CARDS

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"**SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS SUPPORT PROGRAMME**"

Information Centers and One-Stop-Shops

Albania, Montenegro, Croatia

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Introduction

The present report is drafted in the context of the Social Institutions Support Project, which is implemented by the Council of Europe.

The present assignment consisted in analysing ways for improving the performance of social security administration through the introduction of information centres and one-stop shops in the countries that have selected this project, namely Albania, Croatia and Montenegro. In specific, the Terms of Reference of the assignment read as follows:

Information centers and one-stop-shop

Performance of social security administration may present weaknesses in all of the CARDS-SISP countries, especially as regards their relation with (potential) beneficiaries and cooperation between various administrative actors involved with social security administration. Citizens often have to deal with a number of services and institutions in order to collect all the necessary paperwork for applying for social security benefits. Additionally, most citizens/claimants of social security services are usually not aware of the full range of services available within their municipality or commune, thus making coordination and networking mechanisms necessary in order to ensure that the citizen makes use of the full range of services available.

Whereas the complexity of social security administration may not always be avoided, the lack of co-ordination and even communication between different social security administrators can never be justified. Lack of coordination should not be shifted to the shoulders of beneficiaries.

Information centres or even one stop shops could enhance transparency and contribute to improve relations between social security administration and benefit claimants and within social security administration itself in all of the involved countries. They could show to be crucial elements in making the co-ordination of systems within the region and with other states effectively work.

It is important both for the citizens and the targeting of the benefits to ensure coordination and networking between the available benefits and administrations providing them. Possible solution could be to provide consistent and accurate information through information centres, where specially trained staff could provide information on the full range of social security benefits.

One could also take a step further and establish social security one stop shops.
A way of ensuring enhanced accessibility, networking, transparency and efficiency in the operation of social security administration has proved to be the establishment of multifunctional 'One Stop Shops' or "Citizen Centers" offering different services and minimising the effort from the part

of the citizen. The basic idea of a one-stop-shop is that the citizen only has to be in contact with one single entity to get information, obtain all necessary paperwork, make applications etc, rather than having to go through a labyrinth of different government bodies. This has in many cases a positive effect on reducing corruption incidents and in simplifying administrative procedures.

Processes relating to social security can be concentrated in a single contact point operating at the level closest to the citizens. There, citizens can get information about required processes and necessary documents, fill application forms, submit applications, receive the required documentation or even the payment of benefits. Social security one-stop-shops could also constitute the "entrance point" to the social security system and could (besides information, applications etc) assess the needs of beneficiaries and direct them to the competent social security services. In the context of Kosovo, one stop shops need to be multifunctional in order to cater for a number of needs.

One stop shops are a good administrative practice for facilitating access of citizens to information and services, reducing bureaucracy and corruption. In the field of social security, multifunctional one-stop-shops can address many of the malfunctions of the existing system.

Social Security one stop shops or information centres could contribute in improving administrative efficiency and performance and especially improve the relation with the persons claiming benefits. In addition, such information centres or one stop shops would contribute to better communication between various ministries and autonomous bodies entrusted with social security administration. They could play a crucial role in improving social security coordination.

It is possible to split up this project into two, one dealing with information centres, the other dealing with one-stop-shops.

The report was drafted from February 2007- July 2007 based on input from the following sources:

a) the findings of the regional assessment reports elaborated by the key experts participating in the Social Institutions Support Project
b) the documentation made available by the SISP project
c) information and data provided by the Local Project Officers of the SISP project in the countries concerned
d) desk research.

The present report aims to propose ideas for improving specific aspects of the social security administration in the countries concerned through the operation or improvement of the operation of information centers and/or one-stop shops.

The report is structured in the following parts:

Part I identifies the main reasons that make the establishment of information centers and one-stop-shops useful for the operation of the social security administration,

Part II defines the concepts and identifies different models of information centers and one-stop-shops

Part III makes reference to the comparative experience

Part IV presents the situation in the countries participating in the project and

Part V attempts some synthetic conclusions and recommendations.

All suggestions and proposals expressed in this report reflect the personal opinion of the author and should be considered as ideas for further discussion. The competent authorities are welcome to comment the present draft in order to ensure that accurate information is provided and that the present report addresses issues pertinent to the country.

Special thanks are addressed to Ms. Maria Mousmouti, LLM (Leuven), Executive Director of the Centre for European Constitutional Law (CECL) for her assistance and ideas in elaborating this report to Mr Aleksandr Prenga, LPO for Albania, Mr Mihovil Rismondo, LPO Croatia and Ms Svetlana Stojanovic from Montenegro.

I. Access as a condition for the exercise of social security rights

A basic problem in most transition countries, including the countries participating in the present regional project, is to find ways to guarantee the access of all potential beneficiaries or claimants to the social security services and benefits which are consolidated in national legislation.

The constitutional consolidation and the legal regulation of social rights are not sufficient in themselves for guaranteeing access to benefits and services, unless they are accompanied

a) by systematic information and awareness of the citizens/claimants of benefits and services on their rights and the procedure to exercise them

b) by the organisation of the social security administration in a way that allows the effective exercise of the rights consolidated and ensures easy and unlimited access to services and benefits.

From an overview of the constitutions of the countries participating in the project, the following rights are explicitly consolidated therein:

The Constitution of Albania, in its chapter on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Freedoms consolidates the right to work (article 49), the right to social security (article 52), the protection of the family (article 53 par. 2), the special protection of children, young people, women and new mothers (article 54) and the right to health care (article 55).

In Croatia, the Constitution consolidates the right to work (article 54), the right to social security (article 56), the right to social welfare (article 57) and the right to health care (article 58).

In the Republic of Montenegro the Constitution of 1992 consolidates the right to work (Article 52), the right to social security (article 55), the protection of disabled (article 56), the right to health care (Article 57) as well as the protection of family, motherhood, childhood etc. The same rights are included also in the draft Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro: the right to work (Article 56), the right to social insurance (article 59), the protection of people with disabilities (article 60) and the right to health protection (article 61).

In application of these constitutional provisions, social security systems (including benefits, services and social security administration) have been consolidated in legislation and established in practice.

However, despite the quality of the legislation and the efficiency of the administrative structures, one must note that the on-going reforms taking place during the last years in social security systems and the consequent changes in legislation and administrative structures lead to complicatins which make imperative a) the simplification of the administrative procedures for the allocation of social security benefits and b) the systematic information of citizens.

The awareness of the beneficiaries on their entitlements and their orientation to the competent services according to their specific needs, can be achieved, as is proved by comparative experience, in the best possible way through special centres providing comprehensive information to citizens e.g. on the benefits that can be claimed, related services (e.g. vocational training, job placements etc.) as well as on the concrete conditions and procedures that the citizens have to follow in order to claim the benefits and services they are entitled to.

The information of the beneficiaries constitutes a necessary prerequisite for them to have access to specific benefits. For example, if a new benefit is consolidated in legislation and the citizen is not informed about it, he does not know that he has the possibility to claim it. Further, if unemployed persons are entitled to participate in vocational training activities in order to improve the skills that could ensure their integration in the labour market, they need to be aware that such an opportunity exists and in addition they need to have specific information on how and where to apply or register, when the training will take place, how long it will last etc. The fact that information must reach the claimant/beneficiary is not only his/her responsibility e.g. to follow-up developments in a specific field of policy that might be related to his needs, but at the same time an obligation of the social security administration.

Information is a necessary condition for the exercise of rights, but it is not sufficient in itself. 'Access' is a broader concept that refers to a number of physical, material and institutional conditions that must follow the availability of information. For example, even if a citizen is informed on a specific benefit or service that he wishes to claim or to receive, a highly complex, bureaucratic, burdensome and costly procedure (in terms of time and money) can, in practice, obstruct the exercise of his/her right.

Physical access to services refers, for example, to the possibility of a disabled person to have access to the location where the competent services are delivered. Illiteracy or insufficient knowledge of the official language of the country of residence is another obstacle that hinders access to services and benefits for people belonging to linguistic minorities. But even if there are no physical or material conditions hindering access to benefits and services, a citizen might not have a sufficient understanding or knowledge of the legal provisions that apply to him in order to claim a benefit and/or a service. However, the most important obstacles in the accessibility of benefits and/or services, and consequently the most complex in dealing with, are the complicated administrative procedures which involve many different services that the beneficiary has to address successively, the lack of coordination of these services, the time-consuming processes and eventual bottlenecks which might leave room for corrupt practices.

In order to resolve or at least address the above problems, the present report supports the following ideas: on the one hand that a consistent and regular flow of information from the administration to the citizen needs to be ensured, possibly through specialised information centers; on the other hand, complex administrative procedures need to be standardized, simplified and concentrated in *one* location, in order to be easily accessible by the citizen.

The way according to which information centers and one-stop shops are organised differs significantly from country to country. Although various models exist, these can only be efficient if they address the peculiarities of the public administration and the social security administration in the country where they operate. However, since information centers and one-stop shops have been established in many countries in Europe, a comparative overview and assessment of this experience is necessary.

At this point, it is important to highlight the following: the fact that the social security administration and the public administration of the countries involved in the project are in transition is a good opportunity to act proactively and integrate in this reform process a logic oriented towards the points highlighted above.

II.   Concept and models of one-stop-shops

One-stop-government is a relatively new concept, nowadays often used in public administration reform and research. The concept refers to the integration and rationalisation of public services from a citizen's point of view[1]. According to a study on best practices in one-stop services in the United States *'Under the one-stop paradigm, all of a customer's business can be completed in a single contact, be it face to face or via phone, fax, Internet or other means. One-stop customers do not have to hunt around, call back, or repeatedly explain their situation. One-stop customer service is convenient, accessible, and personalized'*. [2] In other words, the key idea behind one-stop-shops is to bring services together under one roof, both in order to share costs and to make it easier for people to access a range of services in one place.

The idea of concentrating information and services at a single point is a business model that was applied initially in the private sector and became very popular during the last decades. One of the first applications of this idea was supermarkets, which allowed clients to do all their shopping in one place instead of visiting different stores. The idea of concentrating different services in one spot proved to be time-saving and efficient for the client, who spares himself the inconvenience of moving to different places, and at the same time has proved to be cost-effective for the provider of the service.

Despite their obvious usefulness in the private and the business sector, the idea of information centres and one-stop-shops was gradually integrated in public administration. Nowadays, public administration offers a broad range of services to the citizens and holds a critical role for providing a stable, secure and sustainable environment for investment, social and economic development and growth. In this context, public administrations around the world try to identify ways to

(a) provide high quality services to citizens, and
(b) provide services on the basis of cost-efficiency.

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[1] Martin Hagen, Herbert Kubicek (Eds), *One Stop Government in Europe. Results from 11 National Surveys,* University of Bremen, Bremen 2000.
[2] Federal Benchmarking Consortium (1997), *Serving the American Public. Best Practices in One-Stop Customer Service,* www.npr.gov/library/papers/benchmrk/onestp.html, Washington, D.C., NPR.

One of the ways in which governments are seeking to improve public service provision is to "join-up" various services in one place and adopt a more customer-responsive approach. The main aim behind this idea is:

- To improve interaction with the citizens;
- To simplify access to a range of services, regardless of the agencies/services competent for their delivery;
- To build the provision of services around the needs of citizens

The idea to "join up" services can take many different forms and has been named in many different ways; such initiatives are often called information centers, one-stop-shops, single-windows[3], integrated services[4], community service centers, citizens' service centers etc. Despite the slight differences that might exist in all these different models, in most cases the basic idea remains the same.

A broad classification of one-stop-shop projects is based on their purposes and structures[5]; in general terms, such initiatives are classified either as "information gateways" or information centers, which provide access to government information and referral services or as "one-stop-shop" services, which provide access to many or all of the services (related and unrelated) provided by government in a single location.

The term one-stop-shop or single window is often used especially in relation to trade or business-related services and refers to a facility that allows parties involved in these fields to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all (or basic) regulatory requirements.[6] However, the way that similar initiatives are named, is by no means restrictive with respect to the type of services provided.

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[3] Bent, Stephen, Kernaghan, Kenneth and Marson, Brian D. *Innovations and Good Practices in Single-Window Service*, Canadian Centre for Management Development. 1999.
[4] Office of Intergovernmental Solutions, *Integrated Service Delivery: Governments Using Technology to Serve the Citizen International, Federal, State, and Local Government Experiences,* 1999, Washington, D.C., GSA.
[5] Bent, Stephen, Kernaghan, Kenneth and Marson, Brian D. *Innovations and Good Practices in Single-Window Service*, Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1999.
[6] Economic Commission for Europe, United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), *Recommendation and Guidelines on establishing a Single Window to enhance the efficient exchange of information between trade and government,* Recommendation No. 33, UNITED NATIONS, New York and Geneva, 2005.

In general terms, the basic idea of concentrating information or services at a single location can be classified as follows, depending on the extent to which the services offered are integrated:

- *First-Stop shops or information centers*

First-stop-shops or centers have as main purpose the dissemination of information. Consequently, they refer essentially to information counters which guide the citizen to the relevant services based on his or her needs. The information counter can be realized both in a physical location or "virtually", e.g. online through a web-site or an internet portal. In a strict sense, this is not 'one'-stop service, since at least a second 'stop' will be necessary in order to apply for an administrative service. **Under this model, only information is concentrated at one location.**

- *Single authorities or single windows*

Single windows refer mainly to a single entry-point of transaction from the part of the citizen. This means that the actual administrative service (e.g. the issuance of a certificate etc.) does not necessarily take place at a single location, but instead that the citizen can *apply* for different services at one location (thus having a single entry point to the administrative system). Once the citizen has made his application, the single authority or single window authority (in whatever form this might take, be it physical or virtual) will undertake to interact with the competent authorities in order to deliver the final administrative product. Consequently, under this model, services continue to be delivered by the competent authorities at the place where they are located. However, the citizen is not obliged to interact with the individual authorities, since the single window authority acts as 'mediator' and handles the application on his behalf. **Under this model, entry points to different administrative procedures are concentrated at one location.**

- *One-stop-shops*

One-stop-shops (in a physical location) ideally go beyond single authorities with regard to the fact that many different transactional services, which satisfy the needs of many different categories of citizens, are located in a single office. Therefore the citizen would find in one spot, representatives of the authorities competent for pensions, health, issuance of civil status certificates, tax administration etc. Under this ideal model, representatives of the administration delivering specific services would be concentrated in one location, thus creating a "public

administration supermarket". However, this model is usually extensively complicated to implement. In most cases, and also in the present report, one-stop-shops will be understood to refer to the model where the citizen has a single entry point for his transactions with the public administration.

This simplified categorisation is used only in order to illustrate alternative approaches to the issue, depending on the extent of the reform to be undertaken, the resources to be allocated etc. as well as the specific needs of the social security administration.

Delivery channels

The classification mentioned above, gets more blurred based on the extent of informatisation of administrative procedures. As technology advances, and services tend to become more informatised, the distinction between their actual point of delivery becomes more complicated.

In general terms, Information centers and one-stop shops usually utilise the following delivery channels for their services:

- *Physical location- office where services are delivered*

The most traditional way to offer services is in a specific office building or other location which is convenient and accessible to the public and where the citizen can be serviced face to face

- *Web-Site/Internet*

The Internet has proven to be an important means of delivery of various services, including financial transactions, applications etc. Governments nowadays broadly use web-sites to communicate, inform and even conduct business with citizens. The use of ICT technology expands rapidly and offers more and more opportunities for integrated and automated services. The concentration of all related information, including legislation and administrative processes, at a single virtual location is an easy and cost effective way to ensue consistent information for citizens regarding the conditions and the administrative procedures according to which they can exercise their rights. A further step to the provision of information services is to allow the on-line submission of applications and, further, their on-line processing. Several examples of web-based services exist e.g. in fields related to taxation e.g. tax registration, submission of income and VAT declarations etc. which in many countries are submitted

and processed electronically[7]. However, the internet as a delivery channel has one relative disadvantage; on-line services presuppose computer literacy and access to internet (which illustrates a more advanced concept of "accessibility"), which cannot be taken for granted in all countries and for all categories of the population. Internet-based solutions can prove very useful for young people or businesses but unfortunately are not always easily accessible for older generations or for specific categories of the population. In order to bridge the digital divide, internet-based solutions could be combined with conventional ones (services offered at a physical location e.g. a kiosk or via telephone) which are accessible to the majority of the population.

- *Call-center*

Call-centers can refer to anything from a central phone number of an agency or institution to an operating unit handling contacts. In this context, call-center refers to telephone lines delivering information, referral or transactional services. Telephone is more accessible in comparison to the internet and a "personal" contact with the citizen is preserved. Again, call centers can have a varying function: a first approach is to ensure only the provision of consistent and comprehensive information through the phone, i.e. when, how and where the citizen can apply for specific services or benefits, a function which is similar to that of information centers at a physical location. Further, call centers could support actual applications for services from the part of the citizen. This entails a more advanced back-office organisation, that is, not only the concentration of information but also the possibility for authorising an application via telephone, as well as the further referral and transaction of the request.

One-stop shops or single windows have been recognised as a good administrative practice in many countries. The areas where more attempts for the establishment of single windows appear are in fields related to trade and the set-up of new enterprises. They have often been used as a tool for supporting entrepreneurship and economic development, especially in countries where administrative procedures e.g. for business set up are burdensome, costly and time–consuming, thus often being a discouragement to potential entrepreneurs[8]. Concentrating related administrative procedures in one single transaction point, facilitates the

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[7] See for example the TAXIS system in Greece (www.taxisnet.gr), which allows for an electronic submission and processing of all major tax obligations both for citizens and businesses.
[8] See the World Bank Doing Business website http://www.doingbusiness.org/map/ with comparative information on the procedures, the time and the cost required for setting up a business.

process for the citizen and saves time and money. Despite the fact that one-stop-shops are in many cases related to business or trade, the services they offer has expanded to a number of areas of administrative action.

Several institutions and international organsations, such as the OECD, the European Union, the World Bank etc. have been active in promoting the estabilshment of one-stop-shops in order to remove administrative burdens and simplify the administrative environment. A relatively recent example, is a special recommendation and guidelines issued by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe regarding the establishment of single window applications.

According to the UNECE Recommendation, which has been endorsed also by the World Customs Organisation, "*a single window is defined as a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfill all import, export, and transit related-related regulatory requirements*".

According to the Recommendation and guidelines, a schematic presentation of single window applications looks as follows[9]:
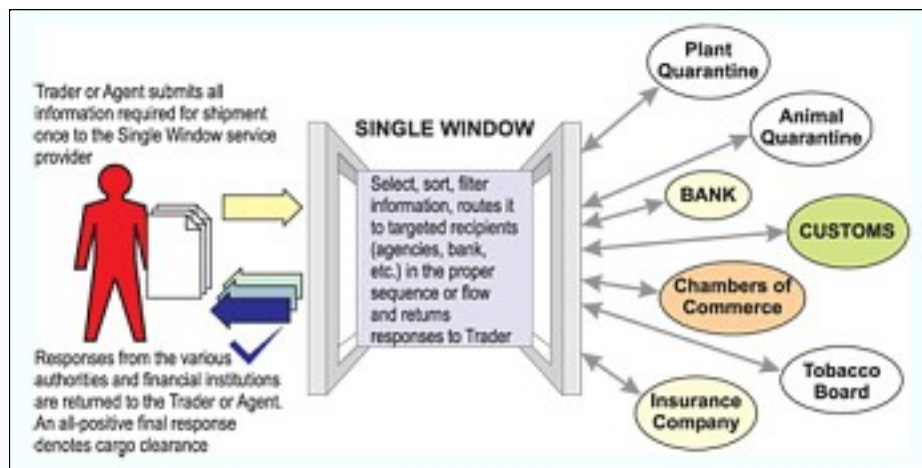
The Recommendation identifies the following organisation models for single window services[10]:

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[9] Economic Commission for Europe, United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), Recommendation and Guidelines on establishing a Single Window to enhance the efficient exchange of information between trade and government, Recommendation No. 33, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2005, http://www.unece.org/cefact/recommendations/rec33/rec33_trd352e.pdf.
[10] Ibidem.

a) Single Authority

The first model is that of a single authority that receives information, either on paper or electronically, disseminates this information to all relevant governmental authorities, and co-ordinates controls to prevent delays. The single authority model is presented in the scheme below:
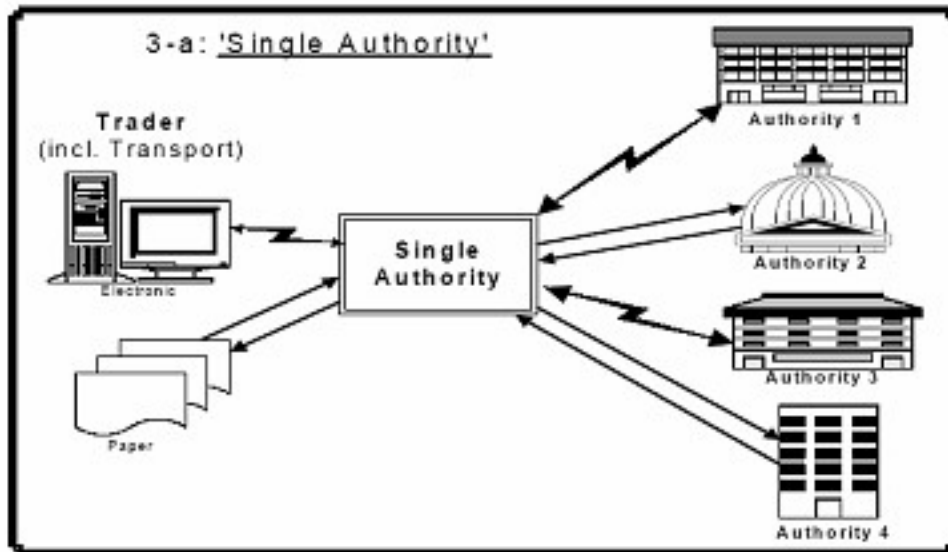

b) Single Automated System

The second model involves a single automated system which collects and disseminates information (either public or private) that integrates the electronic collection, use, and dissemination (and storage) of data related to trade that crosses the border. The system can be either integrated[11] or interfaced[12].

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[11] In simple terms, integrated systems are those integrating (or attempting to integrate) all data and processes of an organization into a unified system, using multiple components of computer software and hardware.
[12] Interfaced systems are the ones allowing interaction between different information systems.
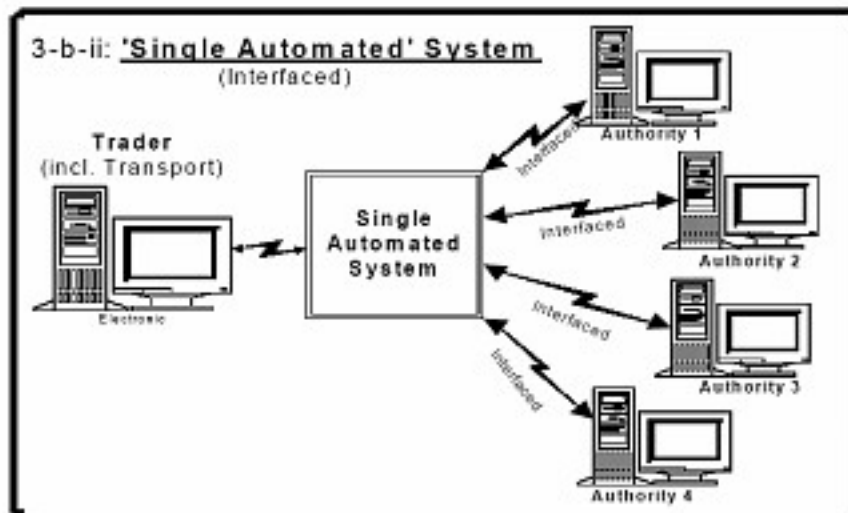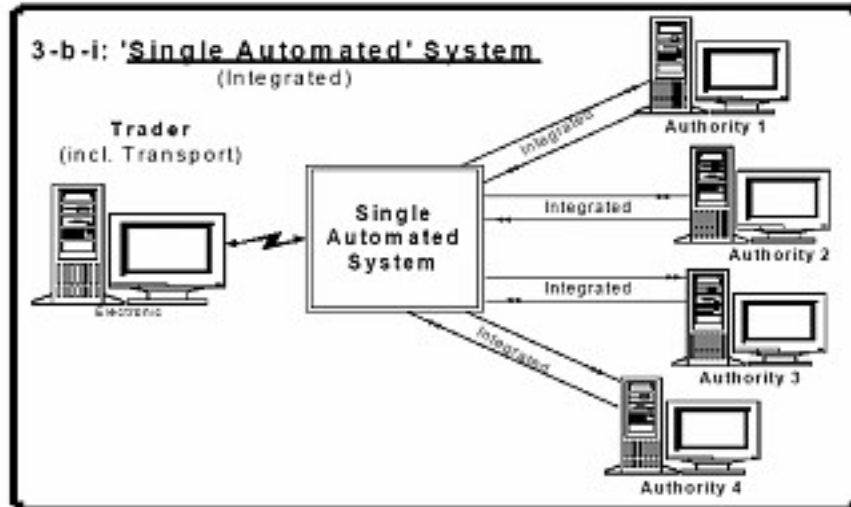
c) Automated Information Systems

The third, and more advanced model, includes an automated information transaction system through which electronic declarations are submitted to the various authorities for processing and approval in a single application. In this approach, approvals are transmitted electronically from governmental authorities to the trader's computer.

3-c: 'Automated Information Transaction' System
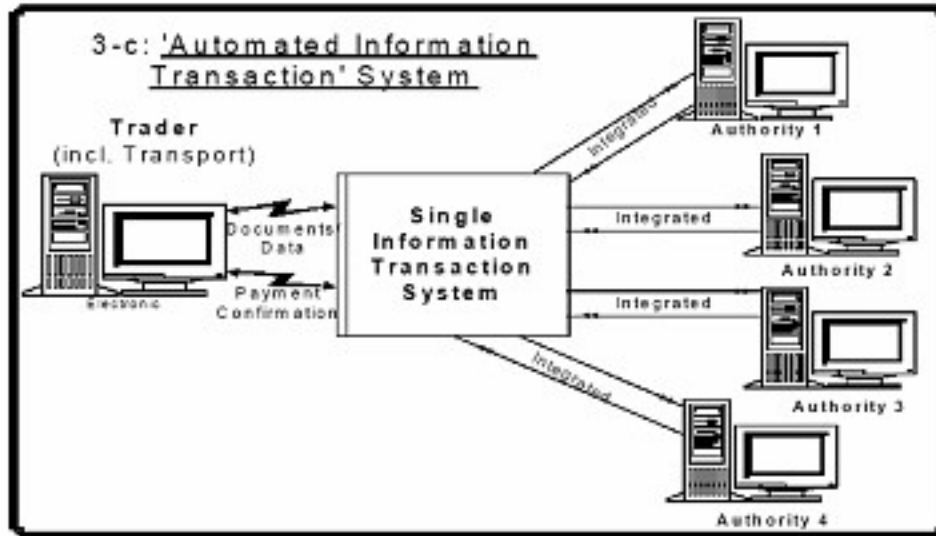
Main administrative procedures covered by information centers and one-stop-shops

The main policy areas, where information centers and one-stop-shop projects are mostly applied are the following[13]:
- citizen registration and licenses (birth or marriage certificates)
- car registration
- Building permits, plant construction permits and real estate matters
- Business licenses and SME related applications
- Tax and wage reporting, normally reflecting applications by financial and social security departments to accept online filings
- Services to Job seekers
- General social security, welfare, health, social services e.g. unemployment/ workforce development etc.[14]

This list can under no circumstances be considered restrictive. The ares in which information or services are –or can be- delivered through information centers or portals or one-stop-shops are constantly broadened.

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[13] Martin Hagen, Herbert Kubicek (Eds), *One Stop Government in Europe. Results from 11 National Surveys*, University of Bremen, Bremen 2000.

[14] A rescent research on one-stop-shops in rural areas identified the following services offered in one-stop-shops in rural areas in Scotland: education and child care, information and advice, health and care of the elderly, other care and support services e.g. social work support; drug users and rehabilitation; support for voluntary sector, cultural and recreational activities and services and other local services. See John Bryden, Frank Rennie, Amanda Bryan, and Kirsty Hay, with Lucy Young-Smith, *Critical Factors in the Success of One Stop Shops as a Model of Service Delivery within Rural Locations 2007*, UHI Millennium Institute, Scottish Executive, 2007.

Target groups

Information centers and one-stop shops theoretically target the whole population of a country, municipality etc. So far, information centers and one-stop-shops have targeted as a matter of priority businesses, entrepreneurs and traders as a way to facilitate and speeden up related procedures.

Information centers and one-stop-shops can be beneficial especially to groups of citizens who reside in remote places, who are disabled etc. Information centers and one-stop-shops with a thematical focus (e.g. student loans, employment opportunities, immigration issues) adress specifically other target groups such as e.g. immigrants, students, unemployed etc.

Administrative level - location

Most one-stop-shop initiatives are decentralised usually at the local level of government. This is mostly explained by the fact that the local level of government is often the first level of service delivery and closer to the citizen.

Independently of the administrative level where information centers or one-stop-shops are established, their location is an important issue, since it is imperative for the success of one-stop-shops to be visible and fully accessible to the citizens. Therefore, ideally, information centers or one-stop-shops should be situated in either a town centre location or where people can be easily attracted. Further issues which can play a role are:
- the one-stop-shop must have a strong identity i.e. a recognisable logo etc.
- the building must be fully accessible to all users including disabled people etc.
- it should preferably be in proximity to public transport
- it should have a visible ground floor 'shop window' or display area as well as appropriate signage, so that people are aware of the service and its function and attracted to it[15].

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[15] Countryside Agency, *Setting up One Stop Shops, A good practice handbook on linking services in market towns,* Countryside Agency Publications, December 2003, website: www.countryside.gov.uk

Benefits

Experience shows that the main benefits from initiatives such as information centers and one-stop shops are:

- Taking into account the needs of the citizen improves the image of public administration
- Facilitating the interaction between the citizen and the administration and making it more efficient and effective
- Enabling services to be tailored to local needs and to be provided locally
- Reducing costs and providing economies of scale
- Facilitating co-ordinated service provision
- Allowing for flexibility in the way services are provided
- Cost-efficiency
- More effective and efficient deployment of resources including better coordination between existing governmental systems and processes
- Increased integrity and transparency
- Combining physical convenience and social contact – especially valuable to the more vulnerable members of society

A recent research focussing on the operation of one-stop-shops offering community services in rural areas identified the following main advantages of one-stop-shops[16]:

- Their accessibility at the local level to all, including low income user groups;
- the possibility for flexible arrangements and support in order to meet clients' needs
- user-friendliness
- the higher qualitity of the facilities/ services offered mainly due to their location, the easier accessibility to information etc.
- the proximity to other facilities/services
- savings in time, cost, travel
- improved community confidence and influence
- proximity to service providers and possibility to develop synergies with other services/ providers

The main disadvantages related to one-stop-shops relate mostly to technical issues such as problems with staff recruitment (e.g. due to short term funding).

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[16] John Bryden, Frank Rennie, Amanda Bryan, and Kirsty Hay, with Lucy Young-Smith, *Critical Factors in the Success of One Stop Shops as a Model of Service Delivery within Rural Locations 2007*, UHI Millennium Institute, Scottish Executive, 2007.

III. The comparative experience

a. Information Centers

As already mentioned above, information centers constitute a first-step service rather that a one stop shop, since the beneficiary can only collect information and will further need to address himself/herself to the competent authorities.

Information Centers can take the following forms:

- *Information centers at a physical location*

This form of information center entails the provision of information to the citizens at a physical location, potentially an office of the competent administrative service or at the local level. Provision of comprehensive and reliable information presupposes that entitlements are clear and that administrative procedures are clarified and to the extent possible simplified and reengineered.

- *Virtual information centers*

The use of internet is expanding nowadays especially among the youngest generations. The creation of a web site or internet portal including all information that would be otherwise provided at a physical location is a cost effective solution. Web sites and internet portals could be limited to providing information on all aspects of the benefits, services and procedures included in their mandate or could go a step further and support on-line applications. This second solution requires more advanced technology and the resolution of several legal issues such as the use of electronic signature, data protection and security, authorisation for processing the application etc.

The operation of information centers through web site /internet portals is a solution with several advantages. However, in order to offer comprehensive services to the broader public and not only to groups of the population having access to internet, this solution should preferably go in hand with the provision of information services through a physical location.

An example is presented in the table below:

FirstGov.gov - USA[17]

FirstGov is the first Web site that provides the public with easy, one-stop access to all online U.S. Federal Government resources. FirstGov allows users to use a word-search engine to browse a Web site that consolidates 20,000 government Web sites into one. It supports a wide range of tasks from researching at the Library of Congress to tracking a NASA mission. FirstGov also enables users to conduct important business online—such as applying for student loans, tracking Social Security benefits, comparing Medicare options and even administering government grants and contracts. Early reviews have been positive.

- *Provision of information through Call-centers*

Another option is the provision of information to the public through call centers. As already mentioned, this option can be limited to the simple provision of information or can be extended also to receive applications by phone. An example of a call centre implemented by the Greek Government is presented below:

Application by telephone (line 1502)[18]

In 1998 a work group made up of experts from the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization and the Greek Telecommunication Organization designed the telephone applications system, which initially dealt with the five most frequently requested certificates and namely
- birth certificates
- extracts from birth, death and marital status certificates
- military status certificates
- criminal record and
- tax observance certificate

For this purpose a telephone center is operating in Athens (1502), that citizens may call from anywhere in Greece. Only thirty employees staff this call center and have online access to the application forms of the certificates.

The telephone application is transmitted immediately by fax to the competent civil service, which issues the document and sends it to the citizen's postal address by registered letter.

The competent public services are obliged to take speedy action into specific time limit (10 days) and If this limit is not respected by a public agency the applicant may request a compensation up to 600 euro to the competent Commission of the relevant Region or the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization.

A further step will be to send the application forms to the competent services by e-mail but this requires that legislation on digital signatures is enforced.

The telephone call cost is two euro twenty (2,20€) and the mail cost is two euro

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[17] www.firstgov.gov
[18] Hellenic Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation

(2€). These prices are the same for anywhere in Greece. The Ministry has negotiated with the Greek Telecommunication Organization and the Greek Postal Services, in order to ensure that prices are low.

In this way citizens are encouraged to submit applications by telephone.

At the same time, in order to facilitate this procedure, a special arrangement abolished the obligation to stick stamps on certain documents.
It is possible to extend this system for other certificates, following the issue of a ministerial decision.

So during the second phase of this project, the telephone application system has been expanded for the passports, the certificates of study that universities issue, and certificates of the engineer insurance service. Regarding passports, besides the application, some other documents are necessary, like photographs etc. So although the citizen can call to submit the application, he or she still has to visit the civil service to deposit the rest of the documents and receive the passport. This kind of certificate is called a " one way certificate ".

In addition, certificates which are issued by the welfare services and hospitals can be requested by telephone application. Welfare services certificates concern principally the disabled. So this measure serves an important group of citizens, who benefit from this special care.

At present, citizens can request up to fifty nine (60) different certificates by telephone application.

These documents are issued from nearly all State services, local government organizations and other legal entities of public law.

From the start, this measure had proved to be a great success and both citizens and media have reacted positively.

From the year 1998 until the end of June 2003 the call center received more than 2.730.000 telephone calls, from which more than 1.360.000, were applications (almost 600 applications per day), as people call not only to ask for a certificate, but also to be informed about the procedure.

So 1502 functions as a one call shop and also as an information center, from eight in the morning, until eight in the evening.

Benefits from the function of this system are important and include:

- Reduction of the citizen's time which is taken for the issue and the receipt of the administrative certificates, because it isn't necessary to visit the competent service.
- Improvement of the waiting conditions of the citizen's in public services, as queuing is minimized.
- Reduction in traffic in big cities, as the citizen doesn't have to move to and from the civil services.
- Habitants of islands and mountainous areas, are facilitated, because the administration centers are sometimes difficult to access, especially in winter, when the weather conditions often render traveling difficult.
- Also disabled people are better served, as they don't need to move to the civil services.

According to research conducted in Greece by the National Center of Public Administration measuring user's satisfaction from call center services, the main conclusions are the following:

- 82% of the users are satisfied with the delivery time
- 95% of the users expressed the opinion that the measure was of great usefulness
- 88% of the users expressed their complete satisfaction with the system's operation
- 98,2% of the users expressed the intention to use this system again
- 94% of the users received the document requested.

To summarize, information centers, in a "traditional" form (information office or kiosk or call center) or in virtual form (internet portals), are nowadays broadly used by the public administration to ensure the easy access of citizens to information regarding administrative procedures and appear to be an efficient measure.

b. One-stop Shops

As already mentioned, extensive use of the single window and the one-stop-shop ideas has been made regarding services related to SME's, entrepreneurship and trade.

Some good single window practices are presented below:

"The Virtual Customs Office" (VCO) - Sweden[19]

The Swedish Single Window system, known as "The Virtual Customs Office" (VCO), allows for electronic Customs declarations and application for import and export licenses and licenses for strategic products. It can be integrated into the traders business system and can automatically update changes in exchange rates, tariff codes and duty rates. The Single Window also includes all trade-related regulations and can provide traders with automated updates on changes via Internet and/or SMS-services. The VCO also offers interactive training courses and possibility to customize and create personal virtual customs offices, which contain all information and processes that each trader uses and finds relevant to its needs and wants.

Import and export declarations can be processed both via Internet and EDIFACT. All services are pooled on a single VCO web page, currently more than 150 e-services are available. The information and procedures on the VCO supports ten different languages.

The system currently involves the Swedish Customs (lead agency), the Swedish Board of Agriculture, the National Board of Trade, the National Inspectorate of Strategic Products and the Police.

International Trade Data System (ITDS) - United States[20]

The Single Window system being developed and implemented in the United States is known as the International Trade Data System (ITDS). The ITDS vision is to use a secure, integrated government-wide system to meet private sector and Federal requirements for the electronic collection, use, and dissemination of standard trade and transportation data. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will integrate ITDS requirements into a joint Automated Commercial Environment/International Trade Data System (ACE/ITDS) system in an effort to avoid parallel, separate, and potentially duplicative systems.

ITDS has identified the following major stakeholder groups: Participating Government Agencies (PGAs), the trade, oversight bodies, and CBP.

Participating Government Agencies (PGAs) have international trade missions including (a) control over admission or export of cargoe, crew, and conveyances,

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[19] http://www.tullverket.se/TargetGroups/General_English/frameset.htm
[20] http://www.itds.treas.gov and http://www.cbp.gov

(b) regulation of compliance with federal trade laws such as tariffs and quotas, licenses, and operating authorities, (c) promotion of international trade through activities such as export assistance, and (d) collection and reporting of statistical information about international trade and transportation. For ITDS purposes, agencies can be categorized as follows:

Border Operations Agencies – have responsibility for the import, export, and transit trade processes related to cargo, conveyance and/or crew. Border Operations Agencies may also have license and permit, statistical, or trade promotion responsibilities. Border Operation Agencies sometimes are referred to as admissibility and export control agencies.

License and Permit Agencies – use ACE as the primary means for the recordation and maintenance of license and permit information. License and Permit Agencies may also have statistical or trade promotion responsibilities.

Statistical Agencies – use ACE to extract trade or transportation data, usually not at the transaction-level, to support needs for their own statistical analysis. Statistical Agencies may also have trade promotion responsibilities.

Trade Promotion Agencies – use ACE to facilitate U.S. trade by making available basic import and export information, such as rules and regulations, to the trade, service providers, and the public.

The Small Business Service in the UK [21]

The Small Business Service, the only institutionalised one-stop shop in central government, was established in April 2000. Its duties included primarily an advocacy role, strengthening the input of small business views into the government process, in particular with regard to simplifying and improving the quality and coherence of business support. It was broadly based on the US Small Business Administration. In November 2000, the Small Business Service published the *Guidelines on Implementation Periods—Timing of the Issue of Guidance to Business on Compliance with New Legislation*. These guidelines recommended that business should be provided with at least 12 weeks preparation period before a regulation came into force ("implementation periods") as of January 1, 2001. In more complex cases, these preparation periods should be further extended. Only in exceptional cases, should the time frame be reduced to below 12 weeks. SBS has a strong institutionalised position in the regulatory process, for example the right to have its views recorded in the RIA in a wording of its own choice. As per June 2001 the SBS had a total staff of 281 of out which 27 are concerned with regulatory issues.

One-stop-shop projects have also been extended to areas of administrative action beyond business and trade. The OECD has identified several good pratices from around the world[22]. Some examples from the Netherlands are are presented in the table below:

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[21] Ibidem
[22] See Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Security, *Administrative Simplification — practices and strategies in OECD-Countries,* Draft report.

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Examples of one-stop shops in the Netherlands[23]

Police Safety Net (Ministry of the Interior): A Web site with all kinds of general information about safety, which at the local level will be supplemented by information about neighbourhood-projects, contact persons and FAQs. The purpose of this Web site is to make people feel safer, and to involve actors other than the police. It permits people to ventilate their opinion.

Counter for Foreigners (Ministry of the Interior): A site that will make it possible for non-refugee foreigners, to handle their affairs—getting a permit to stay from the police, and registering at the town hall—at one counter. To make this possible, the jurisdiction of the police has to be transferred to the municipalities. The result of a pilot project is that this shortens the procedure by about six weeks, and reduces the number of mistakes in the Foreigner's Administration System as well as in the Population Register.

Country-wide Police Information Number (Ministry of the Interior): A number for non-urgent announcements, questions and requests replaces the regional access numbers of the police. The national police number will be maintained for urgent cases. It is expected that the national number (police, fire brigade, and ambulance) will be called less often for non-urgent cases.

ELRO, Electronic Counter Judicial Organisation (Ministry of Justice): This site provides information about the organisation of the court system, makes it possible to consult case files, contains a list of legal terms, and provides news about recent court decisions and more specific information. This site is, however, more oriented to the legal profession than to issues that are relevant to the general public.

The Green Counter (Ministry of Agriculture): aims at a concentration or integration of Web sites of the different departments within the Ministry. The project also allows transactions concerning levies and subsidies.

Counter for Building and Housing (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment): According to the implementation plan, this counter will be oriented on four demand patterns: (1) the search for tenants by a candidate owner; (2) the search for housing by a candidate tenant; (3) problems and questions of house owners; (4) problems and questions of tenants. Other demand patterns may be developed in the future. At least the following partners are participating in the running of the counter: the ministry, the municipality, the local housing corporations, and the cadastre. A toolkit will be made available to the municipalities that opt to create such a counter.

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In Greece, the one-stop-shop concept introduced in public administration covered both general as well as specialised areas of administrative action:

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The Citizen Service Centers (KEP) – Greece [24]

The Citizens' Service Centers aim at reducing citizens' movements in order to have access to the services, so that the citizen's affairs can be handled without him/her having to travel for this purpose. This measure is very useful for people who live in big cities, mountainous areas or isolated islands.
In this framework, the Citizens' Service Centers' institution is a fundament instrument of the public sector to deploy electronic government services. At this

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[23] Ibidem.
[24] Information from the Hellenic Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, See also http://www.kep.gov.gr/portal/page/portal/MyNewPortal?lng=us.

moment, the Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization coordinates technically, procedurally and legally the deployment of Information Systems that will allow the Citizens' Service Centers' employees to access information databases, in order to support citizens' transactions.

At the moment around 1000 citizens' centers operate in the local authorities of the country. The main services available at the Citizens' Service Centers for the citizens, are:

- Accurate and prompt information on administrative procedures, through the use of the appropriate and constantly updated databases,
- Completion of a digitized and simplified application form, for the issuance of certificates, licenses or other public sector documents and its submission (electronically or not) to the competent authority,
- Retrieval of the supporting documents issued by other agencies, through electronic means, if considered necessary,
- Transmission of the completed application folder, electronically or not, to the competent authority, for the issuance of the required document,
- Monitoring of the citizens' matters expediting procedures, through contemporary electronic means and appropriate applications,
- Receipt of the issued document from the competent service, by any appropriate telecommunication mean and its delivery to the interested citizen.

The positive results from the operation of the citizens' centers are:

➢ The improvement of the image of the administrative authorities and of the civil servants. The daily observation of the centers' operation has showed that the citizens are very satisfied with the services offered.

➢ Feedback from the employees indicated that they are highly motivated.

The benefits arising from the operation of Citizens' Service Centers to date are mainly the following:

- ▪ Improved service to the citizen (less time wasted in queues, fewer trips to and from public sector units, simpler documents & procedures, staff responsive to citizen needs)
- ▪ Lower transaction costs (benefit the entire economy)
- ▪ Reduced application processing costs for citizen-facing public sector units

The administrative procedures certified through the Citizens' Service Centers fall within the following policy fields and at the moment cover 1020 administrative procedures:
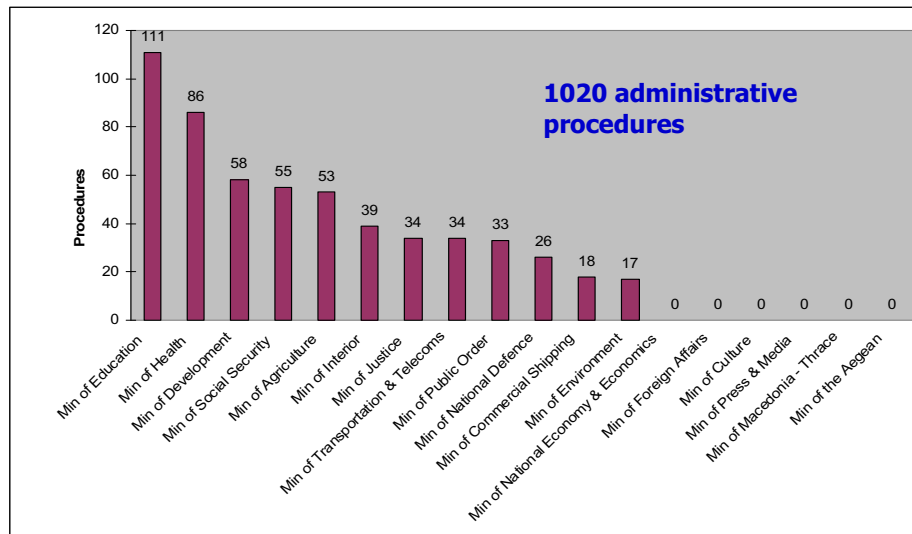
Source: Ministry of Interior, Public Administartion and Decentralisation, 2003

The organisational model according to which the Citizen's Service Centers in Greece interact with their "clients" (citizens and businesses) is presented in the scheme below:

Citizens & Businesses

Case Manager

Back -Office Support Systems
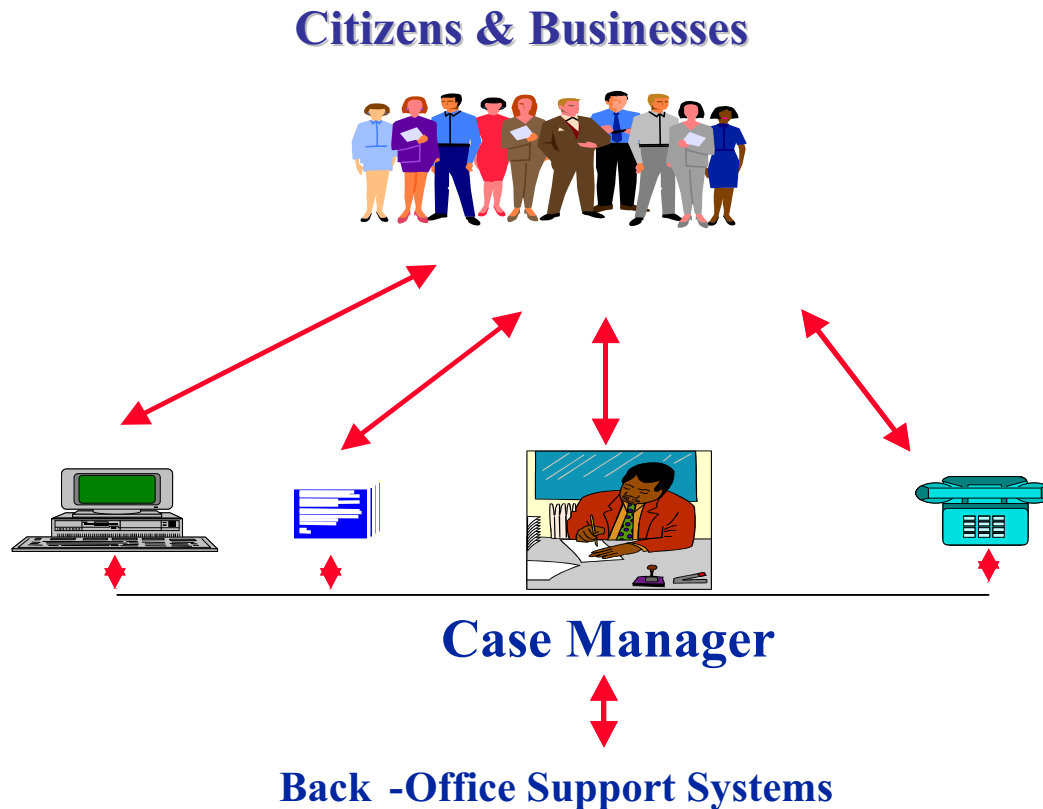
Based on the examples presented above, the operation of one-stop-shops is quite widespread in public administrations in European countries and cover broad fields of administrative action.

c. Citizen Charters

Another means for improving client orientation in public sector services and improving quality of services and transparency in the operation of the public sector are Citizens Charters.

Citizen charters exist in many countries and share the common goal to lead to better public services[25]. According to the Innovative Public Service Group (meeting in Vienna on 25th of April 2005) "A citizen charter is a unilateral declaration by a public sector service in which the service,

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[25] See European Public Administration Network (EUPAN), *Citizen Charters in the EU,* http://www.eupan.org/3/86/&for=show&tid=15.

within the tasks stipulated for it by legislation and regulations, commits to a number of standards for its services and publishes these standards. This allows members of the public to address the service in question as directly as possible, and if the standards are not met, to be awarded compensation by this service"[26].

In this direction, a citizen charter should include the following:

- Clear and concrete quality standards e.g. the timeframes for the provision of services, the content of the services etc.
- Communication of the standards e.g. in a visible place or website, so that the citizen is aware of the commitments of public administration.
- Compensation ('Promise is Debt') is a controversial issue regarding whether citizens should be compensated each time that the standards are not respected. Supporters claim that it is important to show that guarantees are not free of obligations. On the other hand, opposers claim that emphasis should be placed on improving services rather than compensations which, in any case, are tax payer's money and should be brought to best use.
- Complaints procedure: accessible and simple
- Continued improvement: evaluation of results. Charters and the standards set therein should be continuously evaluated in order to measure citizen's satisfaction and efficiecy.

Citizen charters have proved to be useful for ensuring improved client orientation for public services. As a follow-up to the use of citizen's charters in public administration, in many countries (e.g. UK) programmes measuring their effectiveness have been established.

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[26] See Draft Introduction to Citizen Charters, http://eupan.essenceserver.com/files/repository/document/2006__05_02_Citizen_charters_in_the_EU.doc.

d. Specialised information centers and one-stop shops for social security

Information centers and one-stop shops have found several applications in the field of social security. Although one-stop-shops covering the whole range of social security issues are not common, there is a tendency to integrate social security procedures within existing initiatives. The case studies and examples presented below are selected to identify different models of integrated services in the field of social security.

i. Virtual information centers

A first category of examples refers to the provision of information on different areas of social security via internet. Information on general or specialised issues is provided including (in most cases) detailed information on the administrative steps to be taken.

CAT365 Citizens' Portal, Spain, Consorci Administració Oberta de Catalunya[27]

CAT 365 is a portal for the citizens of Catalonia that assists them with education, training and job searches, and facilitates and fosters the creation of new businesses.

The services offered for citizens and businesses include:
- Job search services by labour offices (citizens),
- social security contributions (citizens),
- public libraries (citizens),
- enrolment in higher education/university (citizens),
- other education and training related services (citizens),
- transport related services (citizens),
- elderly related services (citizens),
- disabled related services (citizens),
- registration of a new company (business),
- environment-related permits (business)
- public health (other),
- culture (other),
- environment (other),
- statistics (other),
- catalan language (other),
- services for entities (other),
- work centre permissions (other),
- restricted services for professionals (other).

Another example is Info4local virtual one-stop-shops from the United Kingdom:

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[27] http://www.cat365.net

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Info4local—A Virtual One-Stop Shop in the UK[28]

The Department of Social Security (reformed and renamed in June 2001 as the Department of Work and Pensions) has been instrumental in establishing a "virtual one-stop shop," a portal called info4local (*www.info4local.gov.uk*).

The site "p*rovides the first, online, one-stop gateway for local authorities to get quick and easy access to local government-related information that is published on the Web sites of central government departments and agencies.*" It is run by a group of four departments: Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (reformed and renamed the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in June 2001), Department for Education and Employment (reformed and renamed the Department of Education and Skills in June 2001), Department of Health, Home Office and the Department of Social Security (reformed and renamed the Department of Work and Pensions in June 2001) with co-operation from the Cabinet Office and the Department of Trade and Industry and the ambition to draw in other departments. It aims to follow current leading standards for accessibility and currency of information for users.

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Information web sites can have a general or a specialised content for example on social insurance, health care etc. Examples of specialised information centres are the NHS Direct portal in the UK and the Liguriainformasalute (Liguria informs on healthcare) from the Liguria Region in Italy.

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NHS Direct – UK[29]

NHS Direct represents an e-government initiative which functions as a one-stop shop. This initiative, which offers health advice both via the Internet (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) and the telephone, was supposed to reduce the burden on casualty departments and general practitioners (GPs). It is intended that NHS Direct develops a single point of access for a large range of NHS services. Thus, by 2004, it is planned that calls will be transferred to after-hours services, that referrals to pharmacies will be possible and that ambulances could be summoned. Furthermore, it was intended that all consultations should be directly communicated to the responsible GP and that appointments could also be handled via this service. Early studies suggested a reduced growth in the usage of after-hours calls to GPs, but no reduction in the usage of casualty departments.

The Government also intended to enhance web-based information on all areas of health provision, including hospitals, primary care commissioning groups, General Practices, and health authorities (see www.doh.gov.uk).

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[28] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Security, *Administrative Simplification — practices and strategies in OECD-Countries*, Draft report.
[29] Ibidem.

**Liguriainformasalute (Liguria informs on healthcare),
Italy, Regione Liguria - Assessorato alla Salute - Dipartimento Salute e
Servizi Sociali**[30]

"Liguriainformasalute" (literally, "Liguria informs on healthcare"), is the healthcare portal of the Liguria Region (the Liguria Regional Authority). It's a thematic vertical portal and an access gate to institutional and specific contents and services offered by both the Regional Authority and all healthcare providers within the regional territory. The aim has been to improve the healthcare regional system through a single point of access (both for citizens and operators) in order to guarantee a unique flow of information and a well defined structure of services. The tight link between the editorial offices of the regional healthcare providers and a central editorial staff allow to timely publish information, events, as well as a number of services, in a well organized manner. This happens thanks to the sharing of technologies, metodologies, validation rules, homogeinity of navigation.

Services offered include:
- Social security contributions,
- Health related services,
- Elderly related services,
- Disabled related services,

A further step in the provision of informational services through the internet is to enable applications through it. In this way, citizens can proceed with administrative procedures from their home and only through digital interaction with the administration. An example, is the Social Insurance Bank in the Netherlands.

SVB For Life , The Netherlands, Sociale Verzekeringbank[31]

The Sociale Verzekeringsbank (hereafter 'SVB') is responsible for the implementation of a range of social insurance laws and regulations in the Netherlands. Most Dutch citizens will, in the course of their lifetime, be customers of the SVB at least twice. When a child is born, child benefit becomes payable, and when a person retires, entitlement to an old age pension arises. And a range of other benefits for which we are responsible brings us into contact with hundreds of thousands of citizens more. At any one point in time, more than 25% of the Dutch population (about 5,000,000 people) have dealings with the SVB. With such numbers it is, of course, of the greatest importance for both parties that customers can do business with the SVB efficiently and effectively. The administrative burden on the citizen should be as low as possible.

To make this possible, a wide choice of channels for contacting the service is offered, including the Internet and digital services. New customers can do business via the Internet instantly, but nevertheless safely, by using the

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[30] www.regione.liguria.it, www.asl1.liguria.it, www.asl2.liguria.it, www.asl3.liguria.it, www.asl4.liguria.it, www.asl5.liguria.it, www.hsanmartino.liguria.it, www.villascassi.it, www.ospedalesantacorona.it, www.galliera.it, www.oeige.it, www.gaslini.org, www.istge.it, www.datasiel.net.
[31] www.svb.nl www.DigiD.nl

authenticating mechanism of DigiD. These services are accessible for people with visual or motor disabilities. We do not bother our clients with requests for information unless absolutely necessary (by obtaining data elsewhere as far as possible) - we also pay a good deal of attention to the 'pre-filling' of forms, so most new customers merely have to validate the information with which we present them (apart from the things we do not know yet). Moreover, as the SVB has a great social responsibility, we must take particular care to ensure that individual citizens all get what they are entitled to (well, as far as the laws and regulations within our remit are concerned). For this reason, we strive to approach potential customers proactively to inform them about their possible entitlements. Formerly, this was limited to parents and pensioners, but recently we have extended the process to encompass potential clients for a survivor's benefit also.

Virtual information centers enable access to information for all computer literate people having access to internet. Several institutions have also undertaken initiatives to facilitate access to their portals and information centers also for disabled persons.

Eskuar – Support for Disabled Access,
Spain, Diputación Foral de Bizkaia - Lantik S.A. (Public Enterprise of the Regional Government of Biscay)[32]

Eskuar is to have an accessible version of the website of the Regional Government of Bizkaia for the blind and partially blind, people with cognitive impairments, the deaf, and those with limited mobility. Here, all those people who have an added difficulty in browsing the Internet get specific help with their disability and also have a meeting point, a virtual community. Every update in one of both websites (the traditional website and the one with support for disabled access) are automatically being reported in the other website.

ii. Information centers at a physical location

Some examples of social security information centers and one-stop-shops offering services at physical locations are provided below. However, it should be mentioned that specialised social security one-stop-shops are relatively rare.

Counter Care and Welfare – the Netherlands[33]

Counter Care and Welfare (Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport): By 2002 municipalities will have created counters for care and welfare. All citizens, irrespective of their background, situation, characteristics, or capacities, will get information and advice that will enhance the quality of their lives as well as solutions for their problems. Each municipal counter will take one or more of 15

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[32] http://www.eskuar.bizkaia.net; www.bizkaia.net
[33] http://www.egov-iop.ifib.de/output_all.php

previously defined demand patterns as a spearhead, to share the experiences with other municipalities. At least 25% of the case handling at those counters will take place via multimedia technologies. Four counters, which can be accessed by every citizen, will be fully digitised. One will be oriented to questions related to Alzheimer's disease. Counters for care and welfare have been used by citizens to receive information on disabilities, chronic illnesses, addictive behaviour, unemployment, volunteer activities, sports opportunities, etc. All kinds of social organisations, specialising in the problem areas concerned, are involved in the further operationalisation of the counters.

Communit-e ,
Belgium, Disabled Persons Directorate-General of Federal Public Service of Social Security[34]

One of the roles of the Disabled Persons Directorate-General of the Federal Public Service (Service Public Fédéral - S.P.F.) of Social Security is to accurately and promptly process applications from disabled people for benefits for disabled persons or medical recognition. The regulations require applications and new applications for benefit to be made through the municipality council where the disabled person has his or her main residence. The objective is to give access of the computerized applications of the Disabled Persons DG to the municipalities to:
- Enter benefit applications directly into the computer system of the S.P.F. Social Security, by no longer having to send social data of a personal nature that are already in the social security network
- Receive, in return, an acknowledgement of receipt of the application and the administrative and medical forms (pre-completed with identification data), which can be given immediately to the person concerned.

Centres for Work and Income (CWI) – the Netherlands [35]

The Dutch authorities have followed a comprehensive approach to unemployment in order to prevent people joining the ranks of the long-term unemployed. The government's aim is to offer all unemployed people a place in a labour reintegration or social activation programme before they are classified as long-term unemployed.

As of January 2002, Centres for Work and Income (CWI) were set up. They function as 'one-stop shops' where customers can apply for work as well as social benefits. However, from the very first contact the emphasis is placed on options for returning to paid work.

Basic assumptions of the new sytem are that customers should be in the centre and that tasks not suited to competition are implemented in the public domain (notably claim assessment) while those suitable for competition (like reintegration services) are carried out in the private sphere. The new implementation structure intends to reduce:
1. the number of people claiming benefits,
2. the costs of implementation, and
3. the administrative burden for employers.

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[34] https://professional.socialsecurity.be

iii. Service-delivery points combining more than one delivery channel

It is all the more often that one encounters services provided through a multiplicity of delivery paths, in order to reach all possible end-users and leave the citizen with the choice of the preferred entry-point to the system. Some examples are provided below:

**MISS – Multi-channel Integrated Service System,
Spain, Barcelona City Council**[36]

MISS is an eGovernment project that goes beyond an internet portal. It complements an internal network made up of a *website*, a *call centre* and a *designated office* and includes a complex network comprised of citizens, other public organisations, private firms and other city agents.

MISS offers the following services to citizens and businesses:

• Income taxes: declaration, notification of assessment,
• Car registration,
• Application for building permission,
• Public libraries,
• Certificates,
• Other education and training related services,
• Announcement of moving,
• Transport related services,
• Elderly related services,
• Disabled related services,
• Services related to elections, plebiscites and referenda,
• Services related to the policy development an decision-making process
• Corporation tax, declaration, notification, Public procurement (business)
• Virtual business incubator "Barcelona Activa" (other).

**SISRCR, Regional integrated health services for the continuity in the
medical treatment in Friuli Venezia Giulia,
Italy, Agenzia Regionale della Sanita**[37]

The overall objective of the SISRCR (Regional integrated health services for the continuity in the medical treatment) in Friuli Venezia Giulia is to create an integrated system for the Regional Agency for Health and the Agencies for Health Services of the Region. Back-office and front-end systems allow for managing and distributing health services to the citizen and to a system of–specialised

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[35]http://internationalezaken.szw.nl/index.cfm?fuseaction=dsp_rubriek&rubriek_id=13 008&lijstm=0,310_6057,334_6543

[36] http://www.bcn.es; http://www.barcelonanetactiva.com

[37] www.ass1.sanita.fvg.it. See also Ralf Cimander, Herbert Kubicek, Andrea Soranzio, *eGOvernment Interoperability at Local and Regional Level, Good Practice Case, Regional integrated health services for the continuity in the medical treatment in Friuli Venezia Giulia,* Case Study, 05 May 2006.

consumers (doctors, health operators) thanks to:

a call centre service for a–portals, one for each agency and a joint one
a smart card system to allow access to the services.

Hence the project aims at supplying the citizens with *a complete services system*, which is focused first of all on the de-localisation of the access and information points in order to avoid useless accesses for the gathering of medical reports and information.

The objective is not to reducr expenses through the decrease of the offered resources, but rather the rationalisation of their use. The project has already activated seven portals, one for each territorial medical authority and one operating as a single access point to the eGovernment services of the Regional Health system. The Call Centre guarantees a constant coverage of the access to health services, even without any Internet connection; whereas the smart card system uses the 'card of services'. That card has been created to allow regional citizens to buy discounted petrol, due to low price petrol in Slovenia. Now it is also used to access health services. More, there are two types of cards: for citizen (card of services) and for health operators. Each portal includes an Internet and an Intranet eGovernment area, whereby the latter is used by the Doctors of General medicine and Paediatric to prescribe medicines and health services. Beyond the registration system of the portal, the system adopts the smart card as a second level of security.

The smart cart access system: the patient card for patient identification and authorisation to access clinical information (folders); the health professionals card to operate in the portal system, retrieve information, make drug and treatment prescriptions and forward them digitally to the regional call-centre. The pharmacies are entitled to manage the prescriptions drawn up by the doctors of general medicine and help the citizens to book the medical visit that will then be booked at the CUP (Italian centres for the reservation of the medical visits) by the doctors or by the pharmacies through the portal. During the booking the citizen will be given the information about all available structures and services.

iv. Automated systems

All the examples presented above, require more or less sophisticated backoffice organistion in order to ensure the integrated delivery of services. Backoffice organisation is not visible to the citizen but is however instrumental for the operation of information centers and one-stop-shops. Below, examples of systems are presented, where information technology is used in order to minimise further the effort required from the part of the citizen in order for him/her to interact with social security administration.

**Belgian Social Security Benefits for Citizens,
Belgium, Crossroad Bank for Social Security, National Office for Social
Security**[38]

In Belgium, several federal, regional and local public or private institutions are entrusted with social missions and are responsible for granting social benefits, including government bodies (e.g. public social welfare centres) as well as private organisations (e.g. health insurance funds, unemployment agencies). These institutions provide services (e.g. assistance relating to job search, health care) or grant financial support (e.g. benefits, tax deductions). Public social welfare centres (centres publics d'action sociale, "CPAS"), which are located in each municipality, provide citizens with help in different life-events, therapeutic measures, the prevention of difficult life-situations, and substantial support measures. The policy and funding of benefits in the social security domain is a duty of the Federal State, however, the service implementation is to be provided on the regional or local level. Besides the CPAS and the Federal State, the other government levels in Belgium and their institutions are also partners in the social sector. Altogether, there are about 2,000 offices on five government levels concerned with social services and have to interact for example, if the service provision is local, other government level offices have to be consulted to carry out the service, this mainly concerning the verification of the applicant's data.

This verification relates to one of the basic principles of administrative practice in Belgium, that citizens have to give information only once to the public administration, i.e. the public administration has to ask for the up-to-date data of this citizen at other public administrations that are also concerned with the respective citizen even if quite different purposes are pertained. However, since the responsibilities for services are shared among the various government levels this makes it especially difficult for the single CPAS to get up-to-date citizen data out of these various databases and, in addition, to get this data quickly. **This challenge has been faced by the interposition of an institution which interconnects the back office applications of the various offices concerned with social services.** The local CPAS use this network for the verification of applicants' data which is the basis for the entitlement and calculation of the social benefits. Within this network, i.e. throughout the whole social system, basic legal concepts, information components and instructions have been harmonised, so that the information is collected in a standardised way and can be used in a multifunctional way by all social security offices.

The e-services offered include:
- social security contributions,
- elderly related services,
- disabled related services,
- services related to elections, plebiscites and referenda
- social contributions to employees (business)
- submission of data to statistical offices (business) etc.

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[38] http://www.socialsecurity.be Source: http://www.egov-iop.ifib.de/output_all.php See also Ralf Cimander and Herbert Kubicek, Frank Robben, *Good Practice Case, Social Security Benefits for Citizens in Belgium, Case Study,* 30 September 2005, eGovernment Interoperability at Local and Regional Level.

**e-Enabled child benefit service,
Ireland, Department of Social and Family Affairs**[39]

The e-Enabled child benefit service in Ireland supports the automatic and proactive allocation of a child's Personal Public Service (PPS) Number and the initiation of the child benefit claim after the registration of the birth of a child. This eliminates the need for customers to furnish a birth certificate to authenticate their claim and, for many, also eliminates the need to complete an application form. Births are registered in a two-stage process. Following the birth the hospital or midwife notifies the local Registrar of Births of the relevant details. This is done by completing a Birth Notification Form and sending it to the local Registrar or, in the case of some maternity hospitals, via an electronic interface between the hospital computer system and the civil registration computer system. The parent is then required to attend the Registrar's Office to register the birth. On completion of the registration process the details are sent electronically, via the Inter-Agency Messaging Service (IAMS), to the Department of Social and Family Affairs where a Personal Public Service (PPS) Number is automatically allocated to the child and the relevant details are passed, electronically, to the Department's child benefit computer system. Where the child is the first born a pre-filled claim form is sent to the parents for validation, signature and payment (bank/post office) details. In the case of second and subsequent children the claim is processed automatically and payment issued to the mother without any manual intervention.

Very innovative is the pro-active triggering of child benefit claims. Starting from the electronic child registration process at the hospital via the local and national registration offices to the child benefit section. Supporting is the IAMS securely linking the various agencies and the DISC securely linking the back-offices in the DSFA. The infrastructure is being used for other e-enabled services as well.

DWP's Real-Time Pension Forecasting, United Kingdom, Government Gateway / DWP Technology

From October 2004 UK working-age citizens registered and enrolled with the Government Gateway have been able to use the Department's Real-Time Pension Forecasting (RTPF) e-service to which appropriately authenticated citizens can contact the Department via the Internet to make an online request for a State Individual Pension Forecast (IPF) at retirement and to receive an electronic version of the resultant forecast in real-time. The RTPF Website also allows them to perform 'what-if' calculations, allowing them to model a number of possible changes in their future circumstances, such as retiring early or late. The new service involves the use of components from the Government Gateway, Inland Revenue and the DWP. Previously, Individual Pension Forecast (IPF) requests could be made through a number of channels; Customer Call Centre, Post and Internet. All channels of requests resulted in a paper copy of the forecast being sent out, by post, to the customer within a maximum of 40 working days. On average, however, a forecast was issued to the customer within 20 working days. In order to provide an efficient and cost effective service, and to meet the needs of the proposed Online Retirement Planner (ORP), there was a business need to

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[39] http://www.welfare.ie, http://www.groireland.ie, http://www.reach.ie. See also Ralf Cimander, Herbert Kubicek, Larry Cashman, Paddy Doherty, Ger Coughlan, Reach, eGovernment Interoperability at Local and Regional Level, Good Practice Case, *e-Enabled Child Benefit Service in Ireland, Case Study,* 30 September 2005.

speed up the process by allowing an electronic Interactive Pension Forecast (IPF) to be produced in real-time (i.e. to present a forecast result to the customer within an acceptable web-response time). The website enables the citizen to perform "What-If" modelling, view historical forecasts, and integrates with the Registration & Enrolment and Authentication & Authorisation services of the UK Government Gateway. [40]

All of case studies presented above present different models of information centers and one-stop-shops applied in the social security administration. To conclude, one would briefly identify the following main trends:

- Web based information centers which provide all necessary information to the citizen in order for him/her to apply for social services or social security benefits. More advanced models allow access –or separate portals- for disabled people. Web based information centers are usually not restricted only to providing information of general nature but also information on specific administrative procedures which will allow the citizen to collect all necessary documentation and address himself to the competent administrative authority. More advanced virtual information centers support on-line applications for a number of benefits and services.
- Information counters or one-stop-shops provide general or thematically organised information or services (e.g. care and welfare, health etc.) in one plysical location.
- There is a tendency to allow for multiple entry points into the system, thus combining web portals and on-line applications, call centers and physically located offices.
- All the above require extensive reorganisation of back-office support with the use of advanced information technology systems.

The comparative experience offers therefore a broad range of alternative solutions, ranging from web based applications with a minimum cost, to automated systems which require extensive reorganisation and investments in information technology. The choice of the most appropriate tools or solutions must be made using as sole criterion the specific needs of the sector and the country where they will be applied.

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[40] Information regarding the case studies was drawn from: http://www.egov-iop.ifib.de/output_all.php

IV. The experience of the countries participating in the project

1. The experience of Albania[41]

a. Information Centers

In Albania information centers do not exist as separate offices or agencies. The function of providing information to the public is carried out in the framework of the public relations department of each social security institution located either at central or at local level.

Citizens address these specialized departments in order to acquire information on their rights and the relevant administrative procedures. The competencies of these departments are to provide information to the public on any issue in the field of competence of the institution which corresponds to the users' interests and needs. The information provided, relates mostly to:
- entitlement to social assistance, social care services and other related benefits
- social insurance and health insurance contributions and benefits.

Public relations' departments are organized at two levels: at central level and local/regional level. They are part of the central, regional or local administration and they are staffed by civil servants (or staff of the regional or local government, which is assimilated to civil servants).

According to the information provided, it appears that the informative role of these departments would need to be strengthened in the following directions:
- further providing comprehensive information on rights, benefits and other initiatives to the population
- providing personalized services to beneficiaries of social security benefits
- assisting citizens/social security claimants with complex administrative procedures which involve many institutions and take a long time.

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[41] Information on this section was drawn from the answers to the Questionnaire from Albania.

b. One-stop-shops

There are some early examples of one stop shops in Albania, which provide a range of services to the citizens e.g. the Albanian National Post. However, actual one-stop-shops have not been estabilshed yet.

Albanian National Post

The Albanian National Post is a state-owned company with the main function to deliver mail to the population. However, in the last 6 years, Post Offices regularly provide a number of additional services to the public such as:
- collecting social security contribution,
- collecting health care contributions,
- paying out pensions and cash social assistance,
- collecting taxes from the self employed, as calculated by the tax office
- collect payment for electricity and water fees ect.

In order to apply for benefits or services, citizens need to present themselves directly to the competent regional and local offices of social security administration (e.g. Social Insurance offices, social services offices and regional employment offices).

The idea of one-stop-shops could be further developed in order to contribute especially in providing information on rights, benefits and other initiatives, enhancing the provision of personalized services to beneficiaries of social security benefits and overcoming complex administrative procedures.

Some points considered essential for the operation of one-stop-shops in Albania are the following:

- One stop shops and information centers should function at the level of local government, their function being supervised by the municipalities. Their funding could originate from a number of sources such as the central administration, the competent line ministries and the municipalities.
- One stop shops and information centers should be located in a municipality building, situated within the community where the citizens can speak to a customer service adviser in person with regard to access to services, access information and advice, carry out any other municipal business and self-service unit.
- One-stop-shop customer service advisers should be especially trained in the wide range of services on offer in order to try to respond to the needs of the people. This means that all services

and other requirments from the part of the ctizien will be dealt with in one place.

- One-stop-shops should be in the position to offer advice and services on housing benefits, municipality taxes, education, housing management, different licensing, trading standards, social service - access to children's services, parking eines etc.
- Information centers and one stop shops should be organized in the form of a big supermarket where people can cover their need for information, advice and services in one and the same place.

2. The experience of Croatia[42]

a. Information centers

In Croatia, Information centres operate within the hierarchy of the competent institutes of pension insurance, health insurance and employment and are staffed by civil servants. Their competencies include providing advice, receiving applications and complaints in the field of competence of the institution.

The operation of information centers is considered adequate within the structure of the competent institutions and should be extended also at local and regional level. Further, their function could be enhanced through allowing direct access to the public records of institutions and bodies to competent institutions who provide the benefits.

b. One-stop-shops

One-stop-shops have already been implemented in Croatia with the aim of improving the level of services that state government bodies provides to enterprises and citizens who use them to exercise their respective rights and needs or fulfil their statutory obligations.

One Stop Shop Program – Croatia[43]

The Government of the Republic of Croatia has initiated the One Stop Shop Program (hereinafter: OSS Program).

The starting point of the One Stop Shop concept is an assumption that the state governmental bodies must supply services to all enterprises and citizens, i.e. tax payers, in a simple and prompt way, devoid of unnecessary costs, multiplication in obtaining identical information and documents, aimless wondering from one body or office to another; on the contrary – services should be provided in one place or from one location, by applying all modern means of connections, i.e. available and mature information technologies, particularly the Internet through meaningful applications on the web.

The OSS Program is based on the relevant *Conclusion* of the Government of the Republic of Croatia on the Commencement of the One Stop Shop Concept Design and two other documents – *OSS Program Strategy* and this *Implementation Plan for the OSS Program*.

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[42] The information on this Section is drawn from the anwer to the questionnaire from Croatia.
[43] Central State Administrative Office for e-Croatia, Central State Administrative Office for Public Administration, *Implementation Plan for the One Stop Shop Program,* Zagreb, December 2004.

An ICT network of state governmental bodies is critical for implementing the OSS Program, interlinking all such bodies by fast, permeable telecommunications. This helps achieve a crucial precondition for business interoperability of bodies vested with public authority at all levels.

The OSS Program is planned to be implemented in a three-year period, from 2005 to 2007. The Government of the Republic of Croatia will allocate necessary funds in the State Budget for this purpose.

The one-stop-shops mentioned above, operate within the Croatian public administration with the main aim to assist in the registration of enterprises. Their competencies include social security matters to the extent that they relate to registering employees for pension and health insurance.

One-stop-shops are organized as points for the public within the Financial Agency (FINA), which is a public enterprise, and they form part of FINA.
In their relation with the competent institutions they make use of direct informatic and telephonic connections. They are staffed by public servants.

One stop shops address complex administrative procedures. Their competencies in the field of social security could be extended to include services with respect to:
- employment in general,
- social security and employment of the disabled persons and
- social security of old people.

3. The experience of Montenegro[44]

a. Information Centers

In Montenegro, citizens acquire information on their rights and the relevant administrative procedures through specialised services within the municipalities. However, these services are reported not to be in the position to provide information on a broad spectrum of issues, therefore the citizen needs to address himself/herself to a different place for information or applications for documents.

On the other hand, information systems related to social security are reported to exist in the following areas:

- primary health care systems,
- part of clinical services,
- public health,
- insurance data base,
- agency for property,
- civil register,
- Pension fund,
- Insurance Health Fund,
- human resource management authority in state authorities,
- ministry of justice and courts,
- tax administration,
- ministry of education and science,
- ministry of internal affairs and public administration as well as
- services in municipalities.

In specific, information systems cover: data base of insured persons, contribution payers, healthcare providers, healthcare workers, healthcare services, data of inpatient and outpatient morbidity, data of deaths caused by infective and cancer diseases, occupied beds, received and dismissed patients in hospitals, data of abortions, births, accidents at work, physicians, human resources management system and finance in many institutions, internal organization and job classification scheme of administrative authorities, data on education and training of staff, monitoring of all personnel related procedures such as recruitment, job assignment, performance evaluation, promotion, advanced training and skill assessment, termination of employment etc.

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[44] The information on this section is drawn from the answer to the questionnaire from Montenegro.

Information systems are organized through the institutional Information Network System in each institution and are not physically connected to other part of information system of the state authorities. Each institution has a distributed computer system comprised of autonomous personal computers and communications environment and computer network that allows the exchange of data among them. The basis for the creation of a distributed system is a local area network (LAN), which should be connected through the network of state authorities with the Information Center of the Republic Secretariat for Development and all other Republic Authorities that will use the Information System. This network would function the same as VPN (Virtual Private Network). The Internet or MIPNet (Montenegrin IP Network using MPLS Protocol) is utilised for the interconnection of remote locations and users.

Most of Information systems staff is civil servants and state employers, and they have appropriate authentication to provide data or information.
They are located in the ministries, administrations, public health centers, institutions, bureaus, secretariats, directorates and services of Parliament, Government and Constitutional Court of RoM, basic higher and supreme courts, misdemeanor authorities and prosecutor offices. The aim is to provide necessary information for citizens and other users for improvement managements.

At this moment, there is no electronic communication between institutions and competent line ministries. A project to harmonize process payments for taxes and benefits is expected to ensure communication soon.

Regarding the sustainability of the information systems, there is an ongoing project within the Secretary for Development, and this institution is responsible for development of intersection information system project.

From the above, information centers would seem necessary in Montenegro in order to address especially the following problems:

- the comprehensive provision of information to citizens on rights, benefits and other initiatives
- the provision of personalized services
- assistance with complex administrative procedures

In this respect, and taking into acount the existing information systems and databases, it would seem a matter of priority to link these information systems in order to allow the provisions of comprehensive information in one place. Information should be delivered at the level of the municipality,

expanding the capacities of the existing services. Information centers should be connected to one Government information system Network.

Funding for information centers could originate both from the central and the local administration. The staff should be civil servants with appropriate authentication to provide data or information. This staff should possess basic skills for using the data base, in order to access to appropriate electronic date base.

b. One-stop-shops

One stop shops are not reported to operate in Montenegro. Citizens are served through the competent services of each institution. However, most governmental bodes and municipal institutions have their own web site portal, as a part of information system, where citizens can find information about their rights, the necessary documentation, the administrative procedures, the benefits etc.

One-stop-shops could contribute in dealing with the provision of information on rights, benefits and other initiatives, with special focus in the field of registered unemployed persons, the provision of personalized services to beneficiaries of social security benefits and the complex administrative procedures.

According to the rapporteur, the best way to address the above-mentioned problems is through the development of modern information system, which can provide information for citizens in one place from several institutions.

The mission of one-stop-shops could be the following: "One-stop-shop must be user friendly and correlated with policy of government and municipalities institutions. They must support all services for citizens. It is very important for citizens that One-stop-shop provide information from developed data bases. They must provide access for information, protocols, equipment, networks for safety and legal access, staff well organized and skills necessary for IC."

One-stop-shops need to be organized taking into account the following:
- the establishment of standards ensuring data structure and safety procedures in order to ensure the safety and privacy of data.
- all information centers need to be connected to the centralized Government information system Network.

One-stop-shop should operate at the level of central government and should be supervised by the competent Government entity. The staff will be civil servants and state employees with appropriate authentication to provide data or information. The staff should possess basic skills for using the data base, in order to access to appropriate electronic date base.

c. Common issues

Other important issues for the operation of Information Centers and one-stop-shops in Monenegro are the following: ensuring intersection collaboration and coordination between the government authorities and basic system institutions, basic information system communication equipment, roles of safety access to data, quality of data in relevant centers and possibility to check it from other sources, the establishment of standards and protocols with regard to data structure, forming communication infrastructure necessary for data exchange.

The services of the Information Centers and one-stop-shops should focus primarily on the following fields:
- primary health care,
- secondary and tertiary health care,
- health insurance,
- social insurance,
- social welfare,
- pension,
- benefits,
- taxes,
- payment bills etc.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

i. The main reason behind the discussion on information centers and one-stop-shops is the need to ensure the consistent and systematic provision of information to citizens on their rights and to ensure their unimpeded access to benefits and services

ii. The solutions already in place in the countries participating in the project follow different models and different development paths. In this respect it is not easy to reach common conclusions and make common recommendations.

iii. Information centers as part of the competent institutions (e.g. pensions insurance, health insurance etc) already operate in Croatia and Albania, having as main task the provision of information to the citizens. In Montenegro, information systems are in place but specialised structures for providing information to citizens reportedly exist within the municipalities.

iv. Service of citizens through one-stop-shops is not a new idea for Croatia and Albania. In Croatia, one-stop-shops for businesses operate which integrate also business-related social security procedures (e.g. registration of employees etc.). In Albania, actual one-stop-shops are not set up but several services are becoming concentrated in one location, especially the collection of social security contributions and health care contributions, the paying out of pensions and cash social assistance, the collection of taxes from self employed people etc. (these tasks are concentrated at the National post office). In Montenegro no similar structures are reported.

v. Although in Albania and Croatia there seems to be a flow of information towards the citizens, this is still fragmented at the level of each institution (e.g. one has to address each institution separately in order to acquire information) and is still quite centralised. The same seems to be the situation in Montenegro, although the provision of information is reportedly decentralised. Concentrating existing information from the different institutions in one information point could be recommended as a further step. Three options appear:

• if the existing information centers make use of standardized data supported by IT systems, it could be shared within all existing

information centers. Therefore, each information point could provide comprehensive information to its clients on several social security issues. No major investment is involved in this solution (besides ensuring the compatibility of the information systems used and the reliable exchange of data) but the impact could be significant. The provision of basic training to the staff of the information points would be necessary. This solution could be valid for all three countries participating in the project.

- Virtual information points/portals can be created concentrating all related information. A more advanced version could also support on-line applications (provided of course that appropriate back office organisation is available and all relevant legal issues are solved). Such solutions do not imply a major investment and can be very efficient and time saving especially for younger generations that are IT literate and have access to internet. However, in order to bridge the digital divide and reach all target groups, it would be recommended that this solution be combined with either of the remaining two options i.e. physical locations, kiosks or call centers. Virtual information points should be made accessible also to disabled citizens.

- If the operation of information centers is efficient, call centres seem to be useful mostly in cases where no information is provided at decentralised level and groups of citizens face serious difficulties in accessing information and services. Call centers are a relatively low-cost solution that can relieve the burden of the citizens and can facilitate the work of information centers (provided of course that the appropriate back office organisation is available). A basic model would include only the provision of information on administrative procedures and benefits, while a more advanced one would support also the submissions of applications by phone.

vi. Regarding one-stop-shops in Croatia there are two main options:

- to set up separate social security one-stop-shops
- to integrate social security procedures in existing one-stop-shops. This seems to be the most cost-effective and rational solution, since there appears to be no specific prevailing reason for replicating structures.

One-stop-shops in Croatia reportedly already integrate procedures related to the social security obligations of employers. Based on the model

followed already, procedures related to social security e.g. pensions, sickness benefit, unemployment benefit etc. could be standardized and introduced in the existing one-stop-shops. A thematical counter on social security could be set-up with the existing structures.

vii. Albania and Montenegro, where one-stop-shops in practice do not exist, have the following options:

- to set up special social security one-stop-shops
- to set up one-stop-shops with general competencies where social security provisions would be integrated
- to combine information centers (through a call centre) and one-stop-shops at a physical location

viii. In Albania the further development of one-stop-shops would be recommended taking into account the experience from the early attempts that have already taken place. One stop shops should be organized as locations where people can cover their need for information, advice and services in one and the same place. Their function would be to offer information and services especially in priority fields such as housing benefits, municipality taxes, education, housing management, social services, children's services etc. They should function and be located at the level of local government, which could contribute also part of the funding. They should be staffed by specially trained customer service advisors who will provide information, advice and actual services to the citizens.

ix. In Montenegro one-stop-shops would be recommended in order to facilitate the access to information on rights, benefits and other services. Special emphasis should be placed in the field of unemployment as well as in primary, secondary and tertiary health care, health insurance, social insurance, social welfare, pensions, benefits, taxes etc. Information systems reportedly exist in most areas of social security, but they are not interconnected and interoperable. However, this would need to be ensured if one-stop-shops were to be established.

x. A main condition for the operation of either one-stop shops or information centers is back-office reorganisation, which mainly involves the reengineering and automation of existing administrative procedures. The basic steps in this direction are:

- Standardization of procedures according to the law

- Elimination of unnecessary steps
- Simplification
- Integration in the IT system
- Automation

xiii. Information technology is an important condition for all one-stop projects including information centres, call centres, single windows and one-stop shops. It is impossible to integrate services without the help of Information Technology. All countries involved in the project report the use of information systems in their social security administration. The compatibility between information systems used in different services is a question that needs to be clarified. If information systems in the different social security services are already in existence and compatible among them, the setting up of information centers and one-stop-shops is an easier task.

xiii. Information centers and one-stop shops should operate at decentralised level in order to ensure proximity to the citizen.

xiv. Citizen charters are a helpful instrument for improving the quality of public services and ensuring that citizens are informed on their rights and obligations and on administrative procedures that apply to them. Citizen charters need to incorporate clear and concrete quality standards and to be communicated openly and extensively.

Independently on the model chosen regarding social security one-stop-shops and information centers, any related project should include the following components:

- Organisational-administrative issues

Organizational cooperation between the services, departments etc involved in the provision of social security benefits and services is indispensable for all administrative procedures introduced in one-stop-shops. Ways for ensuring horizontal and vertical organizational cooperation and especially the former e.g., coordinating efforts between different departments should be studied and relevant legislation should be drafted. Additionally, issues related to the decentralised operation of Information Centers and one-stop-shops will have to be dealt with.

- Legal issues

Legal issues related to on-line transactions, including digital signature legislation, data protection, authorisations etc. need to be clarified and the relevant legislation should be enforced in order for social security information centers and/or one-stop-shops to be implemented efficiently.

- Technical infrastructure

As already mentioned, one-stop-government projects cannot be implemented without IT support. The information systems of different services that need to be interconnected needs to be compatible and to allow the secure exchange of information.

- human resources

The development of skills appropriate for the operation of specialised information centers and one-stop-shops need to be developed among the human resources of the public sector that will staff information centers and one-stop-shops. Training seminars focusing on the cognitive, communication and physical skills need to be elaborated and delivered. The competencies of the human resources need to be clearly determined.

- standardization, simplification of administrative procedures

Information centers and one-stop shops cannot operate without reengineering the related administrative procedures. In specific, three main steps need to be followed:

- standardization of procedures, that is determining work flows and what exactly is requests in legislation
- simplification of procedures, which entails removing useless steps and requirements (e.g. documents) in order to rationalise the procedure and limit the time necessary for its completion
- reengineering of procedures, means tat based on the above steps, administrative procedures will be redesigned and the relevant regulatory instruments will need to be drafted and enforced.

- Funding

Funding is a crucial issue for such projects. Adequate funding for the operation of the information centers and one-stop-shops should be identified. The cost of such projects should be calculated.

- Awareness raising

It is important for the success of similar initiatives to receive on the one hand strong political support and on the other hand support from the end users' of the services. To this purpose a clear communication and dissemination strategy is necessary.

Annex I

Questionnaire

On Information Centers and one-stop-shops

A. Information centers

- In your country, do information centers operate within the public administration?

If yes,

    a. What are their competencies?
    b. Which fields do they cover?
    c. Do they cover social security matters?
    d. How are they organized?
    e. how do they function (personnel, location, funding etc)
    f. What is their position within the public administration?
    g. What coordination mechanisms apply in their relation with the competent line institutions?
    h. What is the legal status of the staff (civil servants, individuals recruited in the context of projects, seconded staff etc.)?
    i. Do you consider their function sustainable (e.g. is their operation related to a project and thus subject to interruptions or finalization after the end of the project)? If not, please state the main reasons thereof.

If information centers do not operate in your country, how do citizens acquire information on their rights and the relevant administrative procedures? Please describe briefly

1. Which is, in your opinion, the main problem in the social security system of your country that should be addressed through the establishment of information centers?

    a. Provision of information on rights, benefits and other initiatives (e.g. labor promotion services, vocational education and training) and especially in which fields?
    b. Provision of personalized services to beneficiaries of social security benefits (i.e. identifying what citizens need, guiding them on how to exercise their rights and guiding them to existing services etc.)
    c. Complex administrative procedures which involve many institutions and take a long time
    d. Tackling corruption
    e. Other, please explain briefly

2. In your opinion, what would be the best way to address the above-mentioned problem?

3. In your opinion, which should be the mission of information centers, if they are established in the public administration in your country?

4. How do you believe that information centers should be organized?

    a. At which level of government should Information Centers operate?
    b. Who should supervise their function and how should administrative communication operate?
    c. Who should ensure their funding (e.g. municipalities, central administration and competent line ministries)?
    d. What should be the legal status of the staff?
    e. What kind of skills should the staff have and what kind of training would be necessary in this respect?

f. Please mention other issues that you consider important for ensuring the sustainability of Information Centers

5. Which are the fields (health, social insurance, social welfare, benefits, services etc.) in which the Information Centers should undertake responsibilities? And what kind of services should they provide (provide information, receive application for benefits etc)?

B. One-stop-shops

1. In your country, do one-stop-shops operate within the public administration?

If yes,

a. what are their competencies?
b. Which fields do they cover?
c. do they cover social security matters?
d. how are they organized?
e. how do they function (personnel, location, funding etc)
f. what is their position within the public administration?
g. What coordination mechanisms apply in their relation with the competent line institutions?
h. What is the legal status of the staff (civil servants, individuals recruited in the context of projects, seconded staff etc.)?
i. Do you consider their function sustainable (e.g. is their operation related to a project and thus subject to interruptions or finalization after the end of the project)? If not, please state the main reasons thereof.

If one-stop-shops do not operate in your country, how are citizens served regarding their social security rights (applying for benefits, collecting documentation etc)? Please describe briefly

2. Which is, in your opinion, the main problem in the social security system of your country that could be addressed through the establishment of one-stop-shops?

a. Provision of information on rights, benefits and other initiatives (e.g. labor promotion services, vocational education and training) and especially in which fields?
b. Provision of personalized services to beneficiaries of social security benefits (i.e. identifying what citizens need, guiding them on how to exercise their rights, receive applications and follow up on progress etc.)
c. Complex administrative procedures which involve many institutions and take a long time
d. Tackling corruption
e. Other, please explain briefly

3. In your opinion, what would be the best way to address the above-mentioned problem?

4. In your opinion, which should be the mission of one-stop-shops, if they are established in the public administration in your country?

5. How do you believe that one-stop-shops should be organized?

a. At which level of government should one-stop-shops operate?
b. Who should supervise their function and how should administrative communication operate?
c. Who should ensure their funding (e.g. municipalities, central administration and competent line ministries)?
d. What should be the legal status of the staff?
e. What kind of skills should the staff have and what kind of training would be necessary in this respect?
f. Please mention other issues that you consider important for ensuring the sustainability of one-stop-shops

6. Which are the fields (health, social insurance, social welfare, benefits, services etc.) in which the one-stop-shops should have competencies? What kind of services should they provide?