there is room for improving their effectiveness. In particular, long case handling periods (e.g. SOLVIT, ECC Net) and limited expertise of network staff (e.g. EEN, EURES) were mentioned. In addition, Member States do not always contribute as positively to the performance of the tools as they should (e.g. Your Europe). It concludes that, in order to use existing tools more effectively at the policy execution stage, coordination efforts and information flows between the different tools as well as between the tools and national authorities have to be enhanced.

Along the same lines, in April 2016 the European Parliament³²² stated its concern with the low level of awareness and understanding among Europeans of the services available, such as Your Europe, Your Europe Advice and SOLVIT, and noted that only 4 % of consumers and companies are aware of such tools and that the level of take-up of these services is very low at present. It called on the Commission and the Member States, with a view to resolving this problem, to foster further awareness of such tools, while examining whether the outcomes and responses they generate are adequate for users. Furthermore, it called on the Commission to work on better cooperation between the various assistance services, such as Your Europe and SOLVIT, with the aim of increasing user satisfaction.

³¹⁹ However, Your Europe is acting as a gateway that links to various services.

³²⁰ See 'Smart Single Market Regulation' (IP/A/IMCO/2015-02 PE 563.442), London Economics for the European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department A, Economic and Scientific Policy at the request of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee.

³²¹ Idem.

³²² See Resolution 'Towards improved single market regulation', P8_TA(2016)0105, (2015/2089(INI)), European Parliament, April 2016.

The EU could create additional value by creating a common recognisable brand under which all the services could operate, without necessarily losing their own labels, backed up by a common brand search engine and common quality criteria. This is currently lacking.

3.4.5 Why have the initiatives covered by this evaluation not fully delivered for their intended beneficiaries, and what problems has this caused?

The existing initiatives have all been designed with the best of intentions, but have not fully delivered and display weaknesses that should be explained by the underlying reasons. The underlying reasons are deeply rooted in national (and EU) administrations, and only strong and determined action will stand a chance of improving the current situation.

So which factors are chiefly to blame for the current under-performance of the instruments?

Silo based, administration-centred approaches, leading to fragmentation

All the instruments were constructed in isolation – without first checking how they fit into the bigger picture and what already exists, and whether existing structures could be built upon to make it less confusing and easier to find for the user. Both at EU and national level, administrations and Directorates-Generals have set up their own websites and assistance services, which are sometimes overlapping but also leaving very significant gaps in coverage. No overall governance structure, encompassing the EU and national level, exists to ensure consistency and a user-centric approach. No "overall concept" has been driving the website and service creation, and nobody has ever evaluated whether what is online forms a "coherent whole" for the user, in particular the cross-border one. This is the task of this evaluation, and it concludes that the state of play is an inconsistent set of initiatives without an overall user-oriented vision behind it.

There are various national contact points (for services, products, construction products, professional qualifications cross-border healthcare) that cater either to businesses or citizens, or both. Some of the legal bases require that information should be provided online, others do not. Very often, the target groups need to address more than one contact point when planning cross-border activities. But the individual contact points are usually run by separate national institutions which do not bother to inter-link contact points, to present them via one portal or to think of other ways (e.g. online questionnaires) of guiding users to the most appropriate one(s). Most services and goods contact points do not provide links to the other points even within the same country, let alone other countries³²³.

Only one Member State has so far brought together the services and goods contact points on one website, and one Member State runs an online enquiry form that guides businesses to the right contact point. Yet business stakeholders³²⁴ (e.g. Business Europe and Danish Business Forum as part of a submission to the REFIT Platform) have called for precisely this, as well as EuroChambres and EuroCommerce in their calls for single online business portals per Member State. When a recent study³²⁵ asked each country's product contact points' views as to a potential future joint national PCP and PCPC website, only few replies were received.

³²³ Result of Screening Report on Member States' Product Contact Points and Product Contact Points for Construction", Ecorys, 2017

³²⁴ See appendix 1: Business stakeholder positions.

³²⁵ Screening Report on Member States Product Contact Points and Product Contact Points for Construction, 2017.

They were about evenly split between positive and negative reactions. The reasons given for a negative view were one-off transition costs and the fact that different authorities are running the two contact points.

The EU and national-level silo based approach has led to fragmentation and unnecessary complexity that makes navigating the web for information confusing and difficult for the user.

EU and national administrations designing services from their perspective, not that of the user

When administrations prepare information for online publication, they tend to make this as easy as possible for themselves. Online information is often presented with legal jargon, limited to legal texts, is not systematically updated and does not cover everything the user needs to know.³²⁶ Assistance services do not publish their average response times or what kind of quality the user can expect of them, or do not ask for user feedback on the quality of the service. The product contact points are not even required to have a website, and their replies only refer to the "non-harmonised" parts of products but not the harmonised sector

Procedures are often not designed with the user in mind (who wants simple, intuitive procedures that can be carried out online) but follow the logic of the administration. For example, the very typical life event of "starting a business" contains the registration with the company register, VAT registration and registration with social security scheme. But these are not combined in a one-stop shop but remain separate³²⁷. The result of this administration-centric design of services is that they do not fully meet user needs, and that quality is deficient.

Furthermore, the "silo based approach" as outlined before has prevented a common approach to quality that could provide some guarantee of common basic quality standards to the user. The current patchwork (see table below: mix of degrees of quality standards and whether (contractually) binding or voluntary) cannot work as a coherent whole. The user does not know what to expect as most existing quality standards are not made public or are very difficult to find out (e.g. only by consulting an EU legal act), and will most likely not complain. If no user feedback mechanisms exist where feedback is used to improve the quality, this is basically made impossible in any case.

³²⁶ This is also supported by the 2016 eGovernment Benchmark report. User centricity: governments have advanced in making public services digital, but focussed less on the quality of the delivery from the user's perspective, which advanced poorly.

³²⁷ See World Bank Doing Business national statistics on "starting a business", <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data>.

Table 3.2

Level of quality standard, soft or hard law	Well-developed, legally binding	Well-developed, voluntary	Medium, Legally binding	Medium, voluntary	Very basic, legally binding	Very basic, voluntary
Instruments						
Points of Single Contact	x	x (Charter)				
Product Contact Points				x	x	
Product Contact Points for Construction					x	x
SOLVIT		x				
Your Europe		x				
Your Europe Advice	x (binding contractually)					
Enterprise Europe Network			x (binding contractually)			
EURES	x					
European Consumer Centres Network				x		

The evaluation shows that well-developed but voluntary approaches to quality can work well if all Member States are fully on board. However, they can also quickly reach their limits in an environment of scarce resources competing for attention with legally binding tasks. This is the case for Your Europe, SOLVIT and the Charter for the Points of Single Contact. The of business stakeholders, who have called in a REFIT action for the PSC Charter criteria to be made mandatory, is that a soft-law approach fares worse than a hard law one.

The monitoring of compliance with quality criteria is challenging and costly and can usually only be done with external contractors and a mystery shopping approach. The new EURES Regulation has adopted well-developed and binding quality criteria and will monitor compliance through the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data at national level, including through customer satisfaction surveys. A detailed EURES Performance Measurement System will be foreseen in an implementing act. With a well-defined quality monitoring system in place, and a governance structure with Member States where quality issues can be discussed and dealt with, it is probably safe to argue that a well-defined and legally binding quality system will make the biggest headway.

Technical solutions designed 10 years ago no longer reflect technical progress and best practice of today

When the Services Directive was adopted in 2006, it foresaw (in Art. 8 (1)) that all procedures within the scope of the Services Directive "may be easily completed, at a distance and by electronic means" via the Points of Single Contact. Ten years ago when Member States drew up this provision, it was considered revolutionary, as most were just launching their e-government programmes and many procedures were still being carried out offline. Nowadays, this provision has become almost outdated. It does not foresee "full onlineness" in the sense of enabling the user to carry out the entire procedure within the website environment, and without using email, fax or similar. The example of Estonia and many other "forerunner" Member States shows that EU citizens and businesses can be enabled to complete most of their interactions with the administration fully online. This trend is supported by very

ambitious national e-government programmes, EU funding possibilities for e-government via the social and regional funds, the Connecting Europe Facility and the ISA Programme, and technical evolutions in the commercial sector with which the public sector is expected to keep pace.

When Regulation (EC) 764/2008 was adopted in 2008 and set up the Product Contact Points (and three years later Regulation (EC) 305/2011 creating the Construction Product Contact Points, which was modelled on 764/2008), it obliged Member States to provide information on technical rules applicable to a specific type of product, information whether that type of product is subject to a requirement for prior authorisation, together with information concerning the principle of mutual recognition, contact details of competent authorities and remedies. Nowadays, it would appear evident that these information requirements would need to be fulfilled via a website. But as this was not foreseen and only recommended, more than a third of Member States are not even publishing the contact details online, and a minority of Member States have not even created webpages.

The result is that "first generation" technical implementation solutions in legislation – be it for procedures or information – have not kept pace with the evolution in technology and users' expectations (based on what they experience in the commercial world). They have led to sub-optimal solutions in the case of some Member States that did not adopt state-of-the-art solutions exceeding what had been enshrined in law. The "digital divide" across Member States is large³²⁸. With hindsight, our legal instruments have not been ambitious enough compared with what can and should be required today.

And the Commission learnt from the Services Directive that it should have put more emphasis on helping Member States with the implementation of e-government. This not only refers to EU funding – which is available and many Member States have used it for financing e-government programmes – but also the necessary technical enablers (developed in the form of large scale pilots over the past few years). Many implementation problems could have been avoided if the e-IDAS Regulation had already been in place 10 years earlier.

National administrations' neglect of the non-national user

Most Member States do not have users from other Member States "on their radar" when designing e-government solutions. These are not their "natural clients". 50% of the public authorities replying to the public consultation for the single digital gateway said that they do not take into consideration the specific needs of users from other EU countries³²⁹ when putting procedures online or planning to do so. And as the foreign user has got "no voice" and is not part of any constituency to which public administrations listen, his specific needs in terms of access to information, assistance services and procedures are not catered for³³⁰. Cost

³²⁸ eGovernment Benchmark 2016, "A turning point for eGovernment development in Europe", Capgemini, IDC, Sogeti, Politecnico de Milano, 2016, p. 6: "A string of countries from the South-West to the North-East of Europe perform above the European average and are also showing stronger progress than the European average, while most of the other European countries are behind the European average on both indicators."

³²⁹ In the question, reference was made to language covers, technical aspects such as e-identification and payment, or legal aspects such as whether foreign documents need to be certified.

³³⁰ Idem, p. 10: "25% of the services required of foreign entrepreneurs to start their business in another country is completely offline: meaning there is no information – let alone a service – available online. In contrast, entrepreneurs starting a business in their own country face such issues in only 2% of the cases. Foreign

considerations also come into play, as translations have a cost and the benefit of this cost for the administration is not obvious.

What are the foreign user's "special needs"?

In a nutshell, his needs are for online information, assistance services and procedures to be made available in English; online procedures without stumbling blocks (such as: national authentication and payment means only, form fields only accepting national data); and help with submitting evidence (documents or data) as part of the procedure, i.e. online and without the need for certification and translation. According to an IMI all user survey in 2015, when dealing with foreign documents, 43% of administrations require often (or very often) original documents and 45% require often (or very often) certified translations (45%). The finding of all Commission e-government benchmark reports and relevant Commission studies on the performance of the Points of Single Contact is that the foreign user's accessibility to information, assistance and procedures is much more limited than for the national one. At the same time, his need for smooth online solutions is even greater than for the national user, as he cannot easily visit an administration to drop off evidence or to find out about requirements.

For the services under review, the problem of "lack of accessibility for foreign users" does not pose itself across the board. The services that are fully (Your Europe, Your Europe Advice) or partly (Enterprise Europe Network, EURES, European Consumer Centres' Network) funded by the Commission all ensure cross-border services and mainly cater to the foreign user. SOLVIT, which is a national service with a cross-border reach, has this as its mission as well. The problem lies with the 100% national services, i.e. the services and goods contact points (and also national websites which are within Your Europe's remit), which primarily have a national clientele.

Successful national e-government strategies have further widened the gap between national and foreign users. They have allowed national citizens and companies to benefit from full online interaction with the administration, and good websites in the national language, while foreign citizens and companies still need to follow off-line paper-based procedures and find ways to overcome the language barrier. This has created new Single Market obstacles for EU citizens and businesses from other Member States. These problems largely go unnoticed as foreigners have got no lobby that could complain on their behalf. They usually just pay expensive private services to sort everything out for them. And as pointed out before, the evidence from YEA, SOLVIT, ECC and EEN cases has not been used effectively by the Commission as valuable insights for policy-making.

3.4.6 Conclusion

The evaluation has pointed to a number of problems that concern the individual services, as well as a lack of effectiveness, efficiency and coherence that concerns them as a package of Single Market services for citizens and businesses.

start-ups are also less able to find/access information on services (33% vs. 39%) and using services across borders is only possible in 27% of cases (compared to 46% of services in the national context). Most common barriers are language, lack of information on the foreign website, and the need for a physical encounter to perform the service successfully."

Effectiveness of existing services

As far as the effectiveness of individual services is concerned, recurring and cross-cutting problems pointed out are: lack of visibility and findability online, lack of quality and under-use. 92% of consumers and businesses are unaware of any online services at European level that they could turn to in case of problems.³³¹ In addition, gaps exist with regard to national-level information, which is either not online or only in national language, and procedures can often not be carried out online by foreign users – even where this is possible for domestic users. The existing legal framework also contains a number of gaps³³². Cross-border accessibility remains one of the key development points in order for contact points and other portals to fully support the Single Market.

Nevertheless, the level of quality, user-centricity and accessibility for foreign users is quite divergent for the different services.

For services funded by the EU, quality criteria have been included in contracts (Enterprise Europe Network, Your Europe Advice). These services are contractually obliged to cater for foreign users.

For services created through binding EU law, quality criteria have proven to be too general (Points of Single Contact) or hardly exist (Products Contact Points). Additional voluntary quality criteria (Charter for PSCs) have had limited success.³³³ Access for foreign users is still limited.

For services created through non-binding EU law and managed by the Commission (SOLVIT, Your Europe³³⁴) quality criteria have been agreed, but due to their voluntary nature some Member States are fully onboard, others are not. Access for foreign citizens is guaranteed for these services.

Efficiency of existing services

The efficiency part of the evaluation produces a mixed picture. The EU-level assistance services are considered cost efficient when taking into account the savings and other benefits these services provide to businesses and citizens as compared to much more costly private alternative services. However, the national-level assistance services (PSCs, PCPs and PCPCs) can only be considered as partially efficient. The cost effectiveness aspect is difficult to assess, as data are missing, but they are under-performing for businesses as far as their effectiveness is concerned. Moreover, the low quality of their websites represents a missed opportunity to reduce the number of requests through better online up-front information, and thus to be even more cost-efficient³³⁵.

There is scope for more efficiency and easier "findability" online if the individual services promoted their services under a common brand name. The EU could create added value here, as one recognizable brand, backed up by a common brand search engine, could only be set up at the EU level.

³³¹ A European Single Point of Contact, European Parliament, 2015.

³³² With regard to information for citizens, and for businesses the fields not covered by the Services Directive and the PCPs only covering the non-harmonised sector.

³³³ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/services/docs/services-dir/psc-charter_en.pdf.

³³⁴ For the content that Your Europe aims at, see Annex 13.

³³⁵ On the premise that personalised assistance is always more expensive than online information.

Coherence of existing services

The lack of coherence refers to the fact that all the instruments that were evaluated were created by EU level action, but do not operate as a whole: they are dispersed, incomplete, not sufficiently linked up and not sufficiently user-friendly. A common approach to ensuring quality through minimum quality standards is missing. There is no overall EU-Member States governance structure that would assess and ensure consistency of all the instruments. Whilst the legal framework promotes synergies, these have not been sufficiently exploited by the Member States (in the absence of binding obligations). In particular, contact points for goods and services are distinct for most Member States, whilst businesses tend to demand them as a package. On the European level, the problem lies primarily with duplicating content on Commission websites. A successful sign-posting policy is, however, in place.

Reasons for the under-performance of existing services

The underlying reasons for the under-performance (for the user) of the existing services are:

- Silo based, administration-centred approaches, leading to fragmentation
In the absence of a coordinated, holistic approach from the perspective of the user, national and EU administrations have acted as "silos", dealing with related but different topics on a multitude of single topic portals that are not inter-linked, and only covering the policy areas within their mandates. This has led to complexity, lack of coherence and restricted online findability.
- Administration-centred design
EU and national administrations designing services from their perspective, not that of the user. Both at EU and national level, administration-centred service design has traditionally produced public services that accommodated more the needs of the administration than that of the user in terms of clear and easy-to-understand online explanations. It is easier for the administration to 'launch and leave' a new webportal than to organise for regular and systematic updates of its content. The regular e-government benchmark reports of the Commission all point to this problem of quality content taking second place to making content available online.
- Technical solutions designed 10 years ago no longer reflect technical progress and best practice of today
Existing first generation services could not benefit from well developed digital solutions or national e-government architectures, as these were just being developed. Certain technical solutions foreseen in legal instruments of 10 years ago have been overtaken by technical progress, and not all Member States have been willing to make the necessary adaptations (and investments) to keep their technical systems up-to-date.
- National administrations' neglect of the non-national user.
National administrations concentrate on national digital solutions; accessibility for foreign users is at best an afterthought. Foreign users have got no "voice" in decision-making, and their needs in terms of language coverage and access to procedures are generally not taken into account. This manifests itself in various ways, such as form fields of procedures only accepting national data, foreign evidence (e.g. documents) not being accepted as part of the online procedure, payment possibilities only being accessible to nationals, foreign e-IDs not being accepted and procedures only in the national language(s).

APPENDIX 1: Existing framework and studies and evaluations used

Instrument	Currently applicable rules	Studies/evaluations
Points of single contact (EUGO)	Art. 6-8 and 21 of Directive 2006/123/EC	- "The <u>Performance</u> of the Points of Single Contact. An Assessment against the PSC Charter" Capgemini and Eurochambres study, June 2015 - Evaluation for the Services Card as part of the impact assessment, 2016 - REFIT Platform Opinion on the submission by the Danish Business Forum and BusinessEurope on the Point of Single Contact, June 2016 - Single Market Scoreboard data, 2016
Product contact points	Art. 9 and 10 of Regulation (EC) 764/2008	- Yearly reports on the application of Regulation (EC) No 764/2008 (internal documents of GROW in a form of note to file) - draft Commission evaluation on mutual recognition - CSW Part 1 Evaluation of the Internal Market Legislation for Industrial Products Accompanying the document the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee. - "Evaluation of the Application of the mutual recognition principle in the field of goods"(ENTR/172/PP/2012/FC-Lot 4), 2015 - Communication from the Commission to the EP and the Council "First Report on the application of Regulation (EC) No 764/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 laying down procedures relating to the application of certain national technical rules to products lawfully marketed in another Member State and repealing Decision No 3052/95/EC", COM(2012) 292final. - Results from public consultation on the mutual recognition regulation, 2016 - "Screening Report on Member States Product Contact Points and Product Contact Points for Construction", Ecorys, 2017
Construction product contact points	Art. 10 of Regulation (EC) 305/2011	- "<u>Analysis of implementation of the Construction Products Regulation</u>", Report by RPA of 31July 2015 for GROW and <u>Annexes</u>. - "Screening Report on Member States Product Contact Points and Product Contact Points for Construction", Ecorys, 2017

Annexes to the impact assessment on the single digital gateway

Instrument	Currently applicable rules	Studies/evaluations
SOLVIT	Recommendation 2013/461/EU	- <u>Evaluation</u> of SOLVIT, cses, 2011 - Single Market Scoreboard data, 2016 - Ongoing Commission evaluation that will accompany the initiative 'action Plan to reinforce SOLVIT'
Your Europe	Part of Decision 2004/387/EC on the IDABC Programme Your Europe Action Plan COM(2013) 636 final	- Single Market Scoreboard data, 2016 - Study on information and assistance needs of businesses operating cross-border within the EU, including gap and cost analysis, Draft Final Report, January 2017
Your Europe Advice	Your Europe Action Plan COM(2013) 636 final	- <u>Evaluation</u> of the Your Europe Advice Service, ICF GHK, 2014 - Single Market Scoreboard data, 2016
Enterprise Europe Network	Regulation (EU) 1287/2013 establishing the COSME Programme, as well as yearly Commission implementing decision on the adoption of the work programme and the financing decision	- Final evaluation of the impact of the Enterprise Europe Network, 2008-2014, Technopolis, 2015 - Single Market Scoreboard data, 2016
EURES	Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2016 on a European network of employment services (EURES), workers' access to mobility services and the further integration of labour markets, and amending Regulations (EU) No 492/2011 and (EU) No 1296/2013	- Impact assessment accompanying the EURES Regulation, 2014, SWD(2014) 9 final of 17/1/2014 - Single Market Scoreboard data, 2016
European Consumer Centres Network		- Evaluation of the European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net), CPEC, 2011 - Single Market Scoreboard data, 2016

Further studies and evidence used:

- J. Montesgudo, A. Rutkowski, D. Lorenzani, "Part 2: Assessing the economic impact of setting up Points of Single Contact: an approximation based on the Doing Business" in "The economic impact of the Services Directive: a first assessment following implementation", Economic Papers No 456, June 2012
- "Services Directive implementation survey – the Chambers' perspective on the Points of Single Contact, Eurochambres, Policy Survey, 7th edition, January 2011
- "Are the Points of Single Contact truly making things easier for European companies? – Services Directive implementation Report, Business Europe, November 2011
- Court of Auditors Special Report No 5/2016 "Has the Commission ensured effective implementation of the Services Directive?"
-
- European Parliament, Report on Non-Tariff Barriers in the Single Market, 2016
- Better Governance for the Single Market', European Commission Communication COM (2012) 259 final.
- December 2015-January 2016 panel survey on the European Internal Market conducted by the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Upgrading the Single Market: more opportunities for people and business", Brussels, 28.10.2015 COM (2015) 550 final.
- 'Smart Single Market Regulation' (IP/A/IMCO/2015-02 PE 563.442), London Economics for the European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department A, Economic and Scientific Policy at the request of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee
- Resolution 'Towards improved single market regulation', P8_TA(2016)0105, (2015/2089(INI)), European Parliament, April 2016.

Stakeholder positions used:

Eurochambres survey "EU Internal Market Barriers and Solutions: The Business Perspective", 23 September 2015

EuroCommerce Position Paper on the single digital gateway, "Giving businesses (especially SMEs) better access to information", 6/12/2016

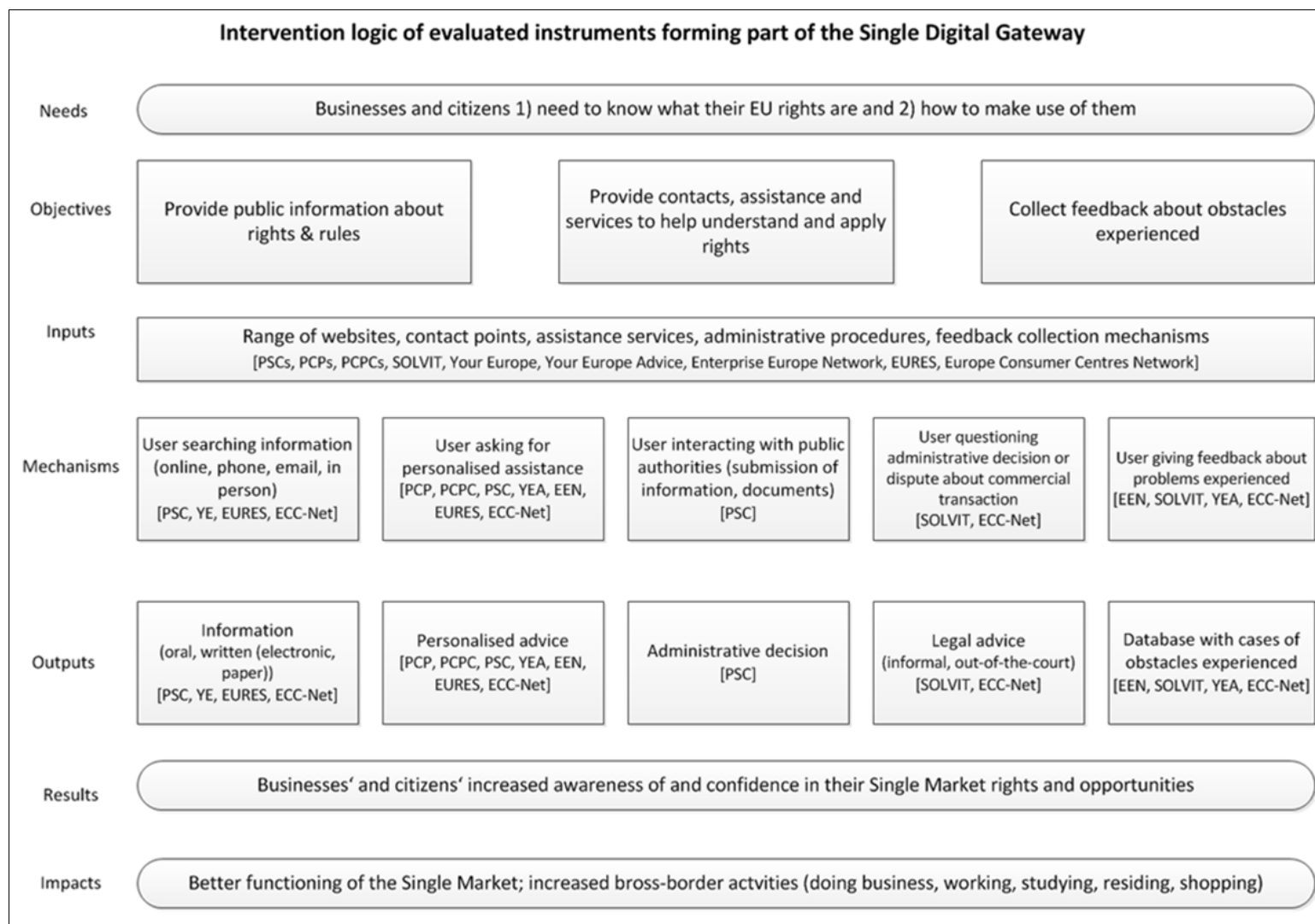
EuroCommerce Position Paper, Contribution to the forthcoming Commission Single Market strategy 2015, 3/7/2015

Business Europe position paper "Building a true single market for Europe – business priorities", 28 September 2015

Danish Business forum, proposal submitted to the REFIT Platform, July 2015

Business Europe Strategy Paper "Remaining obstacles to a true single market for services" of December 2014

APPENDIX 2: Intervention Logic



APPENDIX 3: Information on implementation of the instruments

	ESTABLISHMENT	USAGE
Points of Single Contact	Created between 2006-2009, may have two forms: online and off-line (physical points of contact). They are managed by public authorities, sometimes in co-operation with Chambers of Commerce. Sometimes online PSCs are part of the e-government portals (and part of e-government strategies).	The recent survey on the PSC (June – August 2016) shows that almost all PSCs use web analytics programmes to collect information about the PSC users. Majority of PSCs (18) regularly process and evaluate the collected information. 19 PSCs provided the number of visitors (returning and unique) in 2015. EE PSC with 5.468,908 visitors is by far the most often visited PSC, followed by FR (over 4.000.000), SE (over 3.500.000), IT (over 2.000.000), PL and LUX (over 1.000.000). 18 PSCs are monitoring the requests for information or assistance. As the numbers vary enormously, different methods of monitoring/counting have been introduced: data for 2015: 71.000 (IT), 20.000 per month (PL), 32.000 (NO), 20.000 (SE) and 5.680 (FR) or 554 (NL). The majority of these PSCs can distinguish between nationals and foreigners and the method of contact (by phone or e-mail). The performance is (usually) monitored through the Single Market Scoreboard.
Product Contact Points	In operation since 2009, part of national authorities. The list of e-mail addresses is published on a Commission website.	MS are obliged to send yearly reports to the Commission summarising the activities of the PCPs. Out of the 22 annual reports received in 2015, 16 only indicate the number of inquiries received. The other Member States mentioned the activity of PCPs, without indicating the number of questions they received. Few MSs conduct national surveys on the usefulness of the PCPs. The performance of PCPs is not regularly monitored and they are not part of the Single Market Scoreboard.
Product Contact Points for Construction	In operation since July 2013, part of national authorities. The list of contact details (telephones, e-mail addresses) is published on a Commission website.	MS are obliged to send yearly reports to the Commission summarising the activities of the PCPCs. The performance of PCPs is not regularly monitored and they are not part of the Single Market Scoreboard. A study commissioned by the Commission shows that in 2015 the number of requests put to PCPC was very low – between 15 and 114 per replying MS. Nothing is known about the quality of the replies provided.

	ESTABLISHMENT	USAGE
SOLVIT	Launched in 2002 as an informal network of SOLVIT centres being part of the national administration. Operates using an online procedure since 2013.	The online system (part of the Commission IT infrastructure) allows for: • registration of the complaints, • registration of answers and the response time • monitoring of the quality of answers provided. Over 2000 complaints (eligible cases) are introduced to SOLVIT every year. They are answered within 70 days (average). In 2015 SOLVIT helped more than 4 700 people by resolving their problem, clarifying the issue(s) or signposting them towards another service. Performance is monitored through the Single Market Scoreboard.
Your Europe	The YE portal was launched in 2005. It is part of the inter-institutional “Europe” website, and a joint project between the COM and Member States (including EEA). It contains information needed for citizens and business in 23 languages.	The portal is regularly monitored and efforts are made to constantly increase its findability (search engine optimisation). Use of the site is growing fast – over one million monthly visits in 2015 (800 000 in 2014) Continued high level of satisfaction – more than 90% 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' in online user surveys. Performance is monitored through the Single Market Scoreboard.
Your Europe Advice	In operation since 1996 - EU-run advisory service answering citizens' and enterprises' queries (by phone or online) about their EU rights in the Single Market. It relies on a network of more than 60 legal experts based in all Member States (including EEA) who handle enquiries in all 24 official EU languages.	Between 2009 and 2015 the number of enquiries more than doubled reaching 25.569 in 2015. Service efficiency is measured primarily by the speed of replies. The aim is to reply to enquiries within 3 working days. Over 95% of replies are sent within that deadline and over 99% within four working days. Performance is monitored through the Single Market Scoreboard.
Enterprise Europe Network	Launched in February 2008 and co-financed under COSME programme. Network of 600 member organisations (including chambers of commerce and industry, technology centres, universities and development agencies).	EEN helps SMEs innovate and grow internationally. Its performance is monitored through “Key Performance Indicators” and verified against “Achievement Guidelines on Advisory Services Outcomes”. Not part of the Single Market Scoreboard.

	ESTABLISHMENT	USAGE
EURES	Established in 1993 as a network of employment services (through the National Coordination Offices) in EU/EEA countries, now operating under Regulation (EU) 2016/589 which constitutes its legal basis.	The EURES network provides job mobility information (through 960 advisers) recruitment/placement services in a form of a portal where jobseekers and employers can create their personal accounts. The performance of EURES is monitored yearly in the Single Market Scoreboard.
European Consumer Centres Network	Set up in 2005 by a decision of the European Commission and national governments. It comprises 30 centres covering the EU/EEA. They are hosted by either the national consumer protection authority or a consumer association.	In 2015, the network had over 93 964 contacts from consumers and received over 38 048 complaints. In 2015, the ECC was able to help over half the complainants. • 51% of complex cases (where more than one centre had to be involved) were resolved amicably • 16.35% of the closed complex complaints were transferred to other organisations (of which 26% were alternative dispute resolution entities; 11.1% to enforcement bodies and 27.8% to courts). The achievements of the ECC are presented yearly in the Single Market Scoreboard.

ANNEX 4: GAP ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL ONLINE INFORMATION AND PROCEDURES

Methodology for the gap analysis

4.1 Information

The information coverage represents the degree to which a random user can find information on the topics to be covered by the single digital gateway, in each Member State.

EC desk research, 2016/2017 - mystery shopping

In order to estimate this information coverage, a team of "assessors" looked for answers to a number of questions selected across 8 areas.

Each assessor was attributed with one or several Member States, and had to look for answers to the following questions:

- Area 1. Starting, running and closing a business
 - Question 1: how can I open a business in this MS ? (level of detail required: list of the different steps to follow, and explanation of under which authority each falls)
 - Question 2: what different legal types of companies can I choose from?
 - Question 3: how do I close my business?
- Area 2. Hiring staff
 - Question 1: what are the labour law rules (e.g. nb of working hours per week, min wage)
 - Question 2: what is the average wage cost, gross and net wage in this MS?
 - Question 3: Are there any incentives to hire disadvantaged groups (elder workers, young people, or persons with disabilities)
- Area 3. Paying taxes
 - Question 1: How can I estimate the company taxes I will pay (what is the tax rate and the base)?
 - Question 2: Am I entitled to tax benefits?
 - Question 3: Whom do I owe taxes at the federal, regional and local levels?
- Area 4. Selling goods
 - Question 1: Is there an overview on the rules my products have to comply with?
 - Question 2: Are there regulations that define requirements for selling dolls online?
 - Question 3: Is there a summary of the regulations that applies to paper cups?
- Area 5. Providing services
 - Question 1: what national rules do I have to comply with to provide freight transport services?
 - Question 2: how do I get my professional qualifications as a hairdresser recognised?
 - Question 3: what licences do I need to apply for in order to open a restaurant?
- Area 6. Getting funds
 - Question 1: What are the public funding programmes available for my business at the national level?
 - Question 2: as an SME, to which funds do I get access?
 - Question 3: what innovation funds are available in this MS?
- Area 7. Complying with environmental rules (certification and labels)
 - Question 1: how can I get an EMAS certification?
 - Question 2: if I want to operate a factory, what rules do I have to comply with in terms of waste management?

- Question 3: what are the main administrative requirements for setting up a contingency plan for environmental risks management?
- Area 8. Complying with health and safety conditions
 - Question 1: Is there an overview of what I need to do to respect legislation on health and safety at work ?
 - Question 2: what trainings do I have to give my employees concerning health and safety?
 - Question 3: what are the specific safety requirements in the construction sector?

This process was repeated for information in the national language and in English. For a limited number of Member States, for which no native speaker was available, assessment was based on the information that could be found in English as well as through research using machine translation.

Drawing conclusions

The total number of questions to which an answer could be found on public authorities' websites was then calculated for each Member State. Finally, a percentage was calculated by dividing the total number of questions that could be answered by 24.

4.2 Procedures

As regards procedures, the objective was to assess the degree to which a selected list of procedures were online in each Member State. Five degrees of "onlineness" were defined:

- Information online and procedures fully online :
 - 1/ Information is available online
 - 2/ The whole procedure can be carried out online, on the website of the responsible public organisation, without the need for the user to provide anything offline
- Information online and procedures partly online :
 - 1/ Information is available online
 - 2/ Forms to be filled in for the procedure are available online, but the user needs to provide part of or all documents offline or per email
- Information online and procedures offline:
 - 1/ Information is available online
 - 2/ The procedure is not online at all
- Nothing online: nothing can be found online, neither information nor access to an online procedure
- This procedure is not managed at the national level, but is decentralised. Therefore no assessment of the degree of onlineness was done.

EC desk research, 2016/2017 - mystery shopping

A team of "assessors" looked for the online availability of a list of 20 procedures in each Member State, and rated each procedure according along the degrees of onlineness described above.

The procedures that were assessed are the following:

For businesses:	For citizens:
Registration of business activity	Registering a change of address
VAT registration	Requesting or renewing ID card or passport

VAT returns	Request a birth certificate
Corporate/business tax declaration	Request recognition of diploma from a foreign EU national
Recognition of professional qualification	Apply for a study grant
Registration for income tax	Enrol in university
Registration with national insurance scheme as employer	Declaring income taxes
Notification of cessation of activity subject to VAT	Register for social security benefits
Payment of social contributions for employees and payroll withholding tax	Register a car
Registration of employees with pension schemes	Register for a pension

This assessment was done both for domestic and cross-border users.

In a number of cases, in order to access the procedure itself, Member States authorities' websites require identification. In those cases, it was not possible to go through the procedure itself and the assessment was based on the information available on the authorities' websites before accessing the procedure.

For a limited number for Member States, for which no native speaker was available, assessment was based on the information that could be found in English as well as through research using machine translation.

Cross-checking with other sources of information

Two other sources of information were then used to double check the findings of the first exercise:

- a study on administrative formalities of important procedures & administrative burden for business, 2016/2017. This study provided a table assessing, for 8 of the 10 business procedures, the degree to which the procedure was online in each Member State.
- the public consultation on the single digital gateway, 2016 – self-assessment by national public authorities: 16 Member States provided a self-assessment of the degree of onlineness of their procedures.

When the comparison of the 3 sources of information showed differences, it was considered that the self-assessment from the public consultation was the most reliable information, followed by the study on administrative formalities, and then the mystery shopping.

Drawing conclusions

This exercise enabled to produce 2 tables:

- a table showing, for domestic users, the degree of onlineness per procedure and per Member State,
- a table showing, for users from other Member States, the degree of onlineness per procedure and per Member State.

On this basis, 4 indicators were calculated:

- the number of procedures fully online for domestic users (out of 20),
- the number of procedures partly online for domestic users (out of 20),
- the number of procedures fully online for users from other Member States (out of 20),
- the number of procedures partly online for users from other Member States (out of 20).

4.3 Results of the gap analysis

Table 4.1: Overview gap analysis for information and procedures

Member State	Information coverage in national language(s) (% out of 24)	Information coverage in English	Procedures fully online for domestic users (% out of 20)	Procedures partly online for domestic users (% out of 20)	Procedures fully accessible online for foreign users (% out of 20)	Procedures partly accessible online for foreign users (% out of 20)
Estonia	100%	96%	55%	25%	45%	35%
Luxembourg	100%	83%	40%	40%	35%	45%
France	96%	29%	60%	25%	55%	25%
Finland	96%	96%	80%	5%	60%	15%
UK	88%	88%	89%	0%	79%	11%
Denmark	88%	75%	88%	12%	56%	13%
Belgium	88%	71%	75%	20%	60%	15%
Spain	88%	79%	53%	32%	53%	26%
Sweden	83%	58%	100%	0%	67%	28%
Netherlands	83%	83%	65%	25%	65%	15%
Poland	79%	63%	87%	0%	73%	7%
Malta	79%	79%	75%	10%	75%	10%
Slovakia	79%	58%	42%	37%	26%	32%
Portugal	71%	42%	63%	11%	63%	5%
Austria	71%	17%	33%	47%	0%	27%
Latvia	67%	54%	55%	40%	45%	20%
Germany	63%	58%	47%	33%	33%	13%
Ireland	63%	63%	45%	30%	35%	30%
Greece	63%	63%	15%	30%	5%	20%
Lithuania	58%	38%	70%	25%	20%	25%
Slovenia	54%	54%	40%	5%	30%	5%
Croatia	54%	50%	25%	60%	20%	55%
Romania	54%	21%	25%	40%	20%	25%
Bulgaria	50%	42%	55%	10%	20%	20%
Czech Republic	50%	33%	15%	80%	5%	25%
Italy	46%	21%	70%	10%	6%	33%
Cyprus	42%	42%	25%	30%	25%	25%
Hungary	38%	46%	45%	50%	20%	45%
EU	Average EU = 71 %	Average EU = 57%	Average EU = 55%	Average EU = 26%	Average EU = 39%	Average EU = 23%

Table 4.2: Degree to which national procedures can be handled online by a domestic user (key on page 22)

Degree to which national procedures can be handled online by a domestic user																														
Member States		AT	BE	BG	HR	CY	CZ	DK	EE	FI	FR	DE	EL	HU	IE	IT	LV	LT	LU	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SK	SI	ES	SE	UK	
Business	Registration of business activity																													
	VAT registration																													
	VAT returns																													
	Corporate/business tax declaration																													
	Recognition of professional qualification acquired in another MS																													
	Registration for income tax																													
	Registration with national social insurance scheme upon establishment																													
	Notification of cessation of activity subject to VAT																													
	Payment of social contributions and payroll withholding tax for employees																													
	Registration of employees with pension and insurance scheme																													
Citizens	Registering a change of address																													
	Requesting/renewing ID card or passport																													
	Request a birth certificate																													
	Request recognition of diploma acquired in another MS																													
	Apply for a study grant																													
	Enrol in university																													
	Declaration of income taxes																													
	Register for social security benefits																													
	Register a car previously registered in another EU country																													
	Register for a pension																													

Table 4.3: Degree to which national procedures can be handled online by a user from another Member State (key on next page)

Degree to which national procedures can be handled online by a user from another Member State		AT	BE	BG	HR	CY	CZ	DK	EE	FI	FR	DE	EL	HU	IE	IT	LV	LT	LU	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SK	SI	ES	SE	UK
Businesses	Registration of business activity																												
	VAT registration																												
	VAT returns																												
	Corporate/business tax declaration																												
	Recognition of professional qualification																												
	Registration for income tax																												
	Registration with national social insurance scheme upon establishment																												
	Notification of cessation of activity subject to VAT																												
	Payment of social contributions and payroll withholding tax for employees																												
	Registration of employees with pension and insurance scheme																												
Citizens	Registering a change of address																												
	Requesting/renewing ID card or passport																												
	Request a birth certificate																												
	Request recognition of diploma																												
	Apply for a study grant																												
	Enrol in university																												
	Declaration of income taxes																												
	Register for social security benefits																												
	Register a car previously registered in another EU country																												
	Register for a pension																												

	Information online and procedures fully online : 1/ Information is available online 2/ The whole procedure can be carried out online, on the website of the responsible public organisation, without the need for the user to provide anything offline
	Information online and procedures partly online : 1/ Information is available online 2/ Forms to be filled in for the procedure are available online, but the user needs to provide part of or all documents offline or per email
	Information online and procedures offline: 1/ Information is available online 2/ The procedure is not online at all
	Nothing online: nothing can be found online, neither information nor access to an online procedure
	No assessment of the degree of onlineness was possible, for instance because this procedure is not managed at the national level, but is decentralised.

4.4 Information provided per area

Table 4.4

Area	Availability of information in the national language (%)	Availability of information in English (%)
Starting, running and closing a business	90%	80%
Paying taxes	86%	73%
Getting funds	86%	70%
Hiring staff	79%	60%
Providing services	68%	50%
Complying with health and safety conditions	62%	33%
Complying with environmental rules (certification and labels)	58%	39%
Selling goods	40%	27%
Average EU	71%	54%
Source: EC desk research, January 2017. Assessment was done for 8 selected areas. For each selected area, assessors looked for answers to 3 specific questions, and for related assistance services.		

Table 4.5: Cost of covering missing information per Member State

Member State	Information coverage in national language(s)	Cost for each MS to put online missing information (100% = 267 man-days)	Information coverage in English
Estonia	100%	0	96%
Luxembourg	100%	0	83%
Finland	96%	11	96%
France	96%	11	29%
UK	88%	33	88%
Spain	88%	33	79%
Denmark	88%	33	75%
Belgium	88%	33	71%
Netherlands	83%	45	83%
Sweden	83%	45	58%
Malta	79%	56	79%
Poland	79%	56	63%
Slovakia	79%	56	58%
Portugal	71%	78	42%
Austria	71%	78	17%
Latvia	67%	89	54%
Ireland	63%	100	63%
Greece	63%	100	63%
Germany	63%	100	58%
Lithuania	58%	111	38%
Slovenia	54%	122	54%
Croatia	54%	122	50%
Romania	54%	122	21%
Bulgaria	50%	134	42%
Czech Republic	50%	134	33%
Italy	46%	145	21%
Cyprus	42%	156	42%
Hungary	38%	167	46%
EU	Average EU = 71 %	Average EU = 77.46 man-days	Average EU = 56%

Table 4.6: Cost of covering missing procedures (out of 20) per Member State

Member State	Absolute number of procedures not fully online	Estimated cost	ESIF funding allocated to e-government and ICT 2014-2020³³⁶
Sweden	2	€ 1.2 m	€ 5 m*
UK	3	€ 1.8 m	
Finland	4	€ 2.4 m	
Belgium	5	€ 3.0 m	
Denmark	5	€ 3.0 m	
Malta	5	€ 3.0 m	€ 5 m*
Lithuania	6	€ 3.6 m	€ 244 m
Italy	6	€ 3.6 m	€ 135 m
Netherlands	7	€ 4.2 m	
Poland	7	€ 4.2 m	€ 153 m
France	8	€ 4.8 m	€ 66 m*
Portugal	8	€ 4.8 m	€ 278 m
Estonia	9	€ 5.4 m	€ 204 m
Latvia	9	€ 5.4 m	€ 173 m
Bulgaria	9	€ 5.4 m	€ 118 m
Spain	10	€ 6.0 m	€ 542 m*
Ireland	11	€ 6.6 m	
Hungary	11	€ 6.6 m	€ 601 m
Luxembourg	12	€ 7.2 m	
Slovakia	12	€ 7.2 m	€ 352 m*
Slovenia	12	€ 7.2 m	€ 62 m
Germany	13	€ 7.8 m	
Austria	15	€ 9.0 m	
Croatia	15	€ 9.0 m	€ 191 m
Romania	15	€ 9.0 m	€ 188 m
Cyprus	15	€ 9.0 m	€ 50 m*
Greece	17	€ 10.2 m	€ 173 m
Czech Republic	17	€ 10.2 m	€ 330 m

³³⁶ The figures are allocations to those thematic objectives of ESIF funds that mention e-government or ICT development. In the absence of other information, the amounts marked with an asterisk are for e-government solutions only. Source: Summary of Operational Programmes supporting institutional capacity building 2014-2020, European Commission, September 2016, and Commission data.

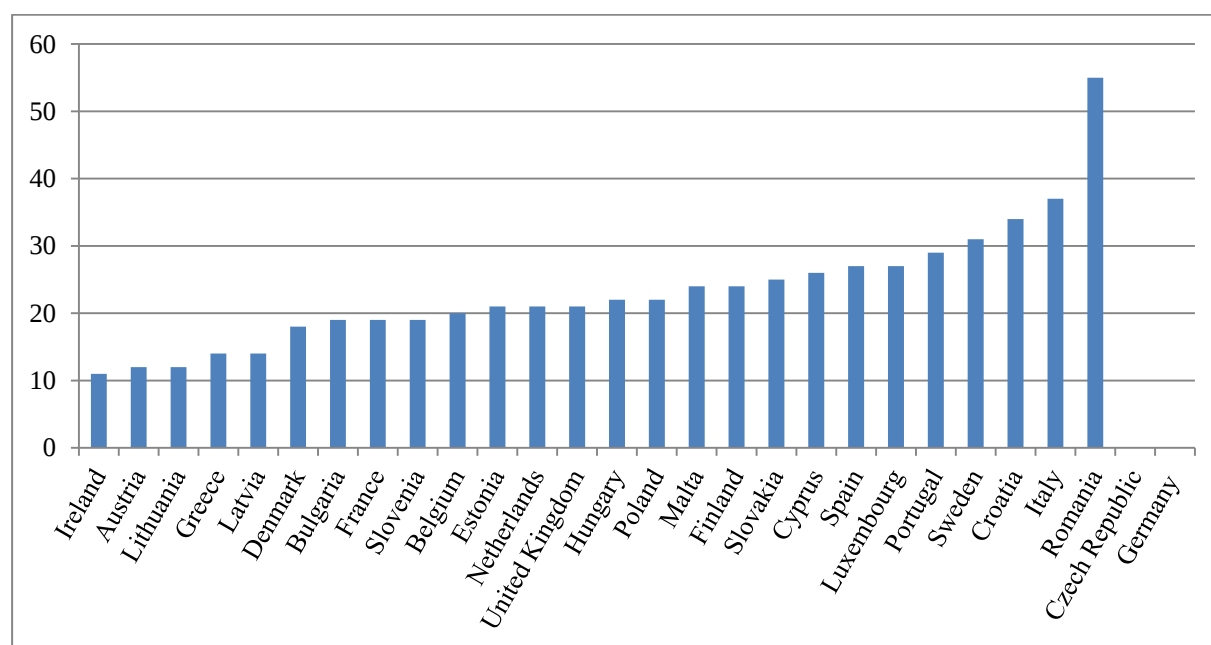
ANNEX 5: DETAILED PROBLEM DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Lack of online information

The information about rules and requirements that is necessary for the cross-border provision of services and sales of goods is often not available online,³³⁷ nor are the rules and procedures for citizens wanting to work, study, travel or reside in another Member State. The lack of online information might not be a problem for domestic firms and citizens, but this creates a substantial hurdle for foreign SMEs.

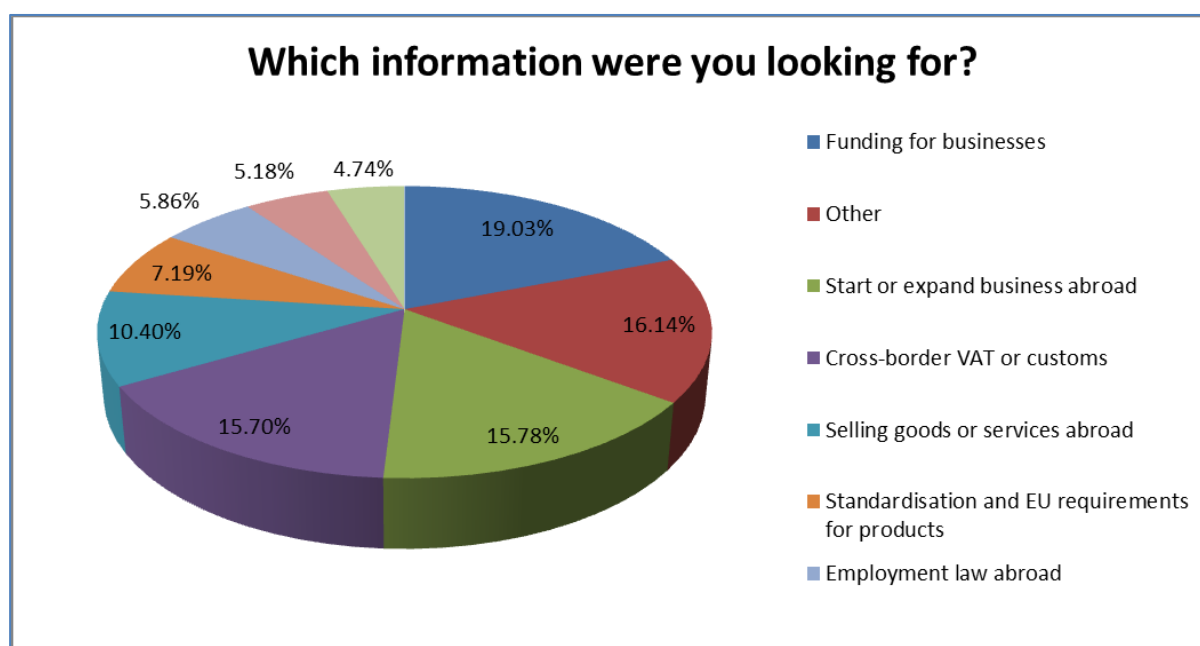
5.2 Businesses do not find information about rules and requirements that are necessary for the cross-border provision of services and sale of goods. In particular for smaller firms the cost and administrative burden can be considerable, and for micro-companies, self-employed or start-ups they can be prohibitive.

Figure 5.1: Problems experienced when using e-government websites (as percentage of regular e-government users, 2013)



Source: EUROSTAT - Problems experienced when using e-government websites (isoc_ciegi_pb)

³³⁷ According to a 2015 Eurobarometer survey on European businesses and public administration, only four in ten companies are satisfied with the ease of obtaining reliable information from public authorities in their country, just 3% being 'very satisfied'. Most companies (55%) are dissatisfied, and almost one in five (17%) say they are 'very dissatisfied'. Given the extra difficulties (language, lack of familiarity) for companies established in other Member States, scores for cross-border situations would no doubt be even lower.

Figure 5.2: Most sought-after information by businesses

Source: *Your Europe for Business, Exit survey, 2016.*

Member States' implementation of the Points of Single Contact has been uneven.³³⁸ Some of them have sophisticated e-government portals that offer extensive information in an understandable format and in more than the national language(s) across all service sectors. However, in other cases only general information on business procedures is available online, without the necessary detail on specific procedures.

According to the Single Market Scoreboard,³³⁹ only in eight countries out of 31 these contact points are performing well.³⁴⁰ A study³⁴¹ has found that information is frequently missing, incomplete or not adapted to user needs. There is a big gap between the availability of information on general requirements such as business registration (71%) and tax formalities (62%) on one hand; and sector specific information such as licences (49%) and permits related to operations and location (46%) on the other hand. These findings are in line with user comments that indicate that the points often provide only general information about requirements.³⁴²

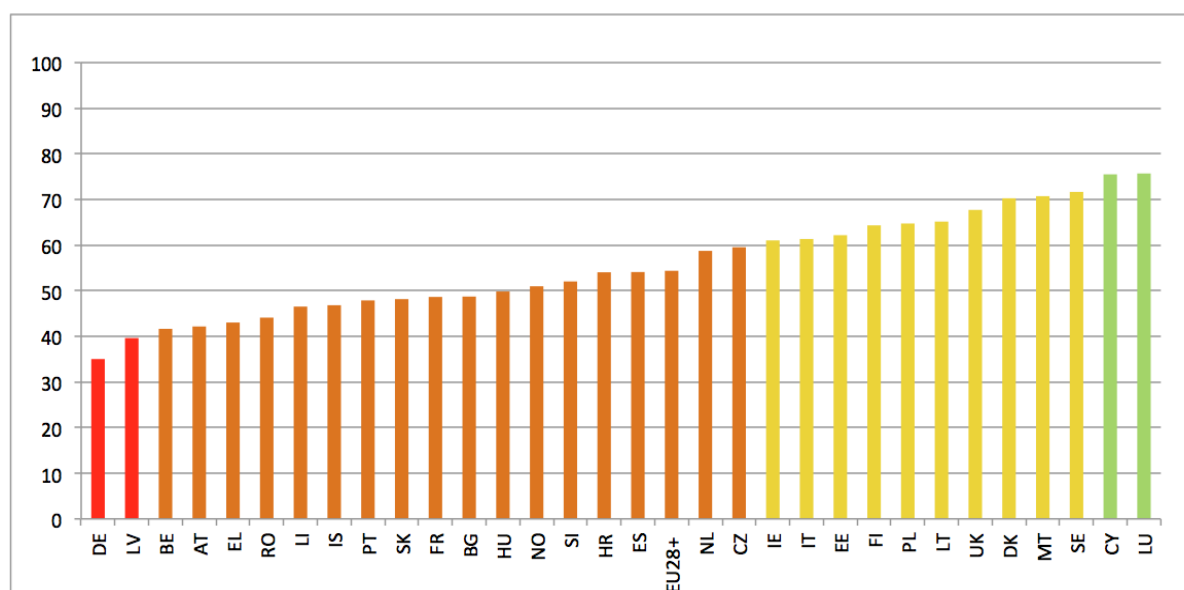
³³⁸ The Performance of the Points of Single Contact. An Assessment against the PSC Charter, European Commission 2015.

³³⁹ See http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/points_of_single_contact/index_en.htm (consulted on 13/06/2016)

³⁴⁰ The reviewed countries were EU28 plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

³⁴¹ The Performance of the Points of Single Contact. An Assessment against the PSC Charter, European Commission 2015.

³⁴² Further details about the evaluation of the Points of Single Contact in Annex 3.

Figure 5.3: Overall performance of Points of Single Contact

Source: Performance of the Points of Single Contact, Capgemini Consulting, Eurochambres, 2015

The Product Contact Points that were set up to facilitate access to product-specific technical rules³⁴³ are not well known and many do not even have a website. Further, many do not have sufficient resources to provide replies timely or in foreign languages.³⁴⁴

Table 5.1: Key findings on shortcomings of PCPs

Finding	Figures
PCPs not having a website	11%
Principle of mutual recognition not explained	29%
No link to EU Mutual Recognition Regulation	39%
No information on relevant national legislation	36%
No technical rules applicable to a specific type of product	46 %
Type of product subject to a requirement for prior authorisation not published	64%
No information on implementing authorities	43%
No link to NANDO database	57%
No information on dispute remedies	46%
No published online or postal mail address	61%
No listed phone number	36%
Not available in another language.	32%
Websites having invalid links	61%

Source: Draft study "Inventory of Contact Points (PCP, PCPC), Ecorys, 2017 (forthcoming)

³⁴³ The Product Contact Points were set up following a provision (Art. 9) in the Mutual Recognition Regulation (764/2008).

³⁴⁴ For a more detailed overview of the evaluation of the PCPs please see Annex 3. One issue worth highlighting is the fact that some PCPs forward queries from companies to the responsible authorities without further involvement and follow-up of the responses given by those authorities. Therefore, there is in some Member States little information about the outcome of queries (see Evaluation of the Internal Market Legislation for Industrial Products (2014), <http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/evaluation/search/download.do?documentId=9966151>, p. 62).

Moreover, in the area of construction products a separate network of Product Contact Points for Construction was created. These should provide information about technical rules for construction products. The proliferation of contact points has promoted neither service quality nor awareness. Only one Member State has streamlined three categories of contact points (Points of Single Contact, Product Contact Points, Construction Product Contact Points) into a single website, and another has combined two contact points under one website. In nine countries the Product Contact Points for Construction do not have a dedicated website.

Table 5.2: Key findings on shortcomings of PCPCs

Finding	Figures
PCPCs not having a website	11%
No online information on products subject to CE marking	43%
No publication of EU Construction Product Regulation	25%
No link to the EU CE marking website	57%
Publication of relevant legislation	50%
No link to the European Committee for Standardization	86%
No link to the European Commission Q&A section	61%
No information about remedies available	75%
No relevant documents contained	36%
No postal mail address online	39%
No phone number provided online	21%
Not available in another language	43%

Source: Draft study "Inventory of Contact Points (PCP, PCPC), Ecorys, 2017 (forthcoming)

In general, there is a relatively low level of awareness amongst companies regarding the existence or purpose of any of these contact points, which means that they are not used very often.³⁴⁵ Overall, the shortcomings in terms of coverage and quality of information provided are broadly similar to those for products more generally as described above.³⁴⁶

Information on European justice and access to judicial procedures is provided on the European e-Justice Portal, which is being made into a one-stop shop for information on European justice. This will include tools for direct communication between citizens and courts in other Member States, as well as interconnection of Member States' business or insolvency registers.

³⁴⁵ Analysis of implementation of the Construction Products Regulation, Final Report, 2015. According to a Commission study/survey of PCPs and PCPCs which is not yet published, requests varied between 12 and 230 per year, with most roughly receiving one request per week. This is based on a limited panel of respondents (6 PCP and 10 PCPC).

³⁴⁶ For further details and relevant evaluation results please see Annex 3.

Table 5.3: Key findings on availability of information

Finding	Figures
Companies dissatisfied with the ease of obtaining reliable information from national public authorities	55% ³⁴⁷
On PSCs significant shares of information for 4 tested specific business scenarios is missing	60% for 1/3 of MS; 50%-40% for 1/3 of MS; 30% for 1/3 of MS ³⁴⁸
Businesses identified inaccessibility of information on rules and requirements as a major internal market obstacle	81% ³⁴⁹
National content on Your Europe missing for several areas for a sizable share of (EEA) countries	42% (taxation); 39% (vehicles); 16% (travel, residence formalities and national contact points); 10% (start & grow) ³⁵⁰

Citizens who responded to the public consultation have tried finding which rules they should be following to comply with national requirements when moving to another EU country and most of them thought it was difficult or somewhat difficult (27% and 59% respectively). In another context just over one quarter of citizens (26%) say they feel informed about what they can do when their rights as an EU citizen are not respected.³⁵¹ This is why it has been proposed to encourage Member States to take a more proactive approach with regard to the provision of information to citizens.³⁵²

Table 5.4: Information needs

What information citizens need ³⁵³	Percentage of respondents
Residency documents and registering	69%
Studying	50%
Employment and working conditions	45%
Social security and welfare	41%
Recognition of diplomas	39%

More than one out of three citizens who had lived or were living in another EU country indicated that they had experienced difficulties in relation to the exercise of their rights as EU citizens after having moved. Most of these problems were linked to lengthy or unclear administrative procedures and a majority of them said they could not find enough information or were not sufficiently aware of their rights as EU citizens.³⁵⁴

Online information, such as on administrative requirements, is not always available. The possibility of completing such requirements online would help significantly the move to

³⁴⁷ Flash Eurobarometer 417, European businesses and public administration, 2016.

³⁴⁸ Study "The Performance of the Points of Single Contact", Capgemini Consulting and Eurochambres, 2015.

³⁴⁹ Survey by Eurochambres, 2015.

³⁵⁰ Your Europe portal.

³⁵¹ Flash Eurobarometer 430

³⁵² http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/2016-flash-eurobarometer-430-citizenship_en.pdf

³⁵³ 24 Years of EU Citizenship: Removing the obstacles to full potential, ECAS (European Citizen Action Service), May 2016.

³⁵⁴ EU citizenship consultation 2015.

EU citizenship consultation 2015 "EU Citizenship: Share your opinion on our common values, rights and democratic participation", available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/2015_public_consultation_booklet_en.pdf, pp. 31-32.

another EU country. EU citizens also asked for information and assistance responding to the individual needs and questions of newcomers through one-stop-shop web portals provided by the authorities to help them settle down in an EU country.³⁵⁵

5.3 Lack of quality

The validity of information, even when it is available online, is difficult to ascertain. Users have difficulties in finding the right information: content is not always up-to-date, navigation tools do not always lead to the information needed, and legal and administrative jargon is used instead of a vocabulary that is adapted to the users.

Member States seem also to prioritise the availability of services online over the quality of those services³⁵⁶. Users have noted that structuring information according to the business life cycle would help them to find the information needed.³⁵⁷

As regards citizens, satisfaction with complaint handling is highest amongst those consumers who complained to Alternative Dispute Resolution bodies, although the use and knowledge of these bodies are relatively low.³⁵⁸

Before deciding whether to move to another Member State, approximately three out of four citizens search for information on administrative websites of the destination country. Almost half of the respondents (47%) would like to receive effective support and assistance in the enforcement of their rights through specialised bodies.³⁵⁹

The need for reliable information and uniform quality levels across the EU

A Romanian construction company is currently operating in several EU Member States and is looking to expand its operations to new countries. In particular, it recently found a good market opportunity in Member State B and it is starting to go through all the required administrative procedures needed for it to be able to operate on this new market. Among these steps is obtaining a Luxembourgish VAT number. At a meeting with the European Commission, this company reported paying 3000 EUR to a private law firm to gather the necessary information on this procedure. Companies value the legal reliability of the information they base their decisions and business upon. This is why they considered that the information that could be found on the official websites, to this date and with the current quality standards, was not a good enough source for them.³⁶⁰

A Dutch company wishing to register economic activity in Member State C spent 7 000 EUR to hire a consultant who knew the language of the host country, and who could deal with the burden of the procedure.

³⁵⁵ EU citizenship consultation 2015 "EU Citizenship: Share your opinion on our common values, rights and democratic participation", available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/2015_public_consultation_booklet_en.pdf.

³⁵⁶ Future-proofing E-government for the Digital Single Market, background report, European Commission 2015.

³⁵⁷ The Performance of the Points of Single Contact. An Assessment against the PSC Charter, European Commission 2015.

³⁵⁸ Consumer Conditions Scoreboard (2015).

³⁵⁹ See Report on 2015 public consultation on EU Citizenship (available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/2015_public_consultation_booklet_en.pdf), p. 31.

³⁶⁰ Information received at a bilateral meeting with the European Commission in October 2016.

Users have frequently criticised information-oriented web sites for the difficulty of finding relevant information and the fact that relevant information was often located in different parts of the web site.³⁶¹

Table 5.5: Key findings on missing inter-linkages

Finding	Figures
No link to the PCPC of the same country	57%
PCPs not linking to the PSC of the same country	54%
PCPs not providing the contact details of PCPs in other countries	43%
PCPs not providing links to PCPCs in other countries	89%
PCPs not linking to other EU websites	50%
PCPCs not linking to the PCP of the same country	43%
PCPCs not linking to the PSC of the same country	64%
PCPCs not linking to other countries' PCPCs	50%
PCPCs not linking to other EU websites	54%
PCPCs websites containing invalid links	32%
National online services in the area of social security referring to corresponding EU-level services	13% ³⁶²
EU level online services in the area of social security referring to corresponding national services	47% ³⁶³

Source unless indicated: Draft study "Inventory of contact points (PCP, PCPC), Ecorys, 2017 (forthcoming)

5.4 Lack of online procedures

Firms and citizens who want to engage in a cross-border activity often need to fulfil registration and other relevant administrative procedures. These can be related to starting or expanding a business, looking for a job or a place of study, or establishing residence. In this context it is often necessary to provide proof of rights or competencies (a VAT number, a permit, a residence permit, a confirmation of a car registration), supporting documents, identity verification and sometimes fee payment.

Despite progress that has been achieved, considerable progress needs to be made to meet business expectations and the requirements of the Directive, in particular regarding the number of procedures available online. The availability of information and online procedures for foreign users is a recurring problem as often only rudimentary information is provided in English or other foreign languages and that online forms are only available in local languages.³⁶⁴

A study³⁶⁵ on the Points of Single Contacts concluded that the ability to complete government procedures online is limited and uneven in Member States. The registration of economic

³⁶¹ Study on Analysis of the Needs for Cross-Border Services and Assessment of the Organisational, Legal, Technical and Semantic Barriers, Final Report, European Commission 2013.

³⁶² EMPSS study interim report.

³⁶³ Idem.

³⁶⁴ The Performance of the Points of Single Contact. An Assessment against the PSC Charter, European Commission 2015.

³⁶⁵ The Performance of the Points of Single Contact. An Assessment against the PSC Charter, European Commission 2015. The Services Directive sets out a list of obligatory features of the Points of Single Contact that the Member States need to implement. The PSCs also provide a framework for more advanced e-government services aimed at creating a more business-friendly environment.

activity or applying for a tax number score best, since these procedures are fully online in about half of the countries investigated. There is room for improvement in other areas, including applying for permits.

Table 5.6: Key findings on lack of procedures fully online

Finding	Figures
Administrative procedures are the top obstacle for exporting SMEs ³⁶⁶	
Companies identifying complex administrative procedures as the main internal market obstacle	83% ³⁶⁷
Services required of foreign entrepreneurs to start their business in another country that are completely offline (no information, no procedure)	25% ³⁶⁸
Share of entrepreneurs starting a business in their own country face such issues (row above)	2%
PSCs scoring worst for cross-border accessibility	41% ³⁶⁹
Share of MS where financial services procedures are online	59% ³⁷⁰
Share of MS where registrations procedures are online	54%
Share of MS where permits procedures are online	35%
Share of administrations requiring often (or very often) original documents when dealing with foreign documents	43% ³⁷¹
Share of administrations requiring often (or very often) certified translations	45%

Another problem is the quality of the procedures available online. Putting parts of a procedure online is of limited use if its completion needs to happen offline. And even when procedures can be completed online nationally, they are often not accessible for users from other Member States.

The legal requirements are another layer, as despite progress made recently, in many cases citizens and businesses are still required to produce original documents, possibly with validation, (requiring an office visit), as part of complying with rules. Most often scanned copies of supporting documents are not accepted.³⁷²

Where entrepreneurs employ third-party professionals to assist in start-up, they often do so for company incorporation and tax registration. These formalities are the major bottlenecks in the start-up process, requiring more procedures than other such as business licensing and inspections. When used, professional services account for most of the cost to start a business.³⁷³

Almost three out of four citizens (73%) would welcome the availability of e-services enabling them to fulfil administrative formalities in the country of destination online, such as the possibility to fill in administrative forms online.

³⁶⁶ Flash Eurobarometer 421.

³⁶⁷ Survey by Eurochambres, 2015.

³⁶⁸ E-government benchmark report 2016, insight report.

³⁶⁹ Study "The Performance of the Points of Single Contact", Capgemini Consulting and Eurochambres, 2015.

³⁷⁰ E-government benchmark report 2016, insight report.

³⁷¹ IMI user survey 2015.

³⁷² For citizens, 14 often used documents are covered by the Public Documents Regulation that dispenses with authorisations and translations.

³⁷³ World Bank, Doing Business 2016.

The number of cases dealt with by Your Europe Advice gives indications about where the problems lie:³⁷⁴

Table 5.7: Your Europe Advice cases

Issue	Cases in 2015
Social security	14 000
Entry procedures	10 000
Residence	9 000
Motor vehicle	6 000
Work	4 000
Taxes	3 000

On the measures rated as highly important, making all online public services inclusive and accessible to all got the highest score (64%) in the EU citizenship consultation, giving users access to public services online (63%) and making online public services more trustworthy and secure.³⁷⁵ When surfing online, beyond your mother tongue, the most helpful language is English.³⁷⁶

According to a study,³⁷⁷ the EU score for the availability and sophistication of procedures, availability of e-payment tools, and track and trace systems (providing end-users with the possibility to follow the status of an application online) are on average 60%, but there are large country variations. Key enabling factors such as electronic identification and electronic signatures are often not available for cross-border users. The e-government benchmark reports³⁷⁸ also point out that the range of services available online to foreign users is much more limited than for domestic users.

Higher costs are caused by the need to visit an office; to provide certified translations of supporting documents; and to provide the necessary identification. Cross-border users face additional costs caused by the demand for more documents than for domestic users; information that is not available in foreign languages; request for certified translations of documents or certificates; or face-to-face meetings with officials or other persons that would not be required for domestic businesses or citizens requesting the same service.³⁷⁹

Table 5.8: Key findings on information, assistance services and procedures

Finding	Figures
PSCs assessed as below the EU average for the criterion of navigation tools	46%
PSCs assessed as below the EU average for the	36%

³⁷⁴ ECAS - Your Europe Advice survey:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/csdays2016---workshop-5---claire-damilano---ecas.pdf>.

³⁷⁵ EU citizenship consultation 2015.

³⁷⁶ See the Exit Survey at http://europa.eu/youreurope/business/index_en.htm. It consisted of +/- 1600 results between December 2015 and January 2016.

³⁷⁷ Capgemini, IDC, Sogeti and Politecnico di Milano, "Future-proofing eGovernment for the Digital Single Market – An assessment of digital public service delivery in Europe", Background Report prepared for the Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, 2015. It found out that e.g. only 57% of all assessed services are available to cross-border businesses.

³⁷⁸ European Commission 2014 and 2015.

³⁷⁹ EU-wide digital once-only principle for citizens and businesses: Policy options and their impacts, SMART 2015/0062, GNK Consult et al. 2016.

criterion of website structure	
Time estimation of procedure provided on PSCs is hardly ever provided.	45% (procedure of general registration of economic activity); 15% (for applying for a VAT number); for other procedures much lower
Respondents considering lengthy or unclear administrative procedures as frequent difficulties	69% ³⁸⁰
Public websites that are 'mobile-friendly'	1 in 3 ³⁸¹

Source unless indicated: Study "The Performance of the Points of Single Contact", Capgemini Consulting and Eurochambres, 2015

5.5 Lack of awareness and findability

Services that are available online are not useful if they cannot be found easily. In many cases, instead of increasing the scope of an existing service whenever a new need arises, the administrative tendency is to create new portals or services for each policy area. This leads to the creation of new networks, new contact points, new IT tools, and new awareness-raising campaigns. Both at European and at national levels it would be more cost-effective to use an existing network, portal or contact point and broaden its tasks but there is very little incentive to avoid proliferation.

Limited awareness of existing rights in healthcare

Lack of awareness about rights and existing assistance services also limits citizen's opportunities and fruition of rights across the Single Market. As an example, one year after their creation, 90% of respondents to a Special Eurobarometer on patients' rights in the EU had never heard of the National Contact Points that provide information about EU cross-border healthcare, and fewer than two out of ten citizens feel that they are informed about their cross-border healthcare rights.³⁸²

The awareness of both businesses and the general public of the Points of Single Contact portals is low, possibly related to the fact that none of the PSCs included in the study ran awareness campaigns when the portals were launched, nor did they create direct links to other Member State portals. Search engine ranking of the PSCs was poor in over half of the countries. Language also limits findability, as foreign users should explicitly be catered for when indexing the website.

The Mutual Recognition Regulation³⁸³ encourages Member States to entrust the role of Product Contact Points to existing contact points, but most have not followed this recommendation. Similarly, the Construction Products Regulation encourages setting up Construction Product Points (PCPCs) by building on an existing Product Contact Point. However, fewer than half of all Member States followed this recommendation, and of those only eight can be accessed online. According to a study,³⁸⁴ few firms are aware of the existence of the PCPCs, in particular in other EU countries.

³⁸⁰ EU Citizenship consultation.

³⁸¹ E-government benchmark report 2016, insight report.

³⁸² Special Eurobarometer 425, Patients' rights in cross-border healthcare in the European Union, 2015.

³⁸³ Regulation 764/2008.

³⁸⁴ Analysis on the implementation of the Construction Products Regulation, 2015.

There are large differences between Member States concerning the awareness of citizens of national e-government portals.³⁸⁵ One of the reasons why portals and websites are difficult to find for firms from other countries is that they are not linked

Table 5.9: Key findings on lack of awareness and online findability

Finding	Figures
Share of consumers and businesses are unaware of any online services at European level that they could turn to in case of problems	91.6% ³⁸⁶
Number of existing EU-level online services	44.0%
Share of targeted citizens unaware	48.0%
Share of targeted businesses unaware	34.0%
Share of Dutch entrepreneurs who are doing business in the internal market have never heard of any EU-level online information and advisory services	80.0% ³⁸⁷
respondents to a Special Eurobarometer on patients' rights in the EU had never heard of the National Contact Points	90.0% ³⁸⁸
Respondents considering not finding enough information or not being sufficiently aware of their rights as EU citizens as frequent difficulties	51.0% ³⁸⁹
Share of citizens having never heard of the European Consumer Centres	85.0% ³⁹⁰
Share of cross-border shoppers having never heard of the European Consumer Centres	80.0%

5.6 Lack of accessibility for foreign users

The primary areas for improvement identified by users are the provision of information in English and other foreign languages, the ability to submit forms in languages other than the home country language and the ability to log into a service area with a foreign eID.³⁹¹

Even on some sites where multiple languages are provided for communication forms can only be completed in the home country language. As most websites can use translation tools, it would be beneficial if these tools were highlighted on the website. For technical information more elaborate and formal translation and mapping would be required.³⁹²

Procedure only available in the national languages

Member State A, a German company wishing to handle VAT return, VAT refund and income tax return had to hire an adviser who knew the language of the host country, and who could deal with the burden of the procedure (3 hours of a senior adviser).

In the same Member State A, a Finnish company needed to pay 3 000 EUR for a consultant to help registering its economic activity, because it found the procedure too cumbersome and needed an adviser knowing the language of the country. In order to register business for VAT, the same company tried to find information online on the procedure. This was difficult because of the low quality of the

³⁸⁵ For instance the Austrian business service portal 'Unternehmensserviceportal' is known by 23% of Austrian enterprises according to a 2015 survey. The central UK government gov.uk domain is among the 25 most visited domains in the UK according to regular surveys.

³⁸⁶ A European Single Point of Contact, European Parliament, 2015.

³⁸⁷ Survey, by the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce, 2016.

³⁸⁸ Special Eurobarometer 425, Patients' rights in cross-border healthcare in the EU, 2015.

³⁸⁹ Report on 2015 Public consultation on EU citizenship.

³⁹⁰ Evaluation of the European Consumer Centres Network, 2011.

³⁹¹ Study on Analysis of the Needs for Cross-Border Services and Assessment of the Organisational, Legal, Technical and Semantic Barriers, Final Report, European Commission 2013.

³⁹² Study on Analysis of the Needs for Cross-Border Services and Assessment of the Organisational, Legal, Technical and Semantic Barriers, Final Report, European Commission 2013.

information, and language that the company didn't understand. In order to deal with this problem, the company used a web translator, but the result was not accurate.

Besides language issues, the technical implementation can create problems. When eID and e-signature are required, this can discriminate against nationals who do not have eIDs, and the systems may not recognise foreign eIDs and e-signatures until the eIDAS regulation is in force.³⁹³ Further, integrated payment tools may not be accessible to foreign users, or are not foreseen at all, i.e. requiring office visits.

5.7 Lack of overview of single market problems

With the current tools, citizens and businesses have to make an effort to signal a problem or make a complaint, which reduces the incentives to do so. Motivation is also diminished when there is no feedback, or when it is delayed. Moreover, it is likely that there is a bias towards complaints from larger businesses, as these have more resources and legal expertise to launch a complaint procedure.

Most business respondent respondents (55%) would be willing to give feedback on their experience with the Single Market, so as to draw the attention of policy-makers to recurrent problems.

Table 5.10: Key findings on problems of users not being analysed

Finding	Cases
Number of real life cases in Your Europe Advice database	200 000
Approximate number of cases received annually in SOLVIT	2 000
No central analysis of real life cases in the database of the Enterprise Europe Network	8 000

Source: European Commission

5.8 Affected business population

With regard to the number of businesses involved cross-border, Eurostat data on the number of businesses controlled from other EU Member States is used (Table 5.10). This figure excludes for example self-employed who move and establish in another EU country, or businesses offering temporary services in another EU country – for example they may need to notify the business register of the host country. Thus, the figures used underestimate the relevant cross-border business population.

³⁹³ The full implementation of the eIDAS regulation should address this.
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.257.01.0073.01.ENG

Table 5.11: Number of businesses controlled from other EU MS³⁹⁴

Host MS	Most recent year	Total businesses	Estimate of new establishments	
AT	2013	7 384	185	
BE	2013	872	22	
BG	2014	7 820	196	
CY	2013	169	7	a)
CZ	2014	10 097	73	a)
DE	2014	16 959	424	
DK	2014	2 344	59	b)
EE	2014	622	16	
ES	2013	8 412	210	
FI	2013	1 979	49	
FR	2014	16 947	424	
GR	2014	1 549	39	
HR	2013	3 055	76	
HU	2014	12,768	319	
IE	2012	1 962	49	
IT	2014	7 663	192	
LT	2014	2 643	66	
LU	2014	5 937	148	
LV	2014	4 415	110	
MT	2014	105	3	
NL	2014	6 915	173	
PL	2013	5 452	136	
PT	2014	4 408	110	
RO	2014	21 028	526	
SE	2013	7 279	182	
SI	2014	3 171	79	
SK	2014	3 069	69	a)
UK	2013	8 701	218	

Source: Eurostat,

Notes: a) Amadeus database, b) www.virk.dk, other: 2.5% of total cross-border businesses

With regard to the number of businesses involved cross-border, Eurostat data on the number of businesses controlled from other EU Member States is used (Table 5.11). This figure excludes for example self-employed who move and establish in another EU country, or businesses offering temporary services in another EU country – for example they may need to notify the business register of the host country. Thus, the Eurostat figures that were used, underestimate the relevant cross-border business population.

³⁹⁴ Study about administrative formalities of important procedures and administrative burden for businesses, Ecorys for the European Commission, forthcoming, 2017

Table 5.11: EU Countries from which cross-border businesses are controlled³⁹⁵

Host MS	Total businesses	Most frequent other EU countries from which the business is controlled
AT	7,384	DE (55%), NL (6%), UK (6%)
BE	872	FR (22%), NL (21%), DE (17%), LU (11%), UK (10%)
BG	7,820	GR (28%), IT (11%), DE (10%)
CY	169	DE (27%), GR (25%), UK (16%), NL (11%)
CZ	10,097	DE (32%), AT (13%), SK (11%)
DE	16,959	NL (21%), UK (15%), AT (12%), LU (11%)
DK	2,344	SE (35%), DE (17%), NL (11%), UK (11%)
EE	622	FI (36%), SE (18%), EE (9%)
ES	8,412	DE (22%), FR (19%), NL (14%), UK (11%), IT (10%)
FI	1,979	SE (38%), DE (16%), UK (12%)
FR	16,947	DE (23%), BE (15%), LU (14%), UK (12%)
GR	1,549	CY (42%), DE (10%), NL (9%)
HR	3,055	AT (20%), IT (16%), SI (14%), DE (13%)
HU	12,768	DE (25%), AT (23%), IT (7%)
IE	1,962	UK (54%), DE (12%), FR (8%)
IT	7,663	DE (24%), FR (22%), UK (16%)
LT	2,643	DE (12%), EE (12%), LV (9%), NL (9%)
LU	5,937	BE (35%), FR (31%), DE (23%)
LV	4,415	LT (23%), EE (16%), UK (9%)
MT	105	DE (24%), IT (15%), UK (13%)
NL	6,915	DE (30%), UK (19%), BE (16%), FR (11%)
PL	5,452	DE (32%), FR (10%), NL (9%)
PT	4,408	ES (32%), FR (25%), DE (10%)
RO	21,028	IT (26%), DE (13%), CY (10%)
SE	7,279	DK (17%), DE (14%), UK (14%), LU (13%), NL (13%)
SI	3,171	IT (26%), AT (20%), HR (17%), DE (13%)
SK	3,069	CZ (20%), AT (19%), DE (17%)
UK	8,701	DE (21%), FR (16%), NL (16%), IE (11%)

³⁹⁵ Study about administrative formalities of important procedures and administrative burden for businesses, Ecorys for the European Commission, forthcoming, 2017

ANNEX 6: DETAILED QUALITY CRITERIA

6.1 Possible quality criteria to be included in the legal act

6.1.1 Information

All national and EU level information covered by the single digital gateway should:

- be comprehensive and cover everything citizens and business need to know to exercise their rights in the Single Market and to comply with rules and obligations which apply to his/her situation (e.g. moving to another Member State, opening business in another EU country);
- be accurate and kept up-to-date
- include references, links and access to legal acts, more specific, technical information or assistance service, as appropriate;
- include the name of entity responsible for the content of the information;
- indicate dates of its publication and its last update,
- be written in a comprehensible language adapted to the needs of a target audience,
- be provided in at least one other EU language different from the national language.

6.1.2 Procedures

Required preliminary information about procedures:

- All the different steps of the procedure, including the competent authorities it involves;
- means of identification that are required (e.g. eID, eSignature);
- the type and format of evidence which should be submitted;
- any fees, if applicable and how they can be paid;
- how long the procedure will last (e.g. on average), what are the deadlines (if any);
- in which languages the procedure can be completed.

The deadlines indicated in the description should be respected and in case of a delay, users should be immediately informed about the cause of such delay and a new deadline should be indicated to them.

The single digital gateway should ensure that when the online procedure has been established, it can be accessed on equal conditions by national users as well as users from other Member States. It is therefore important to ensure that such procedures:

- do not contain form fields which accept data in particular national formats,
- accept eID and eSignature issues from other Member States;
- accept evidence in electronic format;
- contain instructions how to complete the procedure in at least one EU language other than a national one;
- in case the payment of a fee is required, users should be able to pay such fees using a payment service commonly accessible in cross-border situations.

6.1.3 Assistance and problem solving services

The explanation of the nature of the assistance service should be provided upfront, so that users have clear understanding of what they can and cannot expect from such service. The explanation should include:

- the type, purpose and expected results of the service offered;
- the name and contact details of the entity responsible for the service;
- fees, if applicable, and how they can be paid;
- the deadline for the delivery of the service or an average response time;
- languages in which the request can be submitted and further contact carried on.

The deadlines indicated in the description of the service should be respected and in case of a delay, users should be immediately informed about the cause of such delay and a new deadline should be indicated to them.

6.2 Background to the EIPA Study

In the context of the work on the Impact Assessment accompanying the Commission Proposal on the single digital gateway, the Commission requested EIPA to identify quality criteria that could be used to establish standards for the gateway services, in each of the following three areas:

- Information;
- Assistance and problem-solving services; and
- Procedures.

These quality criteria might be applied by the Commission, to monitor the quality of the services accessible through the gateway, by service users to give feedback, or service providers to improve the service quality and delivery.

The EIPA Study describes existing, available systems for measuring and managing the quality of public services, including several international and national assessment standards and awards, and evaluates their potential suitability and transferability for services to be covered by the gateway.

6.3 Content of the study

The report outlines and analyses the gateway's operating environment, the development of e-Government in public service delivery (five stages of e-service development), how public administrations interact both with citizens and businesses as e-service users, and with each other (interoperability, once-only principle), and the expectations of users' interface with public administrations: preferences for a package of services that corresponds to user's individual circumstances ('life events' approach).

The study briefly summarises the tools available to understand and improve the quality of public service delivery, both in content and process (user/satisfaction surveys, user panels, focus groups, mystery shopping, customer journey mapping (CJM), and comments, suggestions and complaints schemes), and sets out their pros and cons. It indicates that online surveys, comments and complaints schemes, CJM and mystery shopping would be the most pertinent for the gateway.

The report next reviews the three dominant quality management systems (QMSs) recognised internationally, applied in public and private organisations, namely the ISO 9000 series, the European Foundation for Quality Management's Excellence Model and the Common Assessment Framework. It provides a short description of each standard, setting out the purpose, nature and methodology of each one, the context in which they are applied, and their pros and cons. As regards their overall applicability to the single digital gateway, the report

notes that their transferability to the single digital gateway context is limited by their organisational focus. The methodology behind each QMS enables institutional self-improvement which indirectly influences the quality of services provided by the organisation.

Following the review of international models, the report presents the eight Member State initiatives (plus one EU-funded project in a pre-accession environment) establishing standards and awards for quality service delivery:

- The Estonian Public Sector Quality Award,
- The UK's Beacon Council Scheme,
- The UK's Customer Service Excellence Initiative,
- France's Le Referentiel Marianne,
- The Dutch 'Mark of Good Services',
- The 'Triple A for Citizens' project,
- Estonia's e-State Charter,
- The UK's Digital Service Standard.

Lessons have been drawn from these experiences for the single digital gateway: strong motivation based on competition, leverage (central government bodies or the supreme audit institution influencing the actions of the target institutions), prestige, funding and improvement (underlying concept of self-improvement within organisation).

The report then proposes a list of potential criteria, drawn from the international & national models and other sources as applicable, for the three elements of the single digital gateway (information, assistance & problem-solving services, and e-procedures), as well as the entire end-to-end 'life event' process).

Finally, the report puts forward some ideas on how the tools, standards and criteria might be applied to the single digital gateway.

6.4 Potential quality criteria for the single digital gateway

The report identifies the following elements of a quality e-service for users in another Member State:

- Available online through an easily identifiable portal,
- Accessible through various electronic channels, on devices and platforms that meet user's preferences,
- User friendly (the portal uses clear, concise, jargon-free & non-legalistic language),
- Easy to navigate: with good signposting from one step to the next, and to other complementary services on other public and private websites,
- Straightforward and quick to use: requiring as few steps as possible, to reduce the administrative burden and cost,
- Available in at least one or two common languages, different than a native language and possibly in neighbouring country languages.

The potential criteria could include the following elements:

a) Quality of information:

Criterion	Elaboration
Channel choice	Information is accessible through all the mainstream devices and platforms, including mobile apps.
Transparency of ownership	The portal includes clear information about the website owner (physical and electronic addresses), its purpose, objective and the target audience.
Life event presentation	Information is structured and presented under 'life events', corresponds with user needs, and is organized flexibly to allow the user to assemble and customise their own service package.
Ease of access	The information is easy to find on the portal, including for non-native readers and the visually impaired.
Language preference	Information is ideally available in all official languages of the EU; otherwise at least English and the languages of the main countries using the specific service(s).
Clarity of orientation	The future steps towards the goal are clear to the information seeker, and particularly what he or she should do next.
Information relevance	The information is practical, accurate, precisely specified, and up-to-date.
Information presentation	Information is set out in simple, non-legalistic and jargon-free language, with any technical terms explained.
Feedback option	It is possible for service users to send feedback regarding their experience with the information provision and to provide reviews and ratings (user satisfaction) that are published on the website.
Feedback use	The feedback from service users is analysed regularly by the portal owner to improve the quality of information and other aspects of the service.
Referral option	It is possible for service users to directly get in contact with personalised assistance services online (using IM or e-mail), there is an up-to-date list of competent sources of advice for further help online or by phone, including up-to-date contact details and language options (see section 7.2).

b) Quality of assistance and problem-solving service:

Criterion	Elaboration
Ease of enquiry, comment or complaint	It is possible to make an enquiry, comment or complaint through all appropriate channels (namely e-mail, social media, telephone), including online by mobile, and the process should be indifferent to the medium, each one being equally as convenient to use as the others.
Language of query & response	It is possible for the query / comment / complaint and the response to be made ideally in any official language of the EU, in accordance with the language preference of the enquirer, otherwise at least English and the languages of the main countries using the specific service(s).
Transparency of ownership	The organisation behind the assistance and problem-solving service is clearly identified, including its ownership, legal identity and contact details (physical and electronic addresses) in the event of complaints.
Clarity of process	It should be clear to the enquiring citizen or entrepreneur what will happen with their query and how long it will take to respond.
Speed of response	The response is executed within a reasonable time (which could be set depending on complexity, from 'instantly' onwards).
Relevance of response	The response is addressed precisely to the query under consideration.
Reliability of response	The response is accurate and legally robust (i.e. not open to challenge).
Clarity of response	The response is provided in simple, non-legalistic and jargon-free language, with any technical terms explained.
Visibility of enquiry, comment, complaint and response	The enquiries, comments and complaints are presented on the applicable website / social media along with the response, with all information anonymised (if appropriate) and aggregated (if helpful to the service user), to enhance future service quality.
Feedback option	It is possible for service users to send feedback regarding their experience with the assistance and problem-solving service and to provide reviews and ratings (user satisfaction) that are published on the website.
Feedback use	The feedback from service users is analysed regularly by the portal owner to improve the quality of assistance and problem-solving.

c) Quality of e-procedures:

Criterion	Elaboration
Online availability	The procedure is fully electronic (via the internet) and can be performed without the need to visit an office or use telephone or postal services.
Ease of access	The procedure is easy to find on the portal, including for non-native readers.
Language preference	The procedure can be performed ideally in all official languages of the EU, otherwise at least English and the languages of the main countries using the specific service(s).
Transparency of ownership	A procedure might comprise many steps, where each one falls to a different organisation, which is invisible in the interests of interoperability and a fully integrated and user-friendly service. The organisation that has the lead responsibility for the procedure as the service provider is clearly identified, including its ownership, legal identity and contact details (physical and electronic addresses) in the event of complaints.
Personal data protection	The portal includes information about the personal data processing policy in accordance with data protection law, the service provider complies with the policy and the legislation, and service users have the right to know how their personal data are protected in administrative agencies.
Intuitive process	The steps required to navigate through the procedure are easy for the user to understand and follow.
User guidance	The procedure is accompanied by clear information that explains the steps to be taken, the duration of the process, and the stage they have reached in the process, in clear, concise, precise, user-friendly, jargon-free, non-legalistic language, which is reliable and up-to-date, with any technical terms explained.
Prior notice	Clear and up-to-date information is provided concerning what the user should have ready in advance to successfully carry out the next step of the procedure (e.g. eID, e-documents, payment details, etc.)
Electronic authentication	If an authentication is needed for a cross-border service, it is possible online using national eID.
Electronic documentation	If any kind of documentation is needed to complete the procedure (e.g. certificate, diploma, proof of registration etc.), it is possible to submit it online.
Speed of process	The procedure can be executed in a reasonable time, including any online checks that must be performed by the service provider.
User tracking	It is possible for the service users to follow the status of the procedure online
Feedback option	It is possible for service users to send feedback regarding their experience with the procedure and to provide reviews and ratings (user satisfaction) that are published on the website.
Performance analysis	The feedback from service users is analysed regularly by the portal owner, along with the 'abandon rate' (the % of site visitors who leave without completing a transaction) to improve the quality of the procedure and other aspects of the service.
Referral option	It is possible for service users to directly get in contact with personalised assistance services online (using IM or e-mail), there is an up-to-date list of competent sources of advice for further help online or by phone, including up-to-date contact details and language options.

d) Quality of the whole process:

Potential criterion	Elaboration
Channel preference	The single digital gateway is accessible throughout the EU on all relevant platforms and devices, including mobile apps.
Language preference	The single digital gateway is accessible in all official EU languages.
Life event presentation	Cross-border services are presented on the single digital gateway from a user viewpoint, corresponding with life events, rather than from the administration's perspective as a series of technical services.
Completeness	Each potential step under the life event is available and accessible online through the single digital gateway.
Customisation	The service user can personalise their 'customer journey', choosing the path they take to realise their desired goal.
Ease of whole process	The number of steps required to complete the life event is as few as possible, while still retaining the ability to customise the service to individual needs and circumstances.
Digital only	It is possible to complete the entire process without requiring paper-based (validated) documentation, office visits, telephone contact or postal services.
Once-only data registration	Ultimately, it should be possible for personal data which is provided to one EU public administration to be available to any other administrative agency, subject to safeguards over data protection and data control by the citizen or business.
Once-only authentication	Once the user has authenticated online for a service, it is possible to access another service in the same life event (provided by a different service provider) without re-authentication.
Total quality	Each service which is accessible through the single digital gateway should meet, or be striving to meet, the quality criteria for information (section 7.1), assistance and problem-solving (section 7.2) and e-procedures (section 7.3).
Feedback option	It is possible for service users to send feedback regarding their experience with the single digital gateway and to provide reviews and ratings (user satisfaction) that are published on the website.
Performance analysis	The feedback from service users is analysed regularly by the European Commission, along with the 'abandon rate' (the % of site visitors who leave without completing a transaction) to improve the quality of the procedure and other aspects of the service.
Referral option	It is possible for service users to directly get in contact with personalised assistance services online (using IM or e-mail), there is an up-to-date list of competent sources of advice for further help online or by phone, including up-to-date contact details and language options (see section 7.2).

The report suggests using the quality criteria as indicators within a (balanced) scorecard approach. They could be also used as standards/targets and form part of an accreditation, award and labelling initiative.

ANNEX 7: COMPARISON OF PROBLEM DRIVERS, PROBLEMS, OBJECTIVE AND OPTIONS

Problem drivers = Reasons for limited success of current initiatives	Silo-based approach			Administration-centered design	First generation drawbacks	Neglect of foreign users	
Problems = Results of evaluation	Lack of online information	Lack of awareness and findability		Lack of quality	Lack of online procedures	Lack of accessibility for foreign users	Lack of overview of single market problems
Overall objectives = How we can make it work this time	Holistic approach			User driven	Build on best practices and more advanced digitalisation	Integrated EU wide accessibility	
Specific objectives = What we want to achieve	Ensure full coverage of information citizens and businesses need	Improve awareness of services available	Eliminate or overcome duplication an complexity, improve findability	Improve quality across the board for all information and assistance services, and for procedures	Ensure that EU citizens and businesses can complete the most important part of their interactions with the administration online	Make all information and procedures fully accessible for non-national citizens and businesses	Get a more systematic overview of obstacles encountered by cross-border users
1. Nationally centralised business and citizens' portals	EC covers EU level information in Your Europe MS cover agreed national information in single national business and citizens portals EC and MS all monitor their own compliance	Coordinated promotion	Merger of contact points (for services, products, construction products)	Agreed quality criteria with monitoring via separate user feedback tools (one for each portal) EC and MS all monitor their own compliance	Voluntary roll-out of online procedures based on rolling work programme MS can decide on priorities, no legal requirements	Information and procedures should be made available in EN	Link to common user feedback tool on EU and all national single digital gateways
			Every national portal has its own search facility			Online procedures should be made fully accessible for foreign users	
						National solutions for use of documents and data to be made accessible for foreign users	
2. EU coordinated approach	EC covers EU level information in Your Europe MS cover agreed national information in different websites and portals Joint monitoring of compliance	Coordinated promotion	Common assistance service finder	Agreed quality criteria with monitoring via common user feedback tool used for all linked portals Joint monitoring of compliance	Obligatory to offer 10+10 national procedures fully online MS to implement according to an agreed timetable	Information and procedures should be made available in EN	Link to common user feedback tool on EU and all national websites and portals
			Common search facility			Online procedures should be made fully accessible for foreign users	
						Common user interface for cross-border use of documents and data to be designed later	
3. EU-wide fully centralised approach	EC will provide all agreed information MS only need to verify EC monitors compliance	Joint promotion	Common assistance service finder	Quality criteria fully harmonised and integrated in contract, with monitoring via single user feedback tool EC monitors compliance	All 10+10 procedures will be harmonised at EU level for foreign users (like for EPC and Services Card) EC will develop IT structure for procedures within IMI	Fully guaranteed, translation in all or several languages	Common user feedback tool will be fully integrated
			Single search facility and fully harmonised presentation of information			Procedures are fully accessible to foreign users by design	
						Integrated user interface for cross-border use of documents and data	

ANNEX 8: SERVICES TO BE COVERED BY THE SINGLE DIGITAL GATEWAY

This annex contains the assistance services that will be covered by the gateway as foreseen in Table 1.3 of the impact assessment, as well as EU services providing information. (The below grouping into assistance services and information is only indicative, as some have competencies in both fields.)

The information and assistance services listed in this annex will be covered by the legal instrument for the single digital gateway in the sense that they would need to meet the quality criteria, be part of coordinated promotion actions, integrate a user feedback mechanism and link up to the user search interface of the single digital gateway.

A Assistance services

The Points of Single Contact – EUGO network³⁹⁶

The Points of Single Contact (PSCs) are online portals for entrepreneurs active in the services sector. Some Member States have in addition physical offices fulfilling the function of PSCs. All PSCs are connected through the EUGO Network. It is a legal requirement to have a PSC in each EU country since December 2009 as set out in the Services Directive (Directive 2006/123/EC). EU countries are not legally obliged to make available information and procedures on topics like tax and social security that are of relevance to businesses but outside the scope of the Services Directive. The requirement to make procedures available electronically has been implemented differently across Member States, resulting in very different degrees of online transactionality and only in few cases to full online availability for cross-border users. Some Member States have integrated the PSCs into e-government portals developed for national businesses, in others two or more portals exist next to each other with more or less strong inter-linkages. For more details about the performance of the PSCs see Annex 3 on evaluation and the PSC study.

Product Contact Points (PCP)

The Mutual Recognition Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 764/2008) provides for Product Contact Points (PCP) to be set up in each Member State. PCPs provide companies from other EU countries with information about national technical rules applicable to a specific type of product, about contact details of the competent authorities and about remedies generally available in the event of a dispute about these rules. Product Contact Points should respond free of charge and within 15 working days of receiving a request. They are encouraged to provide their services in several languages and to provide personalised advice to users. The service covers only products that are not subject to harmonised requirements provided in EU legislation. Not all PCPs have a website.

³⁹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/eu-go/

New Commission initiative: Extension of Product Contact Points³⁹⁷ and possible revision of Mutual Recognition Regulation

Two ongoing Commission initiatives aim, inter alia, at improving the PCPs. In the context of the possible revision of the Mutual Recognition Regulation, one key policy idea is to extend the scope of the PCPs to also cover the harmonised sector, so that businesses can receive an all-encompassing reply on the national and EU rules applying to their products. For further details see Annex 3 and the inception impact assessments^{398 399} for two planned initiatives to improve the functioning of the Single Market for goods.

8.1 Your Europe Advice⁴⁰⁰

Your Europe Advice (Your Europe Action Plan COM(2013) 636 final) is a free of charge assistance service for citizens and businesses in need of tailored advice about their rights originating from EU law. The advice about how such rights apply in a specific situation is given by a team of lawyers who cover all EU official languages and are familiar both with EU law and national laws in all EU countries. These experts have a contract with the European Commission; the service is financed through the EU budget. Visitors of the Your Europe Portal are signposted to Your Europe Advice for situations where the information provided online is not specific enough. They receive a reply within a week after sending a request. Replies are not binding for the European Commission or national authorities. All requests dealt with by Your Europe Advice are captured in a data base which forms the basis for analysis of major, recurring problems for people who use their Single Market rights.

8.2 SOLVIT⁴⁰¹

SOLVIT (Recommendation 2013/461/EU) is a free of charge out-of-the-court problem-solving service for EU citizens and businesses who consider that their EU rights are not respected by a public administration in another Member State. A complaining user has to introduce his request through a simple online form. If the request fulfils certain criteria (e.g. no related legal proceeding on-going) it is dealt with through a network of SOLVIT offices with the office the complainant's home country contacting the office of the Member State where (allegedly) administrative decisions are infringing on the complainant's EU rights. Requests are as a rule dealt with within 10 weeks. Decisions/agreements reached through SOLVIT do not pre-empt the possibility of using formal complaint mechanisms or launching a legal proceeding.

In the Single Market Strategy⁴⁰² the European Commission has announced to strengthen SOLVIT as an enforcement and problem-solving tool. Possible actions would include stronger links with and delimitation from other complaint handling mechanisms, increasing awareness and findability through inter alia closer links with relevant online portals, making more intensive use of the database of SOLVIT cases and communicating success stories more widely⁴⁰³. All cases dealt with by SOLVIT are captured in a data base which forms the basis

³⁹⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/goods/free-movement-sectors/mutual-recognition/contacts-list_en

³⁹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017_grow_007_enforcement_compliance_en.pdf

³⁹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017_grow_005_mutual_recognition_revision_en.pdf

⁴⁰⁰ http://europa.eu/youreurope/advice/index_en.htm

⁴⁰¹ http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/index_en.htm

⁴⁰² <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2015/EN/1-2015-550-EN-F1-1.PDF>

⁴⁰³ Roadmap not yet published.

for analysis of major, recurring problems of cross-border active citizens and businesses in the EU.

8.3 Product Contact Points for Construction (PCPC)⁴⁰⁴

According to the Construction Products Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 305/2011, ‘CPR’), Member States have to designate a PCPC to ‘provide information, using transparent and easily understandable terms, on the provisions within its territory aimed at fulfilling basic requirements for construction works’. This applies to both national technical and EU harmonised rules. The objective is to reduce the burdens for companies to familiarise with national construction product and building legislation. Not all PCPCs have a website. According to a recent study⁴⁰⁵ in the framework of a Fitness Check this has been partially achieved but also several shortcomings identified. For instance the study cites slow response to requests for information, poor quality of information provided (answers provided in legal language, difficult to comprehend and queries not fully answered) and the language barrier. The study finds that PCPCs are frequently unable to provide legally binding advice for practical implementation of the CPR. For more details about the performance of the PCPCs see Annex 3 on evaluation.

8.4 Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)⁴⁰⁶

The Enterprise Europe Network is a support network for small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) that want to do business abroad within the EU or beyond. The Network helps them to access European and international markets, and provides them with growth-oriented integrated business and innovation support services to help strengthen their competitiveness and sustainability. It has 3,000 experts across 600 member organisations in more than 60 countries. Member organisations include chambers of commerce and industry, technology centres and research institutes. The Network provides a range of services such as matchmaking events for finding business partners; practical advice on doing business in another country; targeted market intelligence; information on EU laws and standards; advice on intellectual property; or help with access to R&I funding (e.g. H2020, SME Instrument). EEN also acts as an intermediary between European Commission and SMEs for consultations preparing new EU legislation. Businesses contact national network partner organisations in their language these take care of translations where needed. The EEN also manages a feedback database of 8150 practical cases of SMEs encountering difficulties with legislation which have been encoded by EEN since 2006. EEN partners also provide feedback on practical cases where SMEs encounter difficulties with legislation. Since 2006 8150 cases have been encoded in the feedback database created for this purpose.

8.5 European Employment Services (EURES)⁴⁰⁷

EURES (Regulation (EU) 2016/589) is a cooperation network designed to facilitate the free movement of workers within the EU and EEA countries. Partners in the network include Public Employment Services, Private employment services, trade unions and employers’ organisations. The partners provide information, placement and recruitment services to

⁴⁰⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/18242/attachments/1/translations/>

⁴⁰⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/19343/attachments/1/translations>

⁴⁰⁶ <http://een.ec.europa.eu/>

⁴⁰⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/en/homepage>

employers and jobseekers. Moreover, EURES provides specific information and facilitates placements for employers and frontier workers in European cross-border regions. In practice EURES provides its services through the portal and through a human network of around 1000 EURES advisers that are in contact with jobseekers and employers. The portal is available in the languages of all participating countries.

8.6 National Contact Points for cross-border healthcare⁴⁰⁸

The Patients' Rights Directive (Directive 2011/24/EU) requires each EU Member State to establish at least one National Contact Point providing information about the right to receive health care in other EU countries, including rights to have costs covered; types of treatment that are reimbursed and the amount of reimbursement; need of prior authorisation and how to apply for it and how to appeal if rights have not been respected. Moreover National Contact Points are also required to provide information about the quality and safety standards used in their Member State along with other relevant information (e.g. patients' rights, complaints and redress procedures, as well as whether a provider is authorised to provide certain services, among others).

8.7 National Assistance Centres under Professional Qualifications Directive⁴⁰⁹

The Professional Qualifications Directive (Directive 2005/36/EC) obliges Member States to designate assistance centres to provide information on the recognition of professional qualifications and guide professionals through the administrative formalities concerning the recognition of such qualifications. They also inform about national legislation governing the professions, social legislation, and, where appropriate, the rules of ethics.

8.8 The Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platform⁴¹⁰

The ODR platform, established by Regulation (EU) No 524/2013, is a web-based platform developed by the European Commission, operational since February 2016. Its objective is to help consumers and traders resolve their contractual disputes about online purchases of goods and services out-of-court at a low cost in a simple and fast way. It allows consumers to submit their disputes online in any of the 23 EU languages. The platform transmits the disputes to the dispute resolution bodies communicated by Member States. Member States have to establish a national contact point to provide assistance to users of the ODR platform. Businesses established in the EU that sell goods or services online need to comply with the ADR/ODR legislation, in particular by informing consumers of the dispute resolution bodies by which they are covered and by providing a link from their website to the ODR platform.

8.9 European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net)⁴¹¹

The European Consumer Centre Network "ECC-Net" is a network of offices in all Member States, co-financed by the European Commission that assist citizens who are shopping cross-border in the Single Market online or on the spot. The ECCs advice in the national language on consumer rights, assist to resolve complaints launched against traders based in another EU country with the aim of achieving amicable outcomes and redirect to an appropriate body if

⁴⁰⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/health/cross_border_care/docs/cbhc_ncp_en.pdf

⁴⁰⁹ <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/services/free-movement-professionals/>

⁴¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/odr>

⁴¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/solving_consumer_disputes/non-judicial_redress/ecc-net/index_en.htm

the ECC-Net cannot help. Assistance covers popular consumer topics like on-line shopping, air passenger rights, car rental problems and internet frauds.

8.10 Europe Direct information centres (EDIC)⁴¹²

The European Commission manages a network of information centres, documentation centres and speakers in every EU country. They provide answers to questions on EU rights, funding, etc.; access to EU documents and publications including detailed information on European law, policies and institutions; references to other information sources and contact details for relevant organisations. They also organise trainings for students on EU-related fact-finding and research; help to find an EU expert speaker (lawyers, consultants, academics) for EU-focused events and operate a free of charge call service.

8.11 EU Intellectual Property Rights Helpdesk⁴¹³

The European IPR Helpdesk supports cross-border SME and research activities to manage, disseminate and valorise technologies and other Intellectual Property (IP) Rights and IP assets at an EU level. Services include information material in the form of newsletters and an online library, a free Helpline service through phone or fax for direct and confidential IP support by legal specialists and on-site and online training. Services are available in 13 EU languages and Turkish.

B EU services providing information

8.12 Your Europe Portal⁴¹⁴

Your Europe (Your Europe Action Plan COM(2013) 636 final) offers information to EU citizens and businesses about their basic rights under EU law, about how these rights are implemented in each individual country (where information has been provided by the national authorities) and it gives access to free email or telephone contact with EU assistance services, to get more personalised or detailed help and advice. While information about EU legislation is provided in all 23 official languages country-specific information is provided, where possible, in the national language(s) and in English.

8.13 The European e-Justice portal⁴¹⁵

The portal provides information and links on laws and practices in all EU countries about practical questions like finding a lawyer, consulting a land register or finding basic information about a judicial system. The target audience are citizens, businesses, lawyers and judges with cross-border legal questions. The resources range from information on legal aid, judicial training, European small claims and videoconferencing to links to legal databases, online insolvency and land registers. It also includes user-friendly forms for various judicial proceedings, such as the European order for payment. The portal is implemented by the Commission in very close cooperation with the EU countries. It is available in all 23 official EU languages.

⁴¹² http://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en

⁴¹³ <https://www.iprhelpdesk.eu/>

⁴¹⁴ <http://europa.eu/youreurope/index.htm>

⁴¹⁵ <https://e-justice.europa.eu/home.do?action=home>

8.14 The portal covers two procedures, to which the gateway will link:

European Small Claims procedure⁴¹⁶

The European Small Claims procedure (Regulation (EC) No 861/2007), which is accessible through the e-Justice portal, is designed to simplify and speed up cross-border claims of up to EUR 2000. It is available to litigants as an alternative to the procedures existing under national laws. It operates on the basis of standard forms and is as a rule a written procedure. A judgment given in the European Small Claims Procedure is recognized and enforceable in another Member State without the need for a declaration of enforceability and without any possibility of opposing its recognition. Standard forms are available in all languages. From the handing in of an application there are fixed time spans for the following steps such as the forwarding to the defendant, the judgement by the court, etc.

The European Payment Order⁴¹⁷

The European Payment Order is a simplified procedure for cross-border monetary claims which are uncontested by the defendant, based on standard forms available in all EU languages through the e-Justice portal. The portal also provides information about which courts can issue a European Payment Order and where the application forms should be sent. After a form starting the procedure has been filled in, giving all the details of the parties and the nature and amount of the claim, the responsible court will examine the application, and as a rule should issue the European Payment Order within 30 days. The defendant then has another 30 days to serve or oppose it. If the latter happens, the case must be transferred to the normal civil law courts to be dealt with under national law.

8.15 Technical Regulation Information System database (TRIS)⁴¹⁸

The TRIS database is an information tool aimed at allowing companies to detect upcoming national technical regulations that might affect the marketing of their products in the Single Market. It is based on a notification procedure established by Directive (EU) 2015/1535 dealing with information, prevention and dialogue in the field of technical regulations on products and Information Society services. EU countries must inform the European Commission of any draft technical regulation before its adoption. Starting from the date of notification, a three-month standstill period comes into place, during which the EU country must refrain from adopting the technical regulation in question. This procedure enables the Commission and other EU countries to examine the proposed text and respond. Notifications are translated into at least English, French and German. A mailing list mechanism allows economic operators and stakeholders to be automatically alerted when a draft regulation is announced. Final adopted national regulations also need to be notified to and included in TRIS.

8.16 VAT Information portal⁴¹⁹

This European Commission webpage offers basic information about value added tax rules and procedures in the EU. As most of them are decided at national level the portal links to the

⁴¹⁶ https://e-justice.europa.eu/content_small_claims-42-en.do

⁴¹⁷ https://e-justice.europa.eu/content_order_for_payment_procedures-41-en.do

⁴¹⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/tris/en/>

⁴¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/business/vat_en

respective national websites. There are currently a vast number of sources of VAT information across the EU taking many forms, including online information portals and advisory services. The aim of the VAT portal is to create added value by matching specific needs based on an analysis of users and their habits, on the principles of user-centricity and modularity, and on search engines that allow for a comparison of relevant information across Member States in English.

8.17 EU Trade Export Helpdesk⁴²⁰

The EU Trade Export Helpdesk offers information to companies in third countries exporting goods to the EU. Through the European Commission website they can find information on EU tariffs, requirements (e.g. plant health, public health, labelling, etc.), preferential arrangements, quotas and statistics relating to imports from trade partner countries. A database with a search function allows finding this information easily per product per destination Member State and for both requirements resulting from EU and from national legislation. The service is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and Russian.

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<http://exporthelp.europa.eu/thdapp/form/output?action=tariff&prodLine=80&mode=specificRequirements&status=null&simDate=20151202&languageId=en&cmd=chap&taricCode=1001110010&partnerId=AL&reporterId=BG&simulationDate=02%2F12%2F2015&submit=Search>

ANNEX 9: OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVES WITH LINKS TO THE SINGLE DIGITAL GATEWAY

This annex gives an overview of existing services and websites to which the gateway will link in order to give access to them, planned services and websites to which the gateway will link once they are available online, and initiatives of interest in the general context of developing and over time improving the gateway. The services included in this annex will not fall under the single digital gateway Regulation.

A. Existing services and websites to which the gateway will link**European professional card (EPC)⁴²¹**

The EPC, introduced by Directive 2013/55/EC (amending Directive 2005/36/EC), is an electronic certificate issued via the first EU-wide fully online procedure for the recognition of qualifications for five professions (nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, real estate agents and mountain guides). This digital procedure is based on the Single Market Information System (IMI) and allows professionals to communicate with the relevant authorities inside a secure network. The IMI also provides for an official, multilingual communication channel between the regulating authorities for professionals in EU countries to facilitate their cooperation. The EPC does not replace the 'traditional' recognition procedures under the Professional Qualifications Directive, but it does offer an option for professionals who wish to work either temporarily or permanently in another EU country. It might be extended to other professions in the future.

9.1 EUROPASS⁴²²

With a view to facilitating movement across intra-EU borders of workers the EU has developed five mutually recognised document formats that make it easier to communicate skills and qualifications. Two documents are filled in by citizens themselves, the Curriculum Vitae and the Language Passport that both rely on self-assessment. Three documents are issued by education and training authorities: the Europass Mobility records the knowledge and skills acquired in another European country; the Certificate Supplement describes the knowledge and skills acquired by holders of vocational education and training certificates; and the Diploma Supplement describes the knowledge and skills acquired by holders of higher education degrees. The Commission is considering⁴²³ a revision of the Europass Framework to set up an intuitive and seamless online service platform. The aim is to provide web-based tools for documenting and sharing information on skills and qualifications, as well as free self-assessment tools. This initiative will focus primarily on Europass, the EU Skills Panorama, the Learning opportunities and qualifications portal, and the Euroguidance, Europass and European Qualifications Framework networks as these are the ones where most synergies can be exploited in the short term.

⁴²¹ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/services/free-movement-professionals/policy/european-professional-card_en

⁴²² <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

⁴²³ In its Communication on the New Skills Agenda for Europe
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>.

9.2 Mini one-stop-shop (MOSS) for VAT⁴²⁴

Since 2015, as foreseen in Regulation (EU) No 904/2010, new VAT rules apply for businesses in the fields of telecommunications, broadcasting, and electronic services (e.g. supply of websites, software, databases, films, music, distant teaching, and web-hosting). Such services are now taxed in the country of the customer. The MOSS allows businesses to submit their VAT returns and to pay the applicable VAT due to a number of EU Member States through an online system in one of the EU Member States. This must be a country where the company has a permanent establishment. Therefore, businesses do not have to register for VAT in numerous EU countries and submit multiple VAT return declarations. The tax authorities of the EU Member State have established separate MOSS online platforms.

The 2015 Mini One Stop Shop for B2C supplies of electronic services, which is hosted by tax administrations in Member States, is an efficient system which has reduced compliance costs by 95% compared to the alternative of direct registration. This has led to annual administrative savings of EUR 40,000 per business or a total of EUR 500 million. EUR 3 billion VAT was collected through the system in 2015 representing up to EUR 18 billion in trade.

B Planned services and websites to which the gateway will link once they are available online

9.3 Extension of Mini one-stop-shop for VAT

On 1/12/2016 the Commission presented a legislative proposal to extend the Mini One Stop shop (MOSS) to online B2C supplies of goods and other services. It is currently under discussion in Council.

This current Mini One Stop Shop should be extended to cross-border B2C online sales of physical goods ordered online both within and outside the EU. Instead of having to declare and pay VAT to each individual Member State where their customers are based, businesses would be able to make a single declaration and payment in their own Member State.

The overall objective is to minimise burdens attached to cross-border e-commerce arising from different VAT regimes, provide a level playing field for EU business and ensure that VAT revenues accrue to the Member State of the consumer. It is estimated that the proposal to extend the One-Stop Shop will reduce administrative costs for business by EUR 2.3 billion and will lead to an increase in intra-EU e-commerce. The extension of the one-stop shop combined with the removal of the VAT exemption for the importation of small consignments is estimated to increase VAT revenues for Member States by EUR 7 billion annually by 2021 and improve the competitiveness of EU business.

9.4 Transition to E-procurement - European Single Procurement Document (ESPD)⁴²⁵

The new Directives on Public Procurement provide for a gradual transition to electronic procurement by October 2018. Simplification of procurement procedures will contribute to higher transparency, efficiency, cost-savings and modernisation of public administrations. Supporting actions by the European Commission include sharing of best practices between

⁴²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/business/vat_en

⁴²⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/public-procurement/e-procurement_en

the Member States, assistance via the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), as well as activities to promote interoperability of national systems. Important milestones of the transition process are the following:

- central purchasing bodies should move to full electronic means of communication including electronic bid submission by April 2017;
- e-submission should be made mandatory for all contracting authorities and all procurement procedures by October 2018;

The European Single Procurement Document (ESPD), an online standard self-declaration for all public procurement above the EU threshold, is envisaged to implement the once-only principle in public procurement. This will be complemented by a new version with new functionalities (including links to ESPD) of e-Certis – an online tool on certificates and attestations required in public procurement.

9.5 European Services e-Card⁴²⁶

The Commission has proposed to introduce a Services e-Card. It foresees a simplified electronic procedure that will make it easier for providers of business services (e.g. engineering firms, IT consultants, and organisers of trade shows) and construction services to complete the administrative formalities required to provide services abroad. Services providers will simply have to liaise with a single interlocutor in their home country and in their own language. The home country interlocutor would then verify the necessary data and transmit it to the host Member State. The host Member State retains the current power to apply domestic regulatory requirements and to decide whether the applicant can offer services on its territory. The e-card would not affect existing employer obligations or workers' rights.

9.6 Interconnection of EU Business Registers⁴²⁷

In line with the Directive on the interconnection of central, commercial and companies registers (Directive 2012/17/EU), a system of interconnection of business registers is being set up at EU level by June 2017 jointly by EU Member States and the European Commission. The system is known as the Business Registers Interconnection System (BRIS). When in place, BRIS will ensure access at EU level to information on companies registered in the Member States, and enable, for the first time, the electronic communication between all EU business registers. They will be able to exchange information in relation to foreign branches and cross-border mergers of companies. Thanks to BRIS, citizens, businesses and national authorities will be able to search for information filed by companies in the national registers.

9.7 Electronic Interconnection of EU Insolvency Registers

The Commission will further develop an electronic interconnection of insolvency registers to enhance transparency and legal certainty in the internal market. Member States are obliged to set up their own domestic insolvency electronic registers by 2018[3], while the establishment of the interconnection of insolvency registers is set for 2019, with the aim to enhance the effective administration of cross-border insolvency proceedings, establishing a common framework for the benefit of all stakeholders. This will become available on the European e-Justice Portal.

⁴²⁶ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-23_en.htm

⁴²⁷ https://e-justice.europa.eu/content_business_registers_at_european_level-105-en.do

The system shall provide a search service in all the official languages of the institutions of the Union in order to make available the mandatory information and any other documents or information included in the insolvency registers which the Member States choose to make available through the European e-Justice Portal.

9.8 European Mobility Portal on Social Security (EMPSS)⁴²⁸

A feasibility study is on-going which explores an online tool that would assist mobile people in their contacts with public authorities, primarily related to social security, and would simplify the procedures they are confronted with when exercising their right to free movement. The tool could also help public authorities fight instances of fraud and error. The study assesses potential options for scope, architecture, functionality and their impacts.

C. Initiatives of interest in the general context of developing and over time improving the gateway

9.9 Initiative for a Single-member private limited liability company ('SUP')

The Commission proposal for a directive on single member private limited liability companies ('SUP') in April 2014⁴²⁹, which is currently in the inter-institutional decision-making process, includes provisions on cross-border on-line registration specifically for the legal form of SUP.

9.10 Company law initiative to facilitate the use of digital technologies throughout a company's lifecycle

The Commission initiative on facilitating the use of digital technologies throughout a company's lifecycle was announced in the Commission Work Programme for 2017.⁴³⁰ This initiative will look at the entire company lifecycle and it aims to address, among others, the online registration of companies as legal entities and branches with business registers.

9.11 The eIDAS Regulation⁴³¹

The Regulation (EU) 910/2014 on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the Single Market (eIDAS) from 2014 aims to provide a predictable regulatory environment to enable secure and seamless electronic interactions between businesses, citizens and public authorities. On the one hand, the Regulation ensures that people and businesses can use their own national electronic identification schemes (eIDs) to access public services in other EU countries where eIDs are available: Member States will have to recognise the eIDs notified by other Member States as of 29 September 2018. On the other hand, the Regulation creates a European Single Market for e-trust services such as electronic signatures, electronic seals, time stamp, and electronic delivery service - by ensuring that they will work across borders and have the same legal status as traditional paper based processes.

Implementation of the Regulation is supported by cooperation and technical tools:

⁴²⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=624&langId=en&callId=458>

⁴²⁹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52014PC0212>

⁴³⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/pdf/atwork/pdf/cwp_2017_annex_i_en.pdf

⁴³¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/trust-services-and-eid>

- Cooperation between Member States is being facilitated through the eIDAS Cooperation Network.
- As regards technical tools, the Commission funds the development of so-called “CEF building blocks” such as the eID or the eSignature building blocks which are usable in any European project to facilitate the delivery of digital public services across borders. See also Annex 10 on available IT building blocks for further technical details.

When fully implemented and operational in practice, the eIDAS Regulation will be an important enabler for numerous cross-border online procedures as envisaged to be promoted as part of the single digital gateway.

9.12 Regulation on the free circulation of public documents⁴³²

The Regulation (EU/2016/1191) adopted in June 2016 covers public documents such as certificates, notarial acts, judgments and consular documents in certain areas such as birth; a person being alive; death; name; marriage; divorce; registered partnership; parenthood; adoption; residence; nationality; absence of a criminal record and the right to vote in municipal and European Parliament elections; public documents in order to prove the legal status of a company. Under the Regulation, when a citizen or business presents a public document (original or certified copy) issued in another Union country the receiving authorities will no longer be able to require an 'apostille' stamp to prove its authenticity. This exemption will save citizens the time and money needed to obtain such stamp. In addition national authorities cannot require a translation of public documents if it is in one of the official languages of the Union country. The Regulation also introduces multilingual standard forms that can be used as translation aids attached to their public document. When used the receiving authority can require a translation only in exceptional circumstances and even then it must accept a certified translation made in another Union country.

When fully applied as from 2019 the Regulation will partially reduce the administrative burdens on cross-border active businesses and citizens also for procedures envisaged to be covered by the single digital gateway.

9.13 European eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020⁴³³

The Action Plan was adopted in April 2016 and has as key objectives to modernise public administration, to achieve the digital Single Market, and to engage more with citizens and businesses to deliver high quality services. The single digital gateway is one of the actions mentioned in the Action Plan as well as several others of the below mentioned initiatives. A stakeholder engagement platform⁴³⁴ enables all kinds of stakeholders to submit proposals for additional actions to be taken up.

9.14 Start-up initiative

The Commission adopted its Communication "Europe's next leaders: the Start-up and Scale-up Initiative" on 22/11/2016. The single digital gateway is foreseen as the action to help tackle some of the identified **administrative barriers** especially in a cross-border situation.

⁴³² http://ec.europa.eu/justice/civil/judicial-cooperation/document-circulation/index_en.htm

⁴³³ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/european-egovernment-action-plan-2016-2020>

⁴³⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/egovernment4eu>

9.15 Digital Transformation – Redesign of the European Commission web presence⁴³⁵

The Digital Transformation project is a process of redesigning and streamlining of the European Commission's web presence that was in the past characterised by strong segmentation of content according to Commission Services. In order to provide high quality, accessible online services to citizens and businesses in the EU, the Commission is transforming its websites into a thematic, user-centered web presence. The Commission's web presence will be thematically organised according to one single information architecture and align organisational goals with user needs and tasks. It will provide modern online services and up-to-date information to citizens and businesses. This will improve access to information on EU programmes and their funding opportunities. Key objectives are to design by 2018 a web presence that is more in line with user needs and to reduce duplication and inconsistencies resulting from the current segmentation.

9.16 Core Public Service Vocabulary (CPSV)⁴³⁶

The Core Public Service Vocabulary is a data model financed by the ISA Programme⁴³⁷ that captures the fundamental characteristics of a service offered by public administration.

Even within the same country, public services are documented following different flavours of national, regional or local traditions. This fragmented view of the public service concept impacts on the quality and the efficiency of public service provision for cross-border users, increases administrative burdens and makes public service provision more costly. The Core Public Service Vocabulary aims to offer a technology independent, generic representation of a service provided by public administration. The vocabulary will emerge as the common denominator of existing national, regional and local public service models, providing a lingua franca that will enable the seamless exchange of services and information across different e-Government systems. See also Annex 10 on available IT building blocks for further technical details.

9.17 Pilot on the Once Only Principle⁴³⁸

The Commission has launched a large-scale pilot to test the once-only principle for businesses cross-border in a business-to-public administration area. The project, with the participation of 20 Member States is being funded through the Horizon 2020 research and innovation framework programme and started in January 2017. The areas to pilot will include business mobility, exchanges between business registers and maritime certificates. In addition, further actions to support the implementation of the "once-only" principle have been launched under the ISA programme and continue under the ISA² programme; the best practices and recommendations for base registers management and the semantic specifications for description of public services (essential for the implementation of coherent and inter-connectable catalogues of services).

Another parallel pilot will assess the feasibility of a citizen case.

⁴³⁵ https://blogs.ec.europa.eu/eu-digital/home_en

⁴³⁶ https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/asset/core_public_service/description

⁴³⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/isa/>

⁴³⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/content/pillar-2-13-once-only-principle-large-scale-pilot-project>

ANNEX 10: VISUAL OVERVIEW OF LINKS WITH OTHER INITIATIVES

