

Germany (Brandenburg) Country Report

<https://eap.brandenburg.de>

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1 Introduction

This country report provides an overview of existing Point of Single Contact (PSC) infrastructure and services offered in the state of Brandenburg in Germany. The report provides details about the availability and quality of services found during portal testing by eGovernment experts, views obtained from end-users from Germany and Poland during focus group sessions¹ about usability of the portal and the views of portal staff and other eGovernment experts about the development and functioning of the portal.

For ease of cross-referencing the text in this document with the appropriate tables, the tables have been placed in a separate annex. Annex B provides the tables referred to in this document. Annex A provides details of six scenarios used during the study; these are referred to in Section 2.

The German portal www.dienstleistungen-leicht-gemacht.de links to the 16 portals of the federal states of Germany. Each federal state has its own portal solution. The Brandenburg PSC-Portal <https://eap.brandenburg.de> is part of the Brandenburg eGovernment and is under the management of the ministry of economic and European affairs. The portal is focused on starting or expansion of a business in services (see Table 1). For other business activities (founding a company, innovations, foreign trade subsidies ...) the portal links to related portals of the state Brandenburg, federal government and professional associations. Beside the PSC portal the Brandenburg service portal <http://service.brandenburg.de> has been taken into consideration in the analyses of the Brandenburg PSC. This is the service portal of the Brandenburg regional government authority. The service portal supports the PSC portal on several issues, e.g. addresses of regional authorities, responsible administrations and information on federal state law, employment, economy, construction, social affairs, culture, sport, and environment and consumer protection.

The plans for the portal solution started with 2008. In Dec 2009 the portal went live for users. It was newly created and one of the first eGovernment developments in Brandenburg.

The Brandenburg PSC home page is in German with language buttons to an English and Polish version. General information is available in both languages but at this stage, detailed information as well as the step-by-step guide to procedure completion is only available in German. The PSC is however able to handle requests for assistance in English and also offers help to users in English in actually filling in application forms online.

¹ End-user testing was undertaken by focus group participants and Deloitte experts in each country studied. Participants examined the PSC in their home country and one 'other' country. Details of the scenarios and country 'pairings' can be found in Annex A.

2 Availability and quality of PSC services

Points of Single Contact are the most visible benefit of the Services Directive for businesses. They are meant to become fully fledged e-government portals allowing future entrepreneurs and existing businesses to easily obtain online all relevant information relating to their activities (applicable regulations, procedures to be completed, deadlines, etc.) and to complete electronically the relevant administrative procedures. The services offered by PSCs need to be available not only in the country of the administration but they must also be accessible for businesses from other countries, across-borders.

The degree of availability of services through the PSCs was analysed on the basis of six business scenarios. The six scenarios focused on concrete examples in three sample sectors – architecture, restaurants/catering and tourism. One set of three scenarios focused on establishing a permanent business in the specific sector in the Brandenburg – these are called the 'establishment' scenarios. Three other scenarios investigated the steps required if someone from another country wants to temporarily provide a service in the Brandenburg – these are called the 'temporary cross-border' scenarios. These terms are used throughout the tables and text in this report. Details of the scenarios can be found in Annex A.

For each scenario, eight groupings of administrative formalities (e.g. authorization schemes, licenses, other procedures etc) that businesses are most typically obliged to fulfil in order to provide their service activities were examined. For each grouping, the study analysed to what degree information was available through the PSC and to what extent a business was able to complete the relevant procedures electronically.

The eight groupings (henceforth called 'types of administrative requirements') are:

1. Company registration;
2. Obtaining a general business license;
3. Procedures relating specifically to the service provider/ profession that they are exercising (recognition of professional qualifications, licenses to act as a travel agent, architect, sell alcohol etc.);
4. Tax and financial formalities;
5. Social security formalities;
6. Regulations relating to the premises of the provider, such as providing proof of the location and/or ownership of the premises;
7. Procedures relating to the way the service is carried out and the place where the service is carried out, such as applying for authorization to make outdoor sales or serve food on a street. (called 'operations and location' in later tables);
8. Procedures applying only or specifically to cross-border provision of services.

These eight types of administrative requirements cover the most common procedures businesses usually need to comply with when starting their activities. In order to complete the above requirements, service providers are often required to provide specific supporting documentation (e.g. proof of insurance coverage, proof of good repute, etc.). The different supporting documents are referred to in the tables contained in the annex as "Procedural components that may be relevant to the preceding procedures". They include:

- Provide a translation of legal documents produced in another country;
- Provide details of the location of the business;
- Provide proof of the ownership of the business;
- Demonstrate proficiency in the local language;
- Demonstrate good repute or the lack of a criminal record;
- Prove accreditation from a financial organisation guaranteeing funds if the business should fail;
- Provide official proof of your experience or qualifications;
- Provide official proof of your identity;
- Provide proof that you are not bankrupt;
- Provide proof that you have sufficient financial resources / solvency;
- Provide evidence of relevant insurance;
- Provide proof that you have no outstanding tax payments.

The availability of most of the above eight groupings of procedures is mandatory under the Services Directive, for others it is not (in particular social security and tax procedures). However, from a business perspective, it is strongly recommended to make available all these procedures through the PSCs as they are the main steps required to start a business or to provide cross-border services.

In this section the availability and quality of the three main tasks of the PSC are assessed: provision of information to businesses, completion of online procedures and assistance to PSC users.

The regulatory environment in Brandenburg can be defined as quite high. The development of the PSC has also led to standardisation and simplification of processes.

It is notable that the Brandenburg portal provides information to complete some of the relevant types of administrative requirements (seven of eight – procedures related on operation and location are not mentioned in the portal). An electronic completion of the six scenarios was possible for around half of the procedures relevant for this study (42%).

2.1 Provision of information on the types of administrative requirements applicable to both establishment and temporary cross-border scenarios

The obligation to set up PSCs means, in practice, those businesses must be able to complete the entire cycle of all procedures and formalities relating to the access to or the exercise of their activities without having to contact any institutional interlocutors other

than the PSC. The first key requirement for the PSCs is to make available all relevant information concerning applicable procedures.

2.1.1 Availability and quality of information

Table 3 shows that the Brandenburg portal provides comprehensive access to relevant information and/or services to fulfil the requirements of all six establishment and temporary cross-border scenarios. In total, 70 regulatory requirements need to be undertaken to complete the six scenarios. 52 % of these were covered by PSC portal or at another sites linked to by Business Link. Focus groups remarked how easy it was to follow the Step-by-Step Guide to identify the relevant procedures for a given business context.

Take for example the scenario of an architect that wants to submit services temporarily in Brandenburg. Through the step-by-step guide, the user is asked to specify the details of his personal situation. The portal then presents him with a checklist of those procedures applicable to his scenario. One of the first distinctions (after specifying the services sector) made in the checklist is the question on whether or not the user wants to establish or provide services temporarily. Once temporary service provision is selected, the portal informs the user of the need to submit an annual declaration to the chamber of architects. According to the PSC portal there is no disclosure obligation for the temporary cross-border services “Restaurant & Catering” and “Travel Agent & Tour Guide”.

Logically the establishment scenarios have significantly more regulatory requirements than the cross-border scenarios as they are of higher complexity and usually involve formalities relating to premises, the environment, etc.

From Table 3 it is clear that across the three different sectors (Architecture, Restaurants & Catering, Travel Agents and Tour Guides), about a quarter of procedures are served on the portal (26%, 25%, and 25% respectively) whereas slightly higher percentages (37%, 29% and 25%) are served on other websites and the remaining are not served online (37%, 46% and 50%). Therefore it emerges that the architectural scenario is somewhat better served than the other two included in the study.

In a second exercise we assessed the quality of the information provided by the portal for the eight types of administrative requirements mentioned previously. Table 4 shows that the portal is good at providing necessary information for a general business license and related sector specific requirements and requirements for premises of the provider. Furthermore for the cross-border architect scenario the administrative requirements have been examined. Those are comparable to the establishment scenario for architects.

For gathering information about requirements for company registration, tax formalities, social security formalities and operations and locations few more sites have been examined (e.g. <http://service.brandenburg.de>). General information were available here, additional information about supportive documents or timelines or rather step-by-step-guidance, electronic procedures could support potential user questions.

The column 'sector specific: person' refers to the procedures for individuals to get the recognition of their professional qualifications. It is noteworthy to mention that the Brandenburg portal explicitly covers procedures related to the recognition of professional qualifications, both in the establishment and in the cross-border context (for architects). Information is provided about the necessary requirements and links are established with the competent authorities, so that a user is able to complete the necessary procedures through the PSC.

2.1.2 Good practice: Structure and navigation of information

One of the best examples of good practice at the Brandenburg portal is the step-by-step checklists, following a life-event approach. The tool requires users to insert details such as their business activity, location, legal structure, employees and place of work. The tool enables users to produce a guideline (downloadable and printable) including regulation checklist and contact details of related authorities.

Registered users additionally have the possibility to use a case manager to track ongoing procedures. The case manager is an online post box and contains all cases. It shows per case the current status (status of relevant documents/ forms, outstanding information and activities, deadlines, fees, correspondence).

The checklist and the case manager were widely praised for being very focused and providing clear information for each situation. However, they were not immediately easy to find to a general user. They are highly useful because the categories of business activities covered are comprehensive.

The screen shots show the case establishing a travel agency. The checklist provides a quick and through overview of requirements (or the absence of them, see Annex A). The case manager is an interactive platform.

Information about the applicable administrative procedures (to start up a business/ provide services across-borders) can be accessed or searched in a number of different ways, see Table 5. These include searching/ access by service sector and by a thematic or alphabetical index of procedures (company registration, tax, etc.).

2.2 Electronic completion of procedures: coverage and level of sophistication

The Services Directive establishes an obligation on Member States to make it possible for businesses to complete all administrative formalities related to the establishment or cross-border provision of services online and across-borders. This includes both the submission of an application (with supportive documents) as well as the receipt of the administrative decision from the responsible competent authority.

If e-signatures are required in the context of e-procedures, Member States have to accept as a minimum advanced e-signatures supported by a qualified certificate and, if justified, also supported by a secure signature creation device (i.e. the qualified e-signatures)² Moreover, MS have to be able to technically process certain formats of advanced e-signatures (C/X/PAdES)³.

The sophistication of the PSC portals in terms of online completion of procedures is examined with a commonly adopted eGovernment maturity model with a four-step scale. The four steps or stages of development are:

1. *Information*: only the information required to understand how to complete the procedure is available;
2. *One-way interaction*: forms concerning the procedure that can be downloaded and printed are available (these can then be returned by post, email or taken directly to relevant competent authority offices);
3. *Two-way interaction*: forms concerning the procedure can be downloaded and uploaded, which enables the entrepreneur to *start* the procedure electronically. However, procedures are not fully online, some tasks need to be completed via alternative means (e.g. by post or visit to an office);
4. *Full case handling*: the whole procedure can be completed online (including the receipt of the administrative decision).

Table 6 shows to what extent are administrative procedures available online. About 50% of the procedures are available for registered users on the Brandenburg PSC portal or other sites e.g. the Brandenburg service portal or the portal of the Brandenburg architects association. Nearly the half of them is served by the PSC portal as two way interaction or full case handling. The full case handling (e.g. application for inscription in the list of architects or application for business license) requires an electronic submission with an eSignature. Applicants without an eSignature can send a signed printout via post/fax to the PSC. The mentioned other sites support with information about required forms, accepted formats of supportive documents, fees or related laws.

Applicants for cross border services (architects) may have difficulties to complete the procedures online due to the language barrier. Although general information is

² Decision 2009/767/EC

³ Decision 2011/130/EU

available in English and Polish at the PSC portal, detailed process information (e.g. case manager) and the supportive sites are not multilingual.

Table 6B shows that only one type of administrative requirement (General Business License) can be undertaken online as full case handling. For all other administrative requirements, it was necessary for the user to visit one additional site.

Table 7 shows that for completion of procedures, eID is necessary. A simple identification with user name and password for the log in at the PSC portal is required. Later on the user can upload a scanned proof of identity or send a copy via post/fax to the PSC.

If a user wants to submit his application and supporting documents, he needs to sign the application. As aforementioned the PSC portal offers the possibility to do so by making use of an electronic signature. For a trustfully and easy use of the eSignature the PSC portal provides a practical guideline with comprehensive information in German.

An EU member state citizen foreign can submit online applications in the same way. The identification methods are generally equal for users from all Member States. In the present stage of development, the portal supports only issued in Germany signatures. The conditioning of electronic signatures issued in other Member States is not incorporated in the portal.

Overall, the portal integrates the various administrative requirements in one e-service process (case management). That covers following main types:

- **General business licenses and registrations.** The application form can filled out online. The submission requires a signature. The possibility of a full case handling is provided. Alternatively a signed print out can sent by post/fax to the PSC. The procedure is charged with a moderate fee. Due to comprehensive accounting effort there are plans to cancel the fee.
- **Sector specific: Person and Premises of the provider.** For both the number of supportive forms depends on the provided service. Architects or restaurateurs have more obligations than travel agents (e.g. verifying of qualification, license for selling alcohol, proof of personally reliability or proof of practical experience). The supportive forms are partly provided by the PSC portal or linked sites. Digital documents/copies can be uploaded to the PSC portal or sent by post/ fax to the PSC. The administrative services are charged by the relevant authorities (e.g. association of architects).
- **Cross border services** The requirements for architects providing cross border services are comparable to those for establishing as an architect in Brandenburg. The application for the Brandenburg association of architects can be downloaded or completed online (requires eSignature issued in Germany). All other documents (see sector specific and premises of the provider) can be uploaded to the portal or sent to the PSC.

For the completion of the e-service process identification with passport or copy is required. The digital copy can be uploaded. Overall an electronic completion is possible.

Apart from these, there are a number of procedures relating to the tax and social security formalities etc. that are not supported by the PSC portal or linked sites. Only the checklist of the case management points out the possibility that other formalities must be fulfilled and that the necessary procedures have to carry out independently by the applicant. Few examples are listed (e.g. issuing of a tax number, registration for employers mutual insurance association or standard company number).

Table 9 shows that the portal enables electronic documents to be uploaded, downloaded and completed online using FTP and web forms. The portal supports the exchange of requested documents. These documents can be provided in a variety of ways including digital copies, the submission of copies of originals by post or personally. Each user can prepare a case related personnel checklist, which is the starting point for an individual case manager. That allows for documents to be uploaded at the time of interaction with the PSC by users, or they can be added later if the user has registered. Documents can be submitted in variety of file formats, including MS Word, TXT, PDF, CSV, JPEG and TIF. It is worth noting that Brandenburg has taken a pragmatic approach and that scanned copies of documents are accepted.

Requirements for cross-border services may vary according to the services provided and by the requirements of different competent authorities. For non-nationals a translation of documents is required for the main tasks (company registration, business license, sector specifics).

Only two of the tasks - company registration and services relating to an individual or profession - required the translation of original source documents. These documents can also be uploaded using FTP and web forms. Additionally, they can be sent by email to competent authorities.

Table 10 shows that four out of the eight groups of administrative procedures require *payment*. However, electronic payments (either by credit or debit card) are not supported.

Table 11 shows that the Portal for administrative requirements to be undertaken in Brandenburg provides *tracking services* so that users can monitor, via case manager, the progress of the services they require. The services for which the portal does not provide tracking facilities, progress is communicated to users through the use of email, phone and letters.

For the applications that can be sent electronically, Table 11 shows, that the outcome of requests and administrative decisions can all be received electronically by the user. Decisions are generally provided by email.

2.3 Assistance to PSC users

Portals provide a variety of online and offline support to overcome problems and enhance users' experience of Points of Single Contact.

The Brandenburg portal provides a number of interactive tools to help users obtain information. When users encounter problems, different sources of help are available. As Table 12 shows, online assistance is provided in a variety of ways (downloadable guides, FAQs and individual advice services). These are generally good, easy to use and comprehensive. Users with problems to which they cannot find an answer have the option to contact the PSC via telephone or email.

A simple standard query (about steps to be undertaken in order to provide temporary architect services; sent to all portals in the study) received a qualified response within 24 hours. Thus the response received was well within a reasonable time period. The response was individual and content related.

2.4 Overall quality of PSC services for users from other countries

2.4.1 Language support

To enhance cross-border activities it is recommended that portals are available in the language(s) of neighbouring countries or in one of the most commonly used EU languages.

The Brandenburg portal has respected this. Portal information is available in Polish and English (Table 13), written in a user-friendly manner. However, the translations are limited to certain parts of the portal. Important parts for an online process (especially the case interactive parts) are only available in German. It starts with the introduction 'first steps', continues with the checklist tool and ends with the case manager. The linked sites <http://service.brandenburg.de> or www.ak-brandenburg.de do not provide multilingual service, so it's essential that the PSC portal contains adequate information for the applicants of EU member states.

2.4.2 Finding the relevant information on applicable procedures

As Table 14 shows the portal provides a clear distinction for foreign businesses considering permanent (i.e. an establishment) and temporary trading. Through the targeted step-by-step guide a user is clearly informed about the different requirements he has to fulfil for his specific scenario.

The expert assessment shows that requirements are relatively clear and understandable. Nevertheless ease of use of the site and completion of electronic procedures for residents of other countries is less easy than for German users, due to the (as previously mentioned) lack of translation of the interactive parts. Furthermore, it can become more complicated as foreign users are less familiar with the German legal and administrative systems.

2.4.3 Completing procedures electronically

In general EU member state citizens can submit online forms and documents in the same way as Germans do (Table 14B).

Currently the Brandenburg PSC does not support eIDs/eSignatures from other Member States, which makes some of the electronic services provided by the portal not available to foreign users. In this case an online submission of forms and documents would be not possible and the forms/ documents would be sent to the PSC. Alternatively a foreign user can eIDs/eSignatures issued in Germany.

3 Use and usability

Use and usability is examined through the examination of three criteria, which are considered separately below.

The overall ease of use and usability of the portal was examined by focus group participants (in Germany and Poland) and eGovernment experts. The nine focus group participants were business people who are active in the three sectors covered by the study (architects, restaurants/catering, tourism). Usability was measured using the System Usability Scale (SUS) methodology, which uses an attitudinal scale where users are asked to respond to statements with a rating on a five-point (Lickert) scale of “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. SUS examines the efficiency, effectiveness and ease of use of the portal.

User satisfaction was also investigated using the Analysis of Web Application Requirements (AWARE) methodology. AWARE uses a similar Lickert based attitudinal scale to SUS. AWARE examines user satisfaction by examining users' views of various features of the portal; these include content, structure, navigation, presentation and user operation.

In addition, this chapter also looks at portal positioning, promotion and take-up by business users so far.

3.1 Task completion

3.1.1 Identifying the right procedures and finding appropriate information

A key role for the portal is to enable users to find the appropriate procedural and regulatory requirements prior to starting a business or starting cross-border trading. Tables 15, 16 and 17 show the ability of focus group participants to find the procedural requirements necessary to complete the six business scenarios. The focus group participants had 15 minutes using the portal to find the regulatory requirements and procedures required to complete the establishment and cross-border scenarios they examined.

Section 2.1 highlighted that the Brandenburg portal has a tool to enable users to find and receive a checklist and print out regulatory procedures. This enabled the scenario exercise to be completed by a few users in a matter of minutes. Others searched for appropriate procedures, usually using the ‘search’ function at the portal. This process was inefficient. The search function links to other portals of Brandenburg without a return function.

Tables 15, 16 and 17 show that users were mainly successful in finding relevant procedures for the establishment scenarios. On average, 79 % of the procedures identified for establishment scenarios were correctly selected. As mentioned in section 2.1 the PSC portal explains that there is no disclosure obligation for the temporary cross-border services “Restaurant & Catering” and “Travel Agent & Tour Guide”.

Furthermore the provided checklist for cross-border services of architects contains comparable information as for the establishment scenario. Therefore cross-border scenarios have not been rated by the focus group participants.

The highest proportion of participants who answered correctly was those doing the architecture establishment scenarios, the lowest the travel agent establishment scenarios.

Easier access (or translated guidance for users) to the interactive tool would almost certainly have increased successful identification of relevant procedures. Portal staff might consider making appropriate enhancements to signpost these more effectively for users.

As Tables 19, 20, 21 and 22 shows, overall there is an average level of satisfaction with the information content and the satisfaction with the ease of access to that information on the portal. Most focus group participants found the portal useable. There was more than sufficient information and generally the format and quality of the information was consistent and sufficient. However, a small number of focus group participants suggested that there was so much information that they could not always find precisely what was required; the use of clearer headings and sub-headings was suggested during discussions.

3.1.2 Completion of procedures

One constraint to usability that was highlighted was the weakness of the multilingual support for going through the different steps. Another criticism was related to the support side, which according to feedback was not technically developed enough.

Table 18B shows that, in general the expert assessment of the portal was above the average for several criteria average compared to their counterparts in other Member States. The expert assessment of the portal placed it above average for the structure and organisation of information, for navigation tools, for assistance channels, for translation of forms, for tracking of procedures and for submission and storing of eDocuments and forms. The portal received below average score for e-payment tools and low score (even if above the average of the portals examined) for eSignature services for non-nationals.

3.1.3 Comparison of results between national focus group and other focus group

In general, in Tables 20 and 22, Polish (cross-border) users found the German portal slightly more difficult to use than their German counterparts. The main reason for this was the language barrier that limited access to interactive tools, which have not been translated. These are the tools that explain and support the electronic completion of procedures.⁴

⁴ The scores represent the views of focus group participants and experts in each country, they have not been 'standardised'. Thus whilst the table provides a comparison of results between countries an unusually optimistic or pessimistic group of assessors could influence comparative results.

3.2 General usability and user satisfaction

Tables 23 and 24 examine usability using the SUS framework. It shows that the German users of the Brandenburg portal found the Brandenburg portal easier to use than their counterparts in other countries. The portal was found to be easier to use, better integrated and scenarios could be completed in a more intuitive manner. The portal was considered to be less complex than others and less cumbersome to use. The portal layout, graphics and consistency were also thought to be better than counterparts in other countries.

A particular noteworthy element was the quality of the checklist that helped users to address problems or find further information.

3.3 Accessibility

Several evaluation tools were used to examine portal accessibility and the extent to which the portal was usable by people of all abilities and disabilities.

Table 25 provides the number of errors preventing full accessibility found by two of the most commonly used accessibility tools. The lower the number of errors, the better. The average number of errors for all tested portals across Member States is shown in the right hand column.

Overall the Brandenburg has a relatively low level of accessibility. The most important result in terms of usability and accessibility is the W3C Markup Validator⁵. It assesses the html markup used in the web site and states whether any errors have occurred. In Brandenburg there were a high number of errors that might cause problems for the user.

Finally, accessibility was measured using the W3C CSS Validator⁶, which measures the degree to which web-sites adhere to web standards as regards cascading style sheets (CSS). CSS errors mean that information does not display correctly, or at all. For a website to be considered of good accessibility, the maximum number of errors should be 100. For the Brandenburg portal 113 errors were reported.

3.4 Take-up, positioning and promotion

The current level of use is below the expectations, especially for cross-border activities. More support to promote the site and to develop the attractiveness for cross-border activities should increase portal use and help to improve 'returns' from the current level of investment.

Key PSC related phrases were examined in two search engines. Table 26 shows that for nearly all of these searches the Brandenburg portal was ranked in over 50th position in

⁵ <http://validator.w3.org/>

⁶ <http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/>

the search results⁷. The term that received relatively high rankings in both search engines is the German expression for 'Point of single contact', for which the portal was ranked 1 on Google and 3 on Yahoo. As section 4.2 highlights, the PSC managers are enhancing their marketing activities.

Table 27 describes the focus group's recognition and awareness of aspects of governmental portals such as its affiliation with the EUGO network. However, the portal was not known amongst the participants prior to their participation in the focus group, but recognition was at the average of all Member States portals' studied. The site was recognizable as an official portal due to its style, the content of 'about us pages' and 'Brandenburg' URL. In the beginning of the examination the use of the EUGO logo was not found on the portal, nor was there any link to the EUGO web site. Later on the starting page of the PSC portal contained the EUGO and the German Einheitlicher Ansprechpartner logo. A click on the EUGO logo links to European network <http://ec.europa.eu>.

⁷ These results are based on the search terms in local language.

4 Administration, organisation and back office enablers

This section examines the operational aspects that impact on the practical functioning of the portal activities. This includes the degree of back-office integration (i.e. the interplay between competent authorities responsible for specific procedures handled through the PSC and the portal itself); it investigates the degree of resource availability and it includes the overall eGovernment readiness of a Member States, in particular as regards key technical enablers such as the ability to handle electronic IDs, e-signatures or e-payment means.

4.1 Back office integration and cooperation with competent authorities

For the portal to offer its services to business in an effective manner, it is vital that all competent authorities are closely connected to the portal. Without successful back-office integration, it would be challenging to ensure up-to-date information and electronic application forms are available in a coherent manner across the board. Secondly, providing the means to complete a wide array of electronic procedures through a single portal can potentially offer serious efficiency gains through a push towards a standardization of relevant forms as well as the means to sign applications electronically and to submit application files.

As Table 28 illustrates, the number of authorities dealing with the procedures offered through the portal amounts to over 200 (including large numbers of local authorities). This has posed a serious challenge, especially for the standardization of forms required by the different competent authorities.

It can be stated that, at this point in time, it is difficult to determine what specific role this portal could have (autonomous portal or online gateway platform to other sites). The procedural requirements that are tackled are almost evenly divided between, on the one hand, procedures that are served by the PSC portal and, on the other hand, procedures that are served at another site linked to by the PSC portal. In addition, almost half of the procedures are not served by the PSC portal or other sites.

To ensure that provided information of competent authority is reliable and up-to-date the content is reviewed and then approved locally by the relevant competent authority and additionally by PSC staff (legal experts) on an annual basis before posting. There are no legal arrangements.

Besides, the PSC have no formal remit to seek the active cooperation of competent authorities - the portal manager and staffs are highly motivated to seek an active cooperation with competent authorities. It's a target for PSC to initiate more government activities. Discussions with portal staff identified that the establishment of relationships with competent authorities is now good and they appreciate the help and support that the central core staff of the PSC provides them in automating procedures to enhance efficiency.

There are three manners by which the PSC development team can be notified of errors. Firstly, end-users can contact the team through the portal to notify them of errors. Secondly, competent authorities can identify errors and inform the team. Finally, the staff can encounter errors in the regularly review of web pages and other day-to-day activities, these are also sent to the central team to be resolved. The PSC use an error tracking system/ trouble ticketing system. A ticket gets opened for each identified error and does not get closed before the problem is solved.

4.2 Finance and resources

The development cost of the PSC until launch is estimated by the portal manager to be approximately half a million euro. An additional million euro was spent after the portal launch. The annual running costs have not been reported.

Additional resources are not expected in the future. In the future to justify it might be hard to justify the current level of funding with the relatively small number of users the Brandenburg portal has. An increase in numbers will increase the economies of scale that the portal was intended to achieve when first developed. The marketing activities that the PSC team is undertaking may help increase awareness of the portal and its uses and in that way attract more users, helping to achieve the aforementioned economies of scale.

4.3 Status of key technical enablers (eID, e-signatures, e-payments)

Brandenburg has fairly open-minded views about the need for identification and signatures and therefore, for most procedures, these are not required.

To simplify the procedure electronic signatures are not used for verification purposes. Instead, the eSignature is used to 'lock down' the documents or forms completed users, this ensures that others cannot tamper with them. The portal management expect from the EC to improve the transparency for eSignatures (trusted list) in order to facilitate the use of these in the future.

5 Future Outlook

PSC staff are encouraging the creation of a road map for the further development of the portal. The aim of such further development would be aimed at improving the Brandenburg portal's service offerings.

The PSC team plan more intensive networking on PSC matters to address the current complexity that potential users face. Furthermore the content syndication and the language services are potentially the next focus areas, improving the multilingual services and content to meet foreign users' needs.

Providing there is more transparency with regard to eSignature in the EU, this may also be a point for attention.

6 Strengths, weaknesses and recommendations

This study examined the average degree of readiness for home country and cross-border users. However, not all procedures were supported at the highest level of sophistication.

6.1 Availability and quality of PSC services

Expert analysis found that a reasonable portion of the administrative requirements analysed through the scenarios can be completed online. Information provision is generally good and the quality of the guiding facility, which provides easier directions or access to information for business activities, was praised by focus group participants. However, the support tools, FAQs and several other user support elements are only available in German, which must be considered an area of improvement. More translation on the site would make these highly advantageous attributes of the site available to foreign users as well.

Both experts and focus group participants thought that the checklist and the case manager, which produced regulation checklists for business activities, were significant elements, best practices of the portal. However, these features could be enhanced further, by setting for example standard forms for any of the procedure or requirements.

However, at this point, though acceptable considering the relatively low maturity of the portal, only 42% of the tested procedures can be completed online. It is clear that more needs to be done to ensure the full online completion of administrative procedures through the portal. This will also require a continuous effort to bring on board the authorities not yet using the standardized forms available through the portal. Bringing these onboard would ensure a consistent service offering across the range of authorities and procedures. Finally, the long-term use of the portal both within Germany and from abroad could be ensured by gradually integrating more comprehensive technical solutions for the verification of electronic signatures, to ensure that advanced electronic signatures issued by other member States can also be supported by the portal.

In order to respond to the actual needs of business users, the Brandenburg PSC may want to consider expanding the coverage of the procedures available for online completion, beyond the scope of the Services Directive, as from a business perspective, it would be much more desirable to be able to complete all key formalities through a single gateway.

Furthermore, it has been found out that making available more comprehensive amount of electronic procedures, both for German nationals and for users from abroad (by reducing technical barriers and enabling the use of non-national means of eID and eSignature, where required) would enhance the use and the effectiveness of PSC.

6.2 Use and usability

Overall the use and usability of the Brandenburg PSC was perceived to be adequate relative to the other portals that were studied. Key attributes were thought to be:

- The guidance via checklist
- The assistance of a case manager
- Simple and clear handling
- Its role in concentration on main activities, wrapped by information

Nonetheless, experts and focus group participants suggested some areas for improvement. These included:-

- Promoting the portal, better positioning on search websites
- Easier access or signposting to interactive tools
- More succinct forms for some services
- Translation button for interactive tools
- Videos to help users to better understand the portal

Levels of use and usability would probably be increased if a more user-friendly method of access was adopted.

6.3 Administration, organisation and back office enablers

Overall the administration, organisation and back office enablers were found to be good.

The key attributes identified by experts, PSC staff and competent authorities are:

- Good process performance through a developed network and integration of competent authorities
- The back office functionality; this provides competent authorities with progress of an application because all required information is held in a single module.