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Germany (Hessen) Country Report
https://eah.hessen.de

Contents

1 Introduction

This country report provides an overview of existing Point of Single Contact (PSC) infrastructure and services offered in the state of Hessen 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 Austria during focus group sessions[1] 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.dienstleisten-leicht-gemacht.de links to the 16 portals of the federal states of Germany. Each federal state has an own portal solution. The Hessen PSC-Portal https://eah.hessen.de is part of a lager eGoverment portal of Hessen. The portal is managed by three regional councils – the Regional Council of Kassel, the Regional Council of Gießen and the Regional Council of Darmstadt.

The PSC-Portal provides general information and links the user to the so-called "Hessenfinder" (www.hessenfinder.de), a more detailed information portal to systematically search for competent authorities and applicable procedures in a broad range of business scenarios. Most importantly, the PSC-Portal brings the user to the service-platform (www.dienstleistungsplattform-hessen.de) which contains the online application submission management for starting or changing a business in services. The types of information covered by the portals shows Table 1.

The mentioned portals are among a wide range of further portals for related business activities (tax return, grants, dunning procedure, foreign trade subsidies, etc.) where does the PSC-Portal or the "Hessenfinder" link to. Those are portals of the state Hessen, federal government, professional associations and social online communities (facebook). For gathering further information this portals have been partly taken into consideration. For example the German electronic tax return portal "ElsterOnline" (www.elsteronline.de) for entrepreneurs and employers, workers, pensioners and retirees.

The plans for the IT solution started mid 2008. In Dec 2009 the portal and the service-platform went live for users. It was newly created and one of the three eGovernment developments in Hessen. The requirements of the PSC enhanced the development of eGoverment in Hessen. The PSC manager mentioned that "It was a very intensive work in a short time".

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[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.

The PSC-portal and the service-platform of the Hessen PSC are in German with a language button to an English version. All key information and the guidance thru the application process are available in multiple languages. Linked web pages are often in English too. The "Hessenfinder" information are available in German.

Experts and focus group participants mentioned the "optimistic appearance" of the portals.

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 Hessen – 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 Hessen – 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 fulfill 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 (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 are carried out and the place 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.

The regulatory environment in Hessen can be defined as moderately heavy. The development of the PSC has also led to standardisation and simplification of processes. In the case of Hessen, this has resulted in more use of eSignatures and improvement in operational processes.

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.

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, that 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

In a first exercise we looked at the **number and coverage** by the portal of requirements or process steps needed for permanent establishment or temporary services provision based on the business scenarios described above, see Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the PSC-portal, "Hessenfinder" and service-portal provide comprehensive access to relevant information and/or services to fulfill the requirements of all three establishment scenarios.

In total, 65 regulatory requirements need to be undertaken to complete the three establishment scenarios. 17 of these were covered by the PSC portal. 48 procedures were covered by the web sites of competent authorities; these were primarily (local) administration web sites.

From Table 3 it is clear that across the three different sectors (Architecture, Restaurants & Catering, Travel Agents and Tour Guides), nearly all procedures are served over the three portal and another linked sites. However, to gain the information extensive searches had to be undertaken on all linked sites.

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. The examined portals provide no clear distinguishing between establishment and temporary cross-border services. Therefore for the temporary cross-border scenarios no specific separate information/ services have been identified (see Table 3), with one exception for architects (declaration of services for non-members of German architect associations). Beside this the "Hessenfinder" reports about the certificate for free movement and residence for EU citizens.

The column 'sector specific: person' refers to the procedures for individuals to get the recognition of their professional qualifications. As can be seen from Tables 4, 6B, 8, 9, 10, 11 and Table 18, basic qualitative information is provided by the portal. Users cannot complete all steps of the tasks online (full case handling). Yet, they are referred to other sites for additional information or to complete certain tasks. E-signatures and e-identification is required and available to obtain full completion. In addition, some types of formalities are required to complete the procedure, such as tracking and delivery tools, payment, etc.

In a second exercise we assessed the quality of the information provided by the portal for the eight types of administrative requirements mentioned previously. For this task we took the PSC-Portal, the "Hessenfinder", the service portal and additional the tax-portal into consideration.
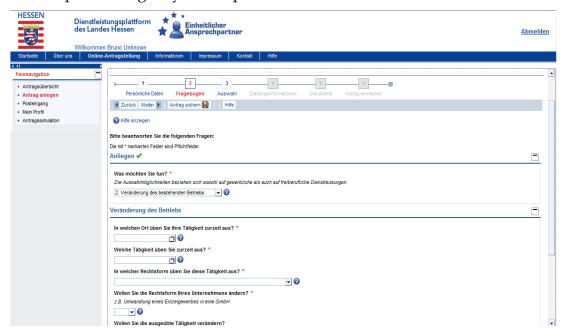
The "Hessenfinder" is the central responsibility finder in Hessen. It contains information about almost all public services for example responsibilities, fees etc. in Hessen. The service-platform receives this data via data transport.

As mentioned before the service portal is focused on registration of a new or changing business and getting or extending a license. Applicants, PSC and competent authorities are all working on the service-platform. On the platform, the applicants do not need to know what kind of applications they need to present and which the competent authorities for different applications are. The platform offers the applicants a dynamic questionnaire which identifies the relevant applications including the corresponding documents and forms and the competent authorities. The documents can usually be uploaded during the application process or at any time else if the applicant has saved his application. The specific documents, which need to be submitted, are determined centrally ("Hessenfinder" data). Documents can be submitted in variety of file formats, such as MS Word, PDF or JPEG. The PSC can add new documents/forms or a whole new application if it is necessary. Furthermore the PSC can return documents/forms that are filled out incorrectly to the applicant.

Table 4 shows that for all eight "main" types of administrative requirements sufficient information are available and for six types a step-by-step guidance inform about regulations, related authorities, required documents, process flow and additional information in general [2]. For for more detailed information (e.g. original/copies, translated documents) it is in few cases possible to follow further links. An electronic/ online procedure was identified for the "general business license" and the "tax formalities".

2.1.2   Good practice: Structure and navigation of information

One of the best examples of good practice at the Hessen portal is the interactive roadmap including a dynamic questionnaire.
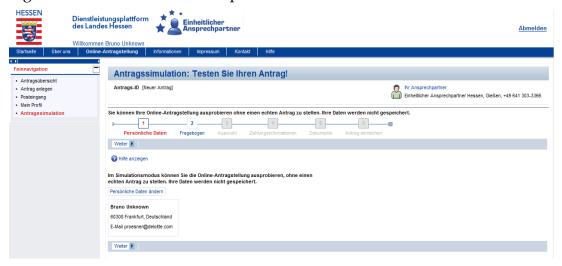

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[2] Specifically procedures applied to cross border provision of services could be examined and documented only for the architect scenario. The result is shown in the table.

The tool requires users to fill in details such as personnel information, their business activity, location, legal structure, employees and place of work. Depending on the answers of the applicant, other questions may open up. Following the questionnaire the user receives the information which documents will be need to complete the process. It acts as a brief checklist (without detailed information, e.g. on competent authorities, deadlines etc). The tool then enables users to submit their application file through the portal, by uploading the relevant document and by filling out the applicable forms online.

Finally the user knows which documents are still missing, where an eSignature is necessary and how much he will be charged for the documents and services.

The simulation function is interesting. It helps the user for a very first orientation, without any need to upload or sign documents. A simulation is possible without registration on the PSC service platform.

Both these functions were widely praised for being highly focused. The users always know how many steps on the roadmap are still to be completed in the application process.

However, they were not immediately obvious to the users. As already mentioned the service-platform is on a separate web site: www.dienstleistungsplattform-hessen.de. The main page www.eah.hessen.de has two links to this page, among other links which seems to have the same or higher information priority. Most of the user spent a long time searching on the www.eah.hessen.de website without getting relevant information about establishing a service.

The online application guidance works also for cross border services. Necessary information is available in English. In few test cases the translation was a bit inconsistent, means a mixture of German and English.

2.2 Electronic completion of procedures: coverage and level of sophistication

The Services Directive imposes 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)[3] Moreover, MS have to be able to technically process certain formats of advanced e-signatures (C/X/PAdES)[4].

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 administrative procedures are available online. About one quarter of the procedures for establishing are served by the portals, mainly via two-way interaction, and information only at the websites of other competent authorities. If all required documents exist in a permitted manner the user can up loaded them – few forms can be also filled online – and send them forward to the PSC. For all other cases information is available at other sides.

As mentioned before the examined portals provide no clear distinguishing between establishment and temporary cross-border services. Therefore table 6 shows for the temporary cross-border scenarios no specific separate information/ services (with one exception for architects).

Related to the eight main types of administrative requirements all steps of the task for the general business license and the tax formalities can be undertaken online. In all

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[3] Decision 2009/767/EC

[4] Decision 2011/130/EU

cases the PSC portal refers to another side (e.g. "Hessenfinder", service platform, tax portal) to complete the task (see Table 6B). For a general business license (www.dienstleistungsplattform-hessen.de) and tax formalities (www.elsteronline.de) all steps of the task can be undertaken online. The completion of a company registration is finally electronically too, but needs the assistance of notary.

To start an online work flow on the service platform a registration (username/password) is required. This has to be done in the ongoing completion process. Table 7 shows that for completion of procedures, eID and e-signatures are necessary. eID is required such as for company registration, where data is directly inserted into the business register. Documents with signature need can send via post, fax or email (scanned document).

For identification a scanned copy of the passport is need as ID (in future, the use of electronic IDs will also be supported). For submitting an application an eSignature is requirement for those procedures offered electronically. A signed print out of the application can also send by fax/post to the PSC for a submission, as well as a scanned copy by mail.

A foreigner can use their own eSignature to sign an application, but it is not yet guaranteed that the signature can actually be verified. In case of doubts, the PSC may contact the applicant and ask for to send a signed application by fax/post or mail. The Hessen PSC is in the process of developing a more comprehensive technical solution to handle electronic signatures which should be in place by end 2012 and which will enable not only national but also non-national users to submit applications, using eSignatures.

The analysis below gives an overview and some insight into the company registration procedures which can be fulfilled electronically in Hessen.

Table 8 shows the use of e-signatures and e-identification for the completion of the eight "main" types of administrative requirements. Again statements were possible for those procedures offered electronically, company registration, general business license, and tax formalities. To complete the procedure for company registration and tax formalities an eSignature is required. For general business license an eSignature is possible too, but also to send a signed print out of the application by fax/post or a scanned copy by mail to the PSC for a submission.

Table 9 shows the business tasks to be undertaken in Hessen. The company registration task requires about six documents for the registration in the commercial register. The application for registration in the commercial register is electronically certified by any manager in legalized form. This should be done by a notary. Two documents are required for a general business license. A passport copy for identification can be uploaded and a business registration form can filled out online. In general a business license is applied in combination with procedures/ administrative requirements specifically for the service provider/ profession and premises of the provider. Therefore further five forms are required (mainly the restaurant/catering scenario), partly

supported by web forms. The precise number of documents is largely determined by the purpose of the application and it is possible to require different numbers of documents to complete the same scenario for architects, restaurants or travel agencies.

A procedure applied specifically to cross border provision of services has been identified only for the architect scenario. In this case a copy of the passport is required as well as a registration at the Hessen architect association. The registration process can started online via web form, supported by the service platform. The "Hessenfinder" informs that for an architect association registration few more documents are required (e.g. project list, proof of professional experience/qualification, proof of professional liability insurance, birth certificate, police clearance). Due to a missing link between the application process via service platform and the information provided by the "Hessenfinder" a user will probably spend much time on gathering full information.

No further examinations have been done for the tax formalities. For deeper analysis a registration with a tax number and a full authorization would have been necessary.

The service platform was able to support the exchange of all documents. These documents could be provided in a variety of ways including digital copies, the submission of copies of originals by post. Foreign-language documents must be translated officially.

In the examined cases the PSC service is mainly free of charge but for administrative tasks or required forms an administration fee has to be paid (Table 10). The service-platform gives an overview over the expected fees. The user has the choice between making the payment by money transfer or by direct debit. Because of the slowly increasing number of applications, an online-payment procedure will not be offered for the present.

The service-platform provides tracking services so that users can monitor the progress of the services they require. The user is informed by email.

For those applications that can already be sent electronically Table 11 shows that the outcome of requests and administrative decisions can all be received electronically. All decisions are send by mail to the user and collected on the service-platform (electronic post box).

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.

When users encounter problems two sources of help are available. As Table 12 shows, online assistance is provided in a variety of ways (downloadable guides, FAQs and step-wise tools). These are generally good, easy to use and comprehensive.

Information about the applicable administrative procedures (to start up a business/ provide services across borders) can be searched through an alphabetical and/or

thematic index (Table 5). The service platform does not provide a search by type of user, stage in business life cycle or service sector. The search function is only part of the main web sites www.eah.hessen.de and "Hessenfinder".
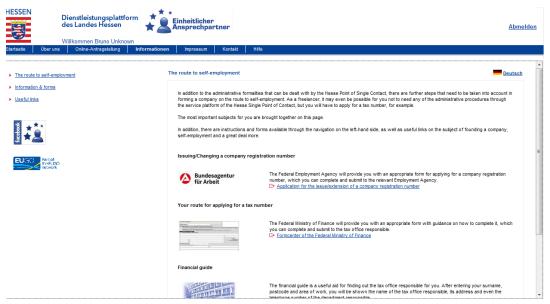
However, users with problems to which they cannot find an answer appear to have the option for an individual advice service by mail or telephone.

A simple standard query (about steps to be undertaken in order to provide temporary architect services; sent to all portals in the study) did not receive a response. The portal states that "The time taken for processing can vary enormously and depends, amongst other things, on how extensive the procedure is. For this reason, we unfortunately cannot say how long it will take". Other PSC portals calculate with max. 5 working days, for more complex queries may it take up to 14 working days.

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 languages. The PSC service platform of Hessen is available in English to (Table 13), it provides general information, the guided online application (www.dienstleistungsplattform-hessen.de), links and FAQ's in English.

The translation is written in a user-friendly manner. Some times with mixed components of German and English.

More than the basic introductory information is available in English. That fact makes it easier for non-German users to start an online registration. However, a translation help button for forms was not found by the focus group participants.

2.4.2 Finding the relevant information on applicable procedures

Expert noted that the portal does not show a clear distinction for foreign businesses considering permanent (i.e. an establishment) and temporary trading. A user can understand the general requirements. As mentioned before the difficulty is to complete the process online (Table 14).

2.4.3 Completing procedures electronically

Table 14B confirms that the use of the site for the online submission of forms and documents is possible. In addition, electronic signatures issued in other MS can also be used for the portal, but for a limited amount of services. Lastly, cross-border e-Identification is available for foreign users from all MS.

3 Use and usability

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

The overall ease of use and usability of the portal was examined by focus group participants (in German and Austria) 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 appropriate procedural and regulatory requirements prior to starting a business or starting cross-border trading. Tables 15, 16 and 17 examine the ability of focus group participants to find the procedural requirements necessary to complete the six business scenarios. 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 Hessen service platform has a tool to enable users to find and receive a kind of checklist. When the starting point of the online guidance was found, the task could be completed easily. Using the 'search' function at the www.eah.hessen-portal.de was inefficient and did not lead to the portal www.dienstleisten-leicht-gemacht.de. Some users ran out of time when attempting to complete the more complex scenarios.

Tables 15, 16 and 17 show that users were generally successful in finding relevant procedures. On average, 62 % of the procedures identified for establishment scenarios were correctly selected. The highest proportion was for the food establishment scenario

(75 %); the architecture establishment scenario achieved about the same level (70 %). the lowest was for the travel agent establishment scenario (40 %)

Easier access (or guidance for users) to the interactive tool and a linkage between the interactive tool at the service platform and the information given by the "Hessenfinder" would almost certainly have increased successful identification of relevant procedures. Portal staff might consider making appropriate enhancements to signpost these more effectively for the users.

As Tables 19, 20, 21 and 23 shows, overall there is a degree of neutrality or dissatisfaction with the information content and the ease of access to that information on the portal. Most focus group participants found it relatively difficult to use the portal. The main reason was the lack of a clear starting point combined with the more confusing change between the portals.

More experienced users found few positive arguments: that functions are well integrated and that scenarios are intuitive to complete (Tables 22 and 23).

3.1.2   Completion of procedures

A weakness that was identified was that it was hard to find the starting point for the application process, there is a need to bring it out more.

Furthermore, there was a need for more information and administration processes in one single place, i.e. on one page.

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

In general, in Tables 20 and 22, German users and Austrian have a comparable opinion. The Austrian focus group participants have been less satisfied with the portal than the German group (Table 22). One reason could be that they had higher expectations due to their home country portal.

3.2   General usability and user satisfaction

Tables 23 and 24 examine usability using the SUS framework. It shows that experts found the Hessen portal easier to use than their counterparts in other countries (this is indicated in the higher scores for Hessen), and less complex than in other countries. Better rated are also the integration of functions and the possibility to complete the scenario intuitively.

Against all the AWARE user satisfaction criteria, the portal received more favourable responses than counterparts in other countries.

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 is shown in the right hand column.

Overall Hessen has a relatively high level of accessibility. The most important result in terms of usability and accessibility is the W3C Markup Validator[5]. It assesses the html markup used in the web site and states whether any errors have occurred. In Hessen there was only one minor error that does not usually cause problems for the user.

Finally, accessibility was measured using the W3C CSS Validator[6], 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.

3.4   Take-up, positioning and promotion

Key PSC related phrases were examined in two search engines[7]. Table 26 shows that for nearly all of these searches the portal was ranked in over 50th position in the search results. The only term that received high rankings in both search engines was "Point of single contact" (German expression "Einheitlicher Ansprechpartner") which was ranked 1 on one search engine and 3 on the other.

Table 27 describes the focus group's recognition and awareness of aspects of governmental portals such as its affiliation with the EUGO network. The portal was not known amongst the participants prior to the focus group and recognition was at the average of all Member States studied. The site was recognisable as an official portal due to its style, the content of 'about us pages' and '.hessen.de' URL. The use of the EUGO logo was consequently used and one link led to the EUGO web site.

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[5] http://validator.w3.org/

[6] http://jigsaw.w3.org/**css**-validator/

[7] This was done in the 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 nearly 500 (including large numbers of local authorities as well as multiple national government ministries).   This has posed a serious challenge.

PSC staff has a formal remit to seek the active cooperation between the point of single contact and the competent authorities.   The act "Einheitlicher Ansprechpartner" (EAH/PSC) describes the roles and the way of cooperation in Hessen. Nevertheless there have been resistances by municipal authorities to accept the PSC competence.

With the EAH/PSC-act is a legal arrangement in place to ensure that information and services provided through the PSC are reliable and up-to-date.   Involved authorities are responsible for their data content in the Hessen-Finder (database of the service-platform). In addition there are administrative mechanisms that ensure reliability.

4.2   Finance and resources

The development of the eGovernment (incl. the PSC site and two other) has cost 3.5 million euro until now. The portal staff estimates annual running costs of 750.000 euro, excl. staff. The portal is currently administered by approximately five staff (not all are employed full-time by the PSC).

Although currently resources are adequate, austerity cuts might have an impact in the future, although additional resources are not expected in the future. It might be hard in the future to justify the current level of funding with the relatively small number of applications the Hessen portal receives. An increase in numbers will increase the economies of scale that the portal was intended to achieve when first developed.

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

The development of the PSC portal has initialized a push toward standardization and simplification; it downsized also the number of requested signatures and improved the methods for e-signatures.

Currently applications require an e-identification (scanned copies of passport are accepted) and to complete the application process an e-signature for about 30% of the services is necessary.

To implement the obligations set out in the three comitology decisions on electronic procedures a supportive measure by the EC about reliable certification of signatures and a simplification of the trusted list is expected by the PSC staff.

5 Future Outlook

Hessen has an eGoverment master plan until 2013, topics are the technical development and the central application portal. As main expected barriers for the development of the PSC the PSC staff mentioned the position/ role of PSC within the eGoverment and business services in Hessen.

6 Strengths, weaknesses and recommendations

This study examined the readiness of the PSC portal by investigating its ability to support the completion of six business scenarios and the support of 'types of administrative requirements'. The portal shows a relative readiness for home country and cross-border users. However, not all procedures were supported at the highest level of sophistication and not all users would agree with the PS staff conclusion, that the readiness of the PSC portal to handle the completion of procedures electronically across borders is good.

6.1 Availability and quality of PSC services

Expert analysis found that an average portion of the administrative requirements analyzed through the scenarios is offered online, but spread over several related sites.

Information provision is generally sufficient for an experienced user; others would have to search information on further web sites. The search function on the main web site supports this, but leads away from the original application process.

Both experts and focus group participants thought that the application guidance, which produced a kind of checklist for business activities, were a significant element of best practice at the portal. However, this advantageous feature could be enhanced if some additional business activities and a linkage to required forms ("Hessenfinder") were added.

One of the main recommendations for the Hessen PSC would therefore be to progressively increase the number of procedures available for online completion. This includes in particular procedures a service provider has to fulfill to provide services across borders on a temporary basis, where currently, the PSC provides (some) information, but no clear distinguishing between the procedures for establishing a service and temporary cross border services. It also includes those procedures that fall under the responsibility of local/federal authorities or prefecture (e.g. restaurant licenses, licenses related to the premises where a service is offered, tax return etc).

In order to respond to the actual needs of business users, the Hessen PSC may want to consider expanding the coverage of the procedures available for online completion, beyond the scope of the Services Directive (e.g. VAT, social security, posting of workers etc), as from a business perspective, it would be much more desirable to be able to complete all key formalities through a single gateway.

Finally, another potential area of improvement could be the way that information is presented concerning the different business situations, most specifically for foreign entrepreneurs wanting to offer services in Hessen. A clearer explanation for instance between the general requirements governing establishment cases and those applicable to the temporary provision of services would be advantageous.

6.2 Summarising expert assessment

Table 18B shows that in general the expert assessment of the portal was less positive than their counterparts in other Member States. The expert assessment of the portal was above the average for assistance channels, eID/ eSignature services for non-nationals. The portal received below average scores for structure and organisation of information, navigation tools and identifying relevant procedures, multilingual assistance, translation of information/ forms, online payment tools, and submission and storing of eDocuments and forms.

6.3 Use and usability

Overall the use and usability of the Hessen PSC has key attributes were thought to be:

- The clear and professional appearance
- Simple and clear language, not too complicated
- Transparent application guidance

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

- providing a one-stop source for information and services
- Easier access or signposting to the application guidance
- clear positioning of services for cross border activities
- Videos to help users to better understand the portal

An important area of improvement is the degree of information available on providing services to Hessen on a temporary basis. The website offers a general introduction for new businesses from abroad but not if it only wants to enter Hessen on a temporary basis (i.e. without establishment), with the one exception for architects.

Some aspects are already focused by the PSC staff, such as simplification of online-forms through behavior orientated integration or updating the portal for new browsers.

6.4 Administration, organisation and back office enablers

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

Currently the level of use of the portal is below expectations, especially for merged administrative services – such as food & beverage - where a PSC portal provides clear benefits for a user. The study shows the relatively low awareness of the portal. More focused support to promote the site should increase portal use and help to improve 'returns' from the current level of investment.