Evaluation of the Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries

Final Report


European Commission
Evaluation of the Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries

European Commission

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Vivid discussion and exchange on findings has likewise taken place within the Adelphi team. Our warmest thanks go to Rudolf Rindermann, Corinna Altenburg, Nanne Zwagerman and Joel Willers for their professional and committed work on this report. We hope our findings will serve to further improve the service for the benefit of exporters from developing countries.

Mikael Henzler Marianne Henkel

Berlin, 8 October 2007
Executive Summary

The present study is an external evaluation of the Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries after three years in service. The Export Helpdesk is an online service provided by the European Commission in order to facilitate market access for developing country exports to the European Union. It offers information on the situation and requirements of EU markets, including import tariffs and import conditions, legal requirements, taxes, and trade statistics.

The objective of the evaluation, as set out in the Terms of Reference, is:

1. To evaluate the results and overall impact of the service;
2. To assess the extent to which the information provided by the Export Helpdesk is reliable, complete, and useful, the service is user-friendly, and its availability is well-known amongst its target users;
3. To consider whether changes are desirable or necessary, and if so, to make practical suggestions about how such changes might be implemented.

To this end, the investigation draws on internal and external sources of information, including:

- A user survey carried out during three months, as well as interviews with experts in trade promotion or related fields;
- A simulation of model queries concerning a range of diverse import transactions;
- An analysis of website traffic on the Export Helpdesk server;
- A comparative analysis of similar online services;
- An analysis of the documentation of the website and its underlying organisation.

According to our findings, the Export Helpdesk is on the whole a very comprehensive source of information, and its approach of providing this range of information systematically by product code is unique among comparable web-based tools. Its assets, as perceived by the stakeholders consulted, are that it is comprehensive, free of charge, and systematic in information structure. This makes it a highly useful service, especially for users who carry out export-related research frequently. For users who have little experience in the export business retrieving and interpreting the information supplied by the Helpdesk is, however, more difficult. The systematic approach currently requires considerable prior knowledge, e.g. on import procedures and the EU Single Market, in order to be able to piece together a picture from the information obtained. User-friendliness needs to be enhanced therefore, so as to ensure that the service is of use to a wider circle of users in developing countries. This should be seen as a priority in the further development of the service.

Information on the Helpdesk is predominantly up-to-date, however the state of affairs which it seeks to present is by definition the current one. In order to take the time spans and financial risks involved with planning for export into account, the Helpdesk should adopt a more future-oriented approach by announcing forthcoming changes in regulations, taxes and tariffs prior to entry into force. Moreover, because of the sheer amount of data which has to be processed, information on taxes and requirements are updated just two to three times a year,
and may therefore be outdated by up to six months. The date when the information was last updated should therefore be indicated for all information where up-to-dateness is of crucial importance.

A number of users, particularly in South America, South Asia, and in the European Union, use the Helpdesk intensively. Overall, however, the tool is as yet fairly unknown among its potential user groups. As one-off presentations in the EU and developing countries do not appear to have as sustainable an impact as ongoing promotion through local multipliers, networking and cooperation with relevant institutions in developing countries should be pursued systematically in order to increase awareness and use of the Helpdesk.

Finally, the Export Helpdesk should be given a strategy or official mission determining its role in the wider context of EU trade policy and development cooperation. In the manner of a mandate, this would set the overall objectives for the Helpdesk, clarify its main target groups, and define and prioritise its scope of content and services. This is a prerequisite for translating global objectives into operational goals, setting up a long-term development strategy, allocating the resources needed in the long run, and making its impact measurable and communicable.
# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>African – Caribbean – Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSO</td>
<td>Business Support Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBSA</td>
<td>Canada Border Service Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMTRADE</td>
<td>United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database</td>
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<tr>
<td>EBA</td>
<td>Everything But Arms-Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>DANIDA</td>
<td>Danish International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>Developing Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>DG Entr</td>
<td>Directorate General Enterprise and Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>DG Sanco</td>
<td>Directorate General Health and Consumer Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>DG Trade</td>
<td>Directorate General External Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>DG Taxud</td>
<td>Directorate General Taxation and Customs Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIPP</td>
<td>Danish Import Promotion Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOC</td>
<td>Document file format</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESIPP</td>
<td>EU – SADC Investment Promotion Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETO</td>
<td>Electronic Trade Opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAQ</td>
<td>Frequently asked Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTA</td>
<td>Free-Trade Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITC</td>
<td>International Trade Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>JETRO</td>
<td>Japan External Trade</td>
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<td>LDC</td>
<td>Least Developed Country</td>
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<td>MAS</td>
<td>Market Analysis Service</td>
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<td>NTBT</td>
<td>Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>OTGS</td>
<td>Open Tradegate Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC-TAS</td>
<td>Personal Computer Trade Analysis System</td>
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<td>PTA</td>
<td>Preferential Trade Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>SECO</td>
<td>State Secretariat for Economic Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIPPO</td>
<td>Swiss Import Promotion Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Small and Medium Enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>TFOC</td>
<td>Trade Facilitation Office Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIDO</td>
<td>United Nations Industrial Development Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSD</td>
<td>United Nations Statistics Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCO</td>
<td>World Customs Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTPF</td>
<td>World Tradepoint Federation</td>
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1 The Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries

1.1 Round tour of the Export Helpdesk

The Export Helpdesk is a free online information service established by the EU Commission to facilitate access to the EU markets for exporters from developing countries. It is offered in four languages, English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. Information provided includes import tariffs, customs documents and procedures, preferential trade regimes, general and product-specific requirements on EU and member state level, as well as trade statistics, a calendar for trade events and links to relevant institutions and web resources. Interactive services include a business exchange platform for making initial market contact with offers and demands and a contact section offering answers to individual questions.

It should be noted, however, that the Export Helpdesk is and has been conceived as primarily an information tool - the Helpdesk has no mandate for problem-solving in concrete import transactions, given that competences for customs procedures remain with the Member States. Also, it is not within its scope to formally provide market contacts (exporters or importers) in the way chambers of commerce do, indeed this could result in preferential treatment and would also exceed Helpdesk capacities.

The service is structured as follows:

The "Requirements and Taxes" section provides an overview of general and product-specific requirements and taxes at both EU and member state level. Queries are submitted indicating the country of origin and destination, and the product code in Combined Nomenclature. A search function is used to identify the appropriate code, either by typing in the name of the product and browsing the product codes offered, or by selecting the code from a systematic list of product groups. Internal taxes are updated twice per year and legal requirements three times per year by an external service provider, with a quality control through the EU Commission.

Import Tariffs allows exporters to benefit from the EU’s Preferential Trade Agreements. By indicating the product code, the country of origin and a date of import into the EU, a concrete export transaction can be simulated; tariff preferences and third country duties will be stated accordingly, as well as quotas, antidumping duties, import control measures etc.

Customs Documents provides general information on the European Union’s three types of preferential duty treatments, the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), the “Cotonou”-or ACP-Agreement, and further Free Trade Agreements with developing countries. Brief introductions to each are followed by links to further sources of information.

1 However, as trade-related texts and regulations are often available in English only (in the Requirements and Taxes section), specific queries here submitted in any of the languages may produce English results.
Under **Rules of Origin**, the user can investigate the conditions that need to be met for goods to qualify for the preferential duty regime he has identified as being applicable. This section does not include the “browse” and “search” functions of the previous two sections; the product code in Combined Nomenclature has to be typed in here.

The **Trade Statistics** help exporters identify market potentials and developments by retrieving data on export and import values and import quantities for any given product from a specific third country, either to the EU-27, the EU-25 or to individual Member States. The statistics are provided by the Comext section of EUROSTAT and updated four times per year. The period covered currently encompasses 2000 to 2006.

The list of **Links** compiles national, EU and international institutions under Customs Websires, Trade and other professional Associations, Organisations involved in Trade and Development Policy, Statistics Resources, Private Sector and Economic Cooperation and Development Programmes, Private Food Quality Standards.

The **Market Place** is a business-to-business platform where exporters from developing countries and importers from the EU can lodge offers and requests for goods. Entries can be viewed without prior registration. However, registration is required in order to advertise an offer or demand for goods.

In the **Events** calendar, trade events in EU Member States and developing countries can be researched by selecting the product sector, a country of interest and a particular month. The period covered currently runs from October 2006 to July 2007.

Through the **Contact form**, visitors can address the EU Commission with individual questions, e.g. to inform themselves of forthcoming changes of product-specific requirements. Depending on how specific the queries are, incoming requests are either answered by the Helpdesk administration unit directly, or passed on to competent experts in other Directorate Generals. The target is to supply a response within 15 work days of receipt of an inquiry.

A **User Guide** and a list of **Frequently Asked Questions** have been established to offer guidance on the use of the service. The User Guide is available for download in all four languages, introducing the reader to the content and use of each section, while the FAQ provide standardised answers to those questions most often raised with the Contact service. Both documents have been created based on comments received from users.
1.2 The Export Helpdesk’s stakeholders

As is the case with any large service, those with an active involvement with the Export Helpdesk include not merely its providers and users, but a broader range of actors in international society who have a legitimate interest in the service. The main stakeholders are shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: The Export Helpdesk’s main stakeholders

All of these groups have an effect on and are themselves affected by the functioning of the Export Helpdesk, whether directly or indirectly. In the light of the focus of the general evaluation, the focus in this analysis will be on the actual users of the Export Helpdesk.

The evaluation's terms of reference indicate that a number of elements and aspects of the Helpdesk are to be evaluated with regard to their “target users”, and that the investigation should show whether these target users and their informational needs have been sufficiently clearly identified. In order to achieve this it is necessary to analyse the various groups of users and their informational needs. This analysis lies at the heart of the evaluation. The empirical data obtained from the user questionnaire are also analysed in terms of the user groups as defined in the questionnaire.
A. Key uses and target users

One of the evaluation's main objectives is to assess the site's impact as well as ways of further enhancing that impact. Seen from that perspective, the uses of the site that are of greatest relevance for the evaluation are those that are related to concrete international trade transactions between exporters in developing countries and importers in the EU. A user group can either be a party to such a transaction or an intermediary, whether by directly providing information to individual companies specifically to facilitate these transactions, or providing information for the same purpose but more generally.

The distinction between companies and intermediaries involves a differentiation based upon the purpose of use. A related, but not necessarily identical differentiation can be made on the basis of the informational needs of the user group. Depending on the purpose of use, but also on the area of interest, the portfolio, or other details from the background of the user group, a user group will have information needs that are broader or narrower. A third differentiation can be made on the basis of capacity. Depending on their previously acquired knowledge, human and financial resources, web access, network and contacts, user groups will have differing requirements with regard to the way information is presented as well as with regard to their capacity to make up for missing or inadequate information.

Based upon these distinctions, a number of dominant user group profiles emerge, which shall be introduced in further depth:

1. Developing country small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)
2. Big developing country producers / distributors and EU importers
3. Intermediary organisations (government-related, independent associations and commercial business consultants)

Developing country small and medium-sized enterprises

The average developing country SME will usually have to deal with a limited number of goods. Small producers usually manufacture just one product, or a few largely similar products. Developing country SMEs which focus on buying goods and exporting them will also usually deal with a single product or group of similar products. The information they seek will focus on a single product or a limited number of products in a product group. It is also likely that the developing country SME will seek to export to just one of the countries within the EU's common market. These informational needs have implications for the way in which developing country SMEs search for information, and accordingly for the way information can best be provided to them.

The developing country SME will use the Export Helpdesk mainly to receive assistance related to its own concrete transactions with EU-based companies. It will either be seeking information on its products in order to make a decision on whether it can profitably export to the European Union, or it might already have made the decision to export and be seeking information on the formalities it has to comply with.

In terms of capacity, it has to be assumed that developing country SMEs may not necessarily have a full understanding of international trade and the terms used in it. They may not know the market to which they seek to export, or have the ability to interpret abstract statistical data so as to form an understanding of the market. SMEs may not have the human and
technical resources to perform their own market research. Generally speaking, their competence tends to be lowest when it comes to legal requirements and documentation. According to an ITC study, managers of developing country SMEs rate their own knowledge of the legal aspects of trade as being particularly low, and many SMEs do not have their own quality documentation. Although they are in general willing to pay for consulting services, their budget for doing so may be limited. Some developing country SMEs will have no internet access of their own, or only by using a very slow connection. Although some companies may have contacts within the EU, they are more likely just to have a single trading partner rather than an extensive trade network outside of their own region.

**Big developing country producers / distributors and EU importers**

The overall situations of big developing country producers, wholesalers, and EU-based importers can differ from one another significantly. As users of the Helpdesk, however, their experiences are comparable. As regards the products they deal with, most will have a range of different products. These will often range across different branches, certainly in the case of large wholesalers but also in the case of a number of large developing country producers and EU-based importers. Both large producers and wholesalers are likely to trade with a number of EU member states, which will also be the case with some of the EU-based importers. The information which they seek will thus be different to that sought by developing country SMEs.

As regards the purpose of use, this group will have a similar motivation to the developing country SMEs, facilitating their own transactions in international trade. Although they will usually already be active within the EU in some way or other, they may be looking to export to additional countries, to import additional products, or seeking recent information on tariffs, taxes and import rules and regulations within the EU.

As big developing country producers, wholesalers and EU-based importers will generally already be engaged in international trade, they will have a good overview of its various aspects. Should they require additional information on trading with the EU or with specific EU countries, they are likely to have in-house capacity to obtain such knowledge, the ability to discover it through their network or the ability to pay for consultation services which can provide them with the relevant information. Such companies' access to and ability to use the internet will be higher than that of most developing country SMEs.

**Intermediary organisations and companies**

Besides assisting companies directly engaged in trade, the Export Helpdesk also serves as a source of information to organisations and companies that function as intermediaries to transactions in international trade. These range from chambers of commerce, government institutions and devolved authorities, industry associations, all the way to business consultants. Intermediaries can be based in developing countries and in the EU.

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The way that these various groups use the Export Helpdesk differs both from SMEs and larger companies in that they do not seek information for their own use within the context of international trade transactions. Rather, they seek information which they can pass on to others, either directly or through general dissemination. In general, this means that they tend to seek a broad array of information on one or more topics related to trade between developing countries and the EU, and with regard to a broad range of different products. This leads to a different kind of usage of the helpdesk, which is at once more general in terms of the products requested and more in-depth in terms of the information that is researched on a certain topic.

The capacity of intermediaries may be regarded as similar to that of big developing country producers and wholesalers. They will have a similar level of knowledge and a similarly well-developed network of contacts that they can use to compensate for any gaps in their knowledge. In some cases, particularly in developing countries, their resources and access to the internet might however be lower, as has been confirmed by a number of the experts who were interviewed.

B. Other uses and users

Part of the interesting potential of the internet is the heterodox use of information which its open structure allows. An information service set up to serve developing country exporters, governments and trade associations may end up being used as a research tool in universities, as an information source, as a template for other online services with varying degrees of similarity, or as a tool for NGOs and lobbies attempting to influence policy. Many of these uses will not be aimed at providing information to facilitate trade transactions, let alone at making such transactions directly. Nonetheless, these uses are legitimate, and the experience stakeholders gather through such uses may prove helpful with regard to the key uses of the site.

C. Comparison with survey results

The way in which the Export Helpdesk sets its priorities for further development partly depends upon the weight given to each of the three target user groups. Weighing the need to provide a service that can be used by SMEs with low capacity against the need to provide a service to intermediaries with high capacity will, for instance, influence the decision whether resources should be allocated primarily to providing a more in-depth service, or to providing a more user-friendly service with more emphasis on educating users.

How the Export Helpdesk proceeds in this matter should also be influenced by the empirical data that the user survey has yielded. The views of these actors should be taken into account when developing the overall strategy for the Export Helpdesk. To what extent do the target users as defined above correspond to the actual users of the Helpdesk? How do the individual user groups see their own priorities with regard to the Export Helpdesk? Chapter 3.11 will provide the answers to these questions.
1.3 The evaluation the Export Helpdesk

In addition to the EU Commission's general requirement that Directorates General submit their policy tools for regular evaluation, Directorate General for Trade is interested in obtaining an independent assessment of the extent to which the Export Helpdesk has achieved its goals within the first two years of operation.

The objectives of this evaluation as set out in the Terms of Reference are:

1. to evaluate the results and overall impact of the Export Helpdesk for developing countries, taking into account both internal and external sources of evidence;

2. to assess the extent to which the information provided by the Export Helpdesk for developing countries is reliable, comprehensive and useful, the service is user-friendly, and its availability is well-known amongst its target users;

3. to consider whether changes are desirable or necessary, and if so to make practical suggestions about how such changes might be implemented.

Queries made to members of the Steering Committee for the evaluation as to their expectations of the study revealed a strong interest in

- the impact of the Helpdesk, both overall and more specifically that of the marketplace section, as well as the usefulness and relevance of the individual sections;
- the related questions of whether the service actually helps its users, and whether they are prepared to return;
- the user-friendliness of the website;
- the question of awareness in general, and especially of how to successfully promote Helpdesk usage in Africa, which seems to be lagging behind that of other regions;
- the question of resource-efficiency, and in particular of how, if at all, human resources could be allocated more efficiently;
- how to achieve further cooperation partnerships to assist in establishing a support network that would be stable beyond personal contacts, so as to ensure the sustainability of the system; and
- practical recommendations and ideas for improvement of the service, as well as strategic advice supporting the development of a vision for the tool.

These questions and assignments in mind, a set of assessment methods was developed; this is introduced below.
2 Methodology of the Evaluation

The following chapter presents the methodology used in the evaluation of the Export Helpdesk and details how it was developed.

The evaluation is based on users’ and experts’ subjective assessment of the service, and also on data originating directly from the Export Helpdesk.

The survey’s aim was to provide a comprehensive picture of how satisfied users are with the service and how they evaluate it. It also sought to give a clearer picture of the Helpdesk’s users groups and their informational needs. In order to examine how complete, up-to-date and user-friendly the Helpdesk is, a set of sample queries was run through the Helpdesk. In addition, website traffic from the past two years was analysed, mainly to establish what the regional distribution of Helpdesk usage was and what services were most frequently requested.

Similar online services were examined and compared with the Helpdesk. This part of the investigation focused on how services similar to those provided by the Helpdesk are provided in other online tools, and what additional services or functions they offer.

In order to appraise the administration, work flows and promotional activities behind the Helpdesk, administrative documentation, strategic and contractual documents were analysed. Further input was sought from interviews with DG Trade’s Export Helpdesk Team and the Steering Committee.

Figure 2: Overview of Assessment Tools
2.1 User survey

The principal aim of the user survey was to obtain a comprehensive picture of user profiles, user satisfaction and patterns of usage. It also aimed to provide a subjective assessment of how user-friendly the service was, what its impact was, and what users’ priorities were regarding further improvements.

Questionnaires have the advantage of reducing bias: they ask all participants the same questions in the same way. They are also easy to circulate to a larger audience. There is, however, a dilemma of comprehensiveness versus representativity: long, comprehensive questionnaires usually elicit low response rates, while short questionnaires have higher response rates but yield less detail.

For this reason, the user survey consisted of two parts: a concise online questionnaire directly linked to the Helpdesk website and a more detailed offline questionnaire. The offline questionnaire was distributed to a large number of recipients around the globe, who had been in touch with the Helpdesk or the evaluator in the past.

The following assumptions underlie the survey:

**Target groups**: The target groups for both online and offline questionnaires were in principle identical. They included export companies from developing countries, import companies from within the EU, intermediary bodies active in the field of export promotion (e.g. chambers of commerce, regional EU programmes such as ALInvest, export consultants) and other organisations interested and active in export to the EU (e.g. research institutions)

**Familiarity of respondents with the Export Helpdesk**: Here, there was a difference between the two groups, as some recipients of the offline questionnaire were apparently unfamiliar with the tool (this was true not only for the evaluator’s contacts, but also for a number of those supplied by DG Trade)

**Scope/length of the questionnaires**: The offline questionnaire was sent to organisations and companies that have a relation of some kind either with the Export Helpdesk, Adelphi, or the IHK. It was assumed that these organisations would be willing to dedicate more time to the questionnaire. Online visitors are prone to abandon a questionnaire if it takes too much time to respond to. Accordingly, the offline questionnaire was more comprehensive and contained more open questions, while the online questionnaire used predominantly multiple-choice questions. Users of the Export Helpdesk are not necessarily familiar with all sections, so respondents were asked at the beginning which sections (i.e. sub-pages) they had used so far, and then presented with questions on these sections only.

**Sample size**: The number of responses was 778 for the online questionnaire, and 219 for the offline questionnaire. Percentages, where indicated, were calculated for each question separately.
A. **Online questionnaire**

**Focus**

Given the number of potential users of the Export Helpdesk, the online survey cannot be considered representative from a statistical point of view. Nevertheless, thanks to its sample size and the fact that respondents were users of the Export Helpdesk at the moment of participation, it does reflect the Helpdesk’s user groups fairly reliably. The online questionnaire was an ideal tool for getting a picture of users’ habits and profiles, including their geographic distribution and favoured features.

**Approach**

The online questionnaire was based almost exclusively on multiple-choice questions, although one open text field at the end of the questionnaire allowed for optional extra comments. Special attention was paid to the following points when designing the online questionnaire:

- Keeping the wording short, simple and unbiased
- Avoiding double-barred questions (questions containing two propositions)
- Arranging questions in a logical order
- Accommodating all possible answers, either using a comprehensive answer pattern or allowing for individual answers (of the type “Other – please specify: …”).

The draft questionnaire was submitted to DG Trade for comment, and a revised and abridged version pre-tested on the evaluator’s website. Nine respondents from German, foreign and international institutions active in export promotion and trade-related capacity-building participated in the pre-test. Their comments and suggestions led to a further shortening of the online questionnaire and some minor structural changes. To prevent excessive complexity, the pre-test was carried out in English only. However, the final version of the survey was translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese and German and made available online in all five languages in accordance with the provisions of the evaluation contract.

Care was taken to avoid technical barriers to accessing the online questionnaire, such as software requirements or large file sizes. These could effectively have excluded respondents with a slow or restricted Internet connection and led to a distortion in the composition of the sample. Accordingly, the software and settings required to participate in the survey did not exceed those of accessing the Export Helpdesk website itself.

The online survey was carried out from March 5 to May 21, 2007. The survey was accessible from the Helpdesk homepage and all of its subsections (http://exporthelp.europa.eu/).
B. Offline questionnaire

Focus
The strength of the offline questionnaire was its comprehensiveness. Because of its greater length, it could give more room to open questions and participants’ comments. Since open questions do not allow for statistical analysis, the fact that the sample size was smaller was less important. The advantage of open questions is that they elicit individual views and more in-depth information, especially on complex questions that cannot be examined fully in multiple-choice questions, such as the user-friendliness and impact of the service.

Approach
The offline questionnaire was similar to the online questionnaire in terms of its methodology (i.e. the shape and order of its questions). In addition, the offline survey asked about respondents’ experiences in export business and the greatest challenges and encountered by inexperienced exporters, as well as their needs in terms of information.

As with the online questionnaire, feedback from DG Trade (and the Helpdesk team, in particular) was sought from the initial draft onwards. The aim was to draw on their detailed knowledge of the tool and take into account their expectations in the scope of the study. As for the online questionnaire, a pre-test was run first. Forty-seven individuals internationally in chambers of commerce, other trade-related institutions and the field of social sciences were invited to take part in this pre-test and comment on the questionnaire. Of these, only six participated. This was taken as an indication of the response rate to be expected for the survey itself.

Following the pre-test, the questionnaire was revised and translated into Spanish, French, Portuguese and German. To make participation in the survey as easy as possible and to avoid potential technical restrictions on the part of recipients (internet connection, software, etc.), we offered two options for participation. Firstly, potential participants were sent a document created in MS Word containing the questionnaire in the prevailing language of the region. Secondly, a cover letter with the questionnaire informed them that the questionnaire was also available online in all five languages. Interestingly, only 28 respondents replied using the printed MS Word document; the vast majority – 191 individuals – chose the online survey.

Contacts for distribution included participants in presentations on the Export Helpdesk from around the world, companies advertising in the marketplace section, participants in export-related trainings carried out by the evaluator, and the newsletter circulation lists of ProInvest and AsiaInvest.
2.2 Guided expert interviews

Focus
Interviewing experts working in export or import promotion and foreign trade, for example, allowed us to tap into their first-hand professional experience with the Export Helpdesk. However, it also provided insights into the challenges and obstacles encountered by exporters from DC and importers from within the EU.

The experts interviewed generally deal with a wide range of questions and individual problems from different sectors (this does not usually apply to the private sector). They provided valuable feedback on the user-friendliness, reliability and completeness of the service offered by the Helpdesk, contributing to benchmarking its strengths and weaknesses and offering suggestions on awareness-raising and future development.

Approach
The assessment tool chosen here was a semi-structured interview guideline geared to the above questions, yet open enough to invite detailed discussion of certain fields where individual expertise manifested itself.

Before beginning the interviews, we ran two pilot tests consisting of a total of five interviews. Between these two pilot tests, the interview guide underwent substantial revision. The pilot tests yielded valuable input for the interviews and confirmed the importance of the tool in the investigation.

Both DG Trade and the evaluator contributed to the list of potential interviewees. The interviewed experts were also asked to recommend other possible interviewees. The experts included members of international EC delegations, the staff of export or business support institutions (chambers of commerce, the EU Commission’s Allinvest, AsiaInvest and ProInvest programmes, consultancies and other intermediaries), international organisations in areas related to export, international trade and development (e.g. the ITC, FAO, UNCTAD) and NGOs active in the field of international trade and development.

The original intention was to involve experts from around the globe to get a comprehensive picture of exporters’ needs and regional perspectives. However, the response to our interview request was particularly low in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Other problems included poor telephone connections, which hampered communication especially in some African and South Asian regions. These technical difficulties made it difficult to strike a regional balance.

In total, 43 interviews were conducted. An interview plan is included in Annex IV.
2.3 Website traffic study

Focus
Since its launch, usage of the Export Helpdesk and its geographical distribution have been monitored on the basis of page hits and requests. In the context of the evaluation, an analysis of logfiles was carried out to give a more comprehensive picture of user profiles.

Approach
The analysis is based on the monthly log files for the period from January 2004 to April 2007 (excluding January 2006). These were analysed using the software tool AWStats.

The Export Helpdesk monitors usage on the basis of statistics on overall traffic (monthly to hourly reports), country of origin of users (domain reports), and Helpdesk pages visited (directory and request report). This indicates which services are used most and what information most frequently requested. The statistics are based on the log files and have been considered in this examination as a point of reference.

Additional sources of information (e.g. on worldwide Internet accessibility) are indicated where appropriate.

2.4 Sample queries

Focus
The simulation of various product queries is intended to help examine typical search results as supplied by the Helpdesk. The sample queries provide as unbiased a view of the Helpdesk services as is possible. Findings mainly relate to the comprehensiveness, reliability and user-friendliness of the service.

The sample queries introduce a form of unbiased examination of the Expert Helpdesk’s contribution to the value addition chain of an enterprise tapping into its information resources.

Approach
A total of ten sample queries were selected from a range of key sectors, including agricultural products and foodstuffs, textiles, cosmetics, animal feed, flowers, chemicals and industrial goods. The regions of origin include the ACP region, Asia and Latin America; the export destinations are ten different Member States of the EU-27 (for a detailed list of the sample queries selected, see Annex III). For each section of the Helpdesk, a list of questions was drawn up which would be either indispensable or at least useful for a user intending to export these goods to the EU.
Because of a change of service provider for the "Requirements and Taxes" section, the database of this core service is currently being revised. At the beginning of the evaluation process it was agreed that the sample queries should be carried out either before or after that transition period. The sample queries were therefore carried out systematically after the launch of the new database in the second half of May.

The user was defined as follows:

- He is competent and knowledgeable as far as the product is concerned, much as the product’s producer would be;
- He is willing to invest a considerable amount of his time to search the Expert Helpdesk for information and hopes to add value to the value addition chain of his enterprise. He is also assumed not to access information sources other than those retrieved from the Expert Helpdesk database and web-pages and portals he has found by clicking on links within the Expert Helpdesk;
- The user consults the Helpdesk regularly, and is thus familiar with the “Requirement and Taxes” database both in its previous state and after the relaunch.

By simulating real queries which are supposed to contribute to the value adding chain of an enterprise, it is possible to objectively judge the Expert Helpdesk’s expertise for specific product ranges. By discovering the real value of the information retrieved from the Expert Helpdesk in specific cases, general analyses can also reveal structural deficits and gaps that are of significance to all types of user.

2.5 Analysis of contractual requirements and back-end documents

Focus

The analysis of back-end documents deals mainly with the management and administration of the Export Helpdesk. It also looks at issues of networking, cooperation and awareness-raising. The aim is to investigate current patterns of resource allocation and, on this basis, discover whether the administration of the service can be optimised in any way (allowing a redistribution of human and financial resources) and whether the resources allocated to the Helpdesk are sufficient.

Raising awareness and usage of the service is one of the major challenges facing the Export Helpdesk. For this reason, we attempt to assess the effect of networking and cooperative projects so far and give further impetus to strategy development and resource allocation.

Approach

The sources used were interviews with staff in various DGs of the European Commission. We also looked at documentation relating to the administration and promotion of the service. Interviewees included staff operating the service and members of the Steering Committee set up for the evaluation of the Export Helpdesk. The documentation examined comprised the minutes of Steering Committee meetings, strategic planning documents, contracts with
external service providers, budgets, information on work time, promotional activities and materials, documentation on cooperative projects initiated so far, and related items.

### 2.6 Comparison with similar services (Benchmark study)

**Focus**

The aim of the Benchmark Study is to identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of the Helpdesk. It does this by giving a comprehensive overview of different approaches in the field of trade facilitation worldwide. An additional aim is to point out development potential and possible synergies.

**Approach**

To select online services suitable for comparison purposes, we used a set of four criteria: (1) comparability of content, (2) geographical focus, (3) target group, and (4) institutional background. In all, 16 online services were identified as suitable for comparison purposes; nine of these were investigated in detail, and seven examined more generally.

The first group of nine online services – subject to detailed analysis – includes portals comparable to the Export Helpdesk in terms of the following:

- **Target groups** (exporters in DC, EU importers, officials in governments and EU administration, intermediaries);

- **Content and services** (national/supranational regulations pertaining to product requirements and import procedures, relevant taxes, tariffs, market information, etc.), approach or structure of contents;

- **Objective** (supporting exporters from developing countries by providing trade-related information and services).

The frame of comparison also included target regions, languages offered and accessibility.

The second group of seven online services – subject to more general analysis – also focus on trade facilitation, but do not necessarily have the same (or comparable) targets and objectives as the Export Helpdesk. These portals were selected as they had a single outstanding characteristic in terms of content or structure that could be a model for the Export Helpdesk. In addition, they provide further insights into the broad spectrum of activities in the field of trade facilitation and the actors in this sector. Best practice examples and potential synergies are indicated in a summary at the end of the chapter.
3 Results of the Evaluation

Supplementary Note: The product code search

A. HS, CN and Taric codes

At the core of the Export Helpdesk lie a number of databases – in the "Requirements and Taxes", "Import Tariffs", "Rules of Origin", and "Trade Statistics" sections – that are searchable by product code. For this, users need either the 2- to 6-digit Harmonised System (HS) code, the 8-digit Combined Nomenclature code (CN) or the 10-digit Taric code. Identifying the product code is a prerequisite for investigating product requirements, import tariffs, import licences, and so on, and selecting the correct code is crucial for customs clearing.

In the "Requirements and Taxes" section, the subsection “Overview of Import Procedures” gives a short explanation of the HS, CN and Taric code system. This is valuable information. However, it is provided at a point where the user has already carried out a code-based database search. Clearly, it should be placed where it is easily accessible, to guide users on the classification system and the use of the nomenclature tool.

B. The Helpdesk’s Nomenclature Device

The Export Helpdesk offers two methods of product classification: users can either systematically browse the product categories of the chapter list, or they can enter a whole or partial keyword and select one of the entries displayed (or continue the specification from there).

The product code is required for database queries in four sections of the Export Helpdesk (see above). However, the nomenclature tool for browsing or searching for codes is not available in the "Rules of Origin" section. This means that the user has to identify the product code in one of the other sections and then type or copy the product code into the input form in the "Rules of Origin" section – a complicated procedure that should be changed.

The nomenclature tool opens up in a new (pop-up) window on top of the Export Helpdesk window. This pop-up window has to be closed by hand once the user has selected the code; it would be better if it closed automatically.

C. Identifying the Appropriate Product Code

The survey and interviews carried out for the purpose of this study indicate that users face a number of challenges when trying to identify the correct product code. This process can prevent users accessing the site’s services fully, or at least slow them down unnecessarily.

Depending on the product itself, rather than on user expertise only, the query for the code can be complicated and time-consuming, and the results ambiguous.
The search for information can be very troublesome because of the specific information you have to insert in the documents that you need. In my opinion this should be simpler. For example, I am in the wine business, and to be able to access [the service] I am required to enter the code. It is really hard to me to find the code, since one[code] is sparkling wine and the other one is vinegar.” - Comment from the user survey

The product descriptions in the chapter list are very abbreviated. As a result they are often ambiguous. Moreover, the classification does not follow a consistent system. The current system is as follows:

- To a large extent, the clustering of products in product groups follows a principle of exclusion – instead of enumerating all the products that fall under a certain heading, the description distinguishes between one particular product (or product group) and the rest, termed “other”.

**Example:**

A company wishes to export handicraft napkins made of 90% linen with 10% silk in damask design. First, the company must decide if the product is adequately described as "Table linen, knitted or crocheted

- **Other** table linen (6302 51)
  - of cotton
  - of man-made fibres
    -- non-wovens
    -- other
  - of **other** textile materials (6302 59)
    -- flax
    -- **other** (6302 59 90)"

- Products are partially classified by their mode of functioning, and partially by their wider context (e.g. as components of technical devices).

**Example:**

Car bumpers fall under

**Vehicles**, aircraft, vessels and associated transport equipment

- Vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock, and **parts and accessories thereof**
  - Parts and accessories of the motor vehicles of headings 8701 to 8705 (8708)"

Catalytic converters, by contrast, figure under:

**Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances, parts thereof** (84)

- Centrifuges, including centrifugal dryers; filtering or purifying machinery and apparatus, for liquids or gases (8421)
  - Machinery and apparatus for filtering or purifying other gases (8421 39 40)
  - By a **catalytic** process (8421 39 60)
• On occasion, several different chapter headings may appear to be possible. Identifying the right chapter and subheading can be a highly time-consuming process.

**Example:**

Searching with the keywords “catalytic” or “converter” does not yield any results; “cataly” eventually leads to “catalysts”, “catalytic preparations”, or “catalytic process”:

“Reaction initiators, reaction accelerators and *catalytic* preparations, not elsewhere specified or included (3815)”

“Natural or cultured pearls, precious or semi-precious stones, precious metals, metals clad with precious metal, and articles thereof; imitation jewellery, coin (71)
  • Other articles of precious metal or of metal clad with precious metal (7115)
    • catalysts in the form of wire cloth or grill, of platinum (711510)”

“Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances, parts thereof (84)
  • Centrifuges, including centrifugal dryers; filtering or purifying machinery and apparatus, for liquids or gases (8421)
    • Machinery and apparatus for filtering or purifying other gases (8421 39 40)
      • By a *catalytic* process (8421 39 60)

• Product group headings do not indicate commercial names consistently, so searching by keyword can be misleading and yield the wrong results. The headings also use British English spelling only, so using American English spelling leads to no results being found.

**Example:**

a) Tapioca pellets, made from dried cassava, or manioc, are a major animal feed ingredient. Searching for “tapioca” in the HS nomenclature will produce:

“Tapioca and substitutes therefor prepared from starch, in the form of flakes, grains, pearls, siftings or similar forms (1903)“

This falls under chapter IV „*Prepared foodstuffs*; beverages, spirits and vinegar; tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes“, which is wrong; this chapter heading, however, is not displayed in the above result.

The correct classification is under chapter „23”

b) The word “fertilizer” offers no matches at all, because the nomenclature tool contains the spelling “fertiliser” only.
A further problem is that, as already mentioned, different sections require different product code hierarchies ranging from 2 to 10 digits\(^3\). This is not explained in the section.

A number of experts consulted as part of this investigation suggested making it possible to search for product requirements and taxes first of all using 4- to 6-digit product codes. This would be useful, as in general requirements are not highly specific. What is undisputable is that the site should provide some information on this issue in the form of an introduction to the system, positioned next to the nomenclature tool.

**Example:**

Prior to January 1, 2007, ship’s propellers were listed under HS 8485 and covered by the corresponding list rule for 8485 under the GSP. In the revised Harmonised System, goods formerly belonging to 8485 are now comprised in the newly introduced HS heading 8487; ship’s propellers fall under the HS position 848710.

As the rules of origin of the GSP continue to be based on the HS 2002, position 8487 does not exist. Looking up the rules of origin for the GSP for 8487, the rule to be applied would thus be “ex-Chapter 84”. This is actually wrong, as the rule for 8485 continues to apply.

**D. Changes in HS Codes**

The fourth revision of the HS code system, introduced by the WCO as of January 1, 2007, is not mentioned in the Export Helpdesk. Some headings were deleted or merged with other headings, and the reclassification of products' codes may have had an impact on the import duties applicable and the rules of origin in free-trade and preferential trade agreements. Users who know their product codes and consult the Helpdesk only occasionally may have been unaware of the change, and may thus have continued to use the old code.

**E. Conclusions**

- The classification of a product in the HS system has far-reaching implications. Selecting the wrong code is likely to produce the wrong information on product-specific requirements, import tariffs and rules of origin. Customs officials confirm that this is a problem exporters often face at customs if they do not leave the import of their products to commercial shippers.

  This problem can be solved by making a request for Binding Tariff Information (BTI) from the responsible customs administration. The Export Helpdesk should draw attention to the importance of appropriate tariff classification and the possibility of obtaining a BTI when planning a concrete export transaction\(^4\). This information could be included in the

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\(^3\) The “Trade Statistics” section uses the 2- to 6-digit HS or 8-digit CN code; “Requirements and Taxes” and “Rules of Origin” use the 8-digit CN code; “Import Tariffs” use the 10-digit Taric code.

\(^4\) It actually does so in the answer to one of the Frequently Asked Questions; this information should be given in the section as well.
introduction to the product classification system, and clear links to the introduction should be given in all sections offering searches based on the product code.

- Including the HS Explanatory Notes to the CN code on the site would considerably improve the complicated research procedure and help avoid ambiguous or even incorrect results.

For example, in the case of the user in wine business (see above), the Explanatory Notes would offer further details under the heading "2204 - Wine of fresh grapes, including fortified wines; grape must other than that of heading 2009" by referring also to other headings that should be considered.

Excerpt from Explanatory Notes for wine

(1) Wine of fresh grapes
   The wine classified in this heading is the final product of the alcoholic fermentation of the must of fresh grapes.
   The heading includes:
   (1) Ordinary wines (red, white or rosé).
   (2) Wines fortified with alcohol.
   (3) Sparkling wines. These wines are charged with carbon dioxide, either by conducting the final fermentation in a closed vessel (sparkling wines proper), or by adding the gas artificially after bottling (aerated wines).
   (4) Dessert wines (sometimes called liqueur wines). These are rich in alcohol and are generally obtained from must with a high sugar content, only part of which is converted to alcohol by fermentation. In some cases they are fortified by the addition of alcohol, or of concentrated must with added alcohol. Dessert (or Liqueur) wines include, inter alia, Canary, Cyprus, Lacryma Christi, Madeira, Malaga, Marsala, Port, Malmsey, Samos and Sherry.

   The heading does not cover:
   (a) Beverages with a basis of wine of heading 22.05.
   (b) Medicaments of heading 30.03 or 30.04.

- Browsing by product category could also be facilitated by successive drop-down menus offering a list of products that fall under that heading, to avoid the ambiguity of the term „other“.

This principle is exemplified below in a product classification from the online business directory "Expand Germany". This site does not help users find the HS code, but classification here is fairly similar to the HS product categories:
Product Classification on expand-germany.com

Please classify "your product inquiry " to one of the following commodities!

Motorcars and utility vehicles, all kinds of means of transportation, incl. ▼
Motorcars

--- please select --
Motor vehicle
Recreation vehicles, motorhomes
Race- and sportscars
Motorbikes and other two-wheeled bikes, also spare parts and parts subject to v ...
Spare parts for cars
Fire extinguisher

No associations have been found.
Please specify your inquiry with the help of the selection above.

- It would be useful to include a model query next to the nomenclature tool. This would show the user how to find a product code using the “browse” and “search” options.
- Changes to HS or CN codes should be indicated prominently at the top of the sections, or in another prominent location in the Export Helpdesk.

3.1 Requirements and Taxes

A. Overview

The "Requirements and Taxes" section of the Export Helpdesk web-site provides information on general import and product-specific requirements at the level of the Community and Member States. It also gives information on Member State taxes, and import procedures and import restrictions in the Customs Union.

The information on product-specific requirements includes both relevant legislation and details of technical standards under the New Approach and certification for organic production.

The section is searchable by product code. Results are displayed in four clusters:

- Specific requirements for (the selected product)
- Internal taxes
  - VAT and other duties
- General requirements for all products
  - Commercial invoice
  - Customs value declaration
  - Freight insurance
  - Single administrative document (SAD)
- Freight documents
- Packing list

- Overview
  - Overview of import procedures
  - VAT
  - Excise

With the change in service provider at the beginning of 2007, the underlying database was completely revised: As data was copyrighted, all entries were rewritten.

Compliance with product requirements – whether these are legal or market requirements – is a precondition for entering foreign markets. They constitute a highly complex subject where access to up-to-date, complete information is of utmost importance.

The Export Helpdesk provides an important service in collating information spread across various different sources and giving links to legal texts and contact people. This can save potential exporters a considerable amount of time.

**B. Completeness**

The information provided in the section "Requirements and Taxes" encompasses a wide range of regulations and trade policy measures, including import licences and import bans.

In the sub-chapter “Specific Requirements for Products”, the Export Helpdesk gives a brief introduction to all relevant EU legislation and lists applicable legislation on the level of individual Member States. On one occasion, an expert reported that a reference to a directive was missing. While this points to the importance of quality assurance through the Helpdesk team, it seems to have been a one-off case.

More significantly, the Export Helpdesk can be regarded as giving too much information on some occasions, and too little on others. For example, the information on product-specific requirements contains entries that do not apply to the product in question, but to another part of the product group. Here, as an interviewee remarked, the 8-digit product code suggests that only information that specific product is indicated, whereas product-specific requirements are given for the wider product group, which is irritating.

**Example:**

Provisions for personal protective equipment in a query for women’s blouses.
At the same time, the Export Helpdesk does not think along the whole product line, as it were, and fails to provide information on special requirements for packaging or product components. It should refer to these requirements explicitly or note that further provisions may exist.

**Example:**

For juices, as for prepared foodstuffs in general, the information provided by the Export Helpdesk is quite extensive, and by default, it even lists provisions for genetically-modified food and organic production. Legal provisions apply also to food containers that are in direct contact with foodstuffs, such as Regulation (EC) 1935/2004. However, the latter is mentioned in the “Overview of Import Procedures”, but not under “Specific Requirements for [product code]”.

Again, for children’s trousers, the Export Helpdesk lists requirements applying to textiles in general and the type of textile in question, but does not refer to the General Product Safety Directive (GPSD) that applies to buttons, for example, or technical standards for cords and drawstrings for children’s clothes (EN 14682:2004).

It seems that this aspect is improving as the new database is being built up progressively.

Finally, the Export Helpdesk should put more emphasis on technical standards. At the moment, it covers the harmonised standards of the three European standardisation bodies CE, CENELEC and ETSI, i.e. standards that are relevant under one of the New Approach directives. Additionally, the “General Overview of Import Procedures”, which is the last chapter on the results page, contains a short outline of the system of harmonised and national standards.

Wherever one of these technical standards is referenced in a search result, the sub-chapter on target country provisions also includes the name and address of the national standardisation body. However, if no harmonised standard applies to the product, this general reference to national standards is missing.

The "Requirements and Taxes" section makes little or no mention of any EU-wide or supranational voluntary standards apart from the EU eco-label and the EU standard for organic foods, both of which are regulated by the European Commission. The section thus neglects standards such as those pertaining to social or ecological standards (EUREPGAP, Nordic Swan, Blue Angel, Clean Clothes Campaign, etc.). Although these standards are voluntary, meeting them can be crucial for launching a product successfully on a market, especially in the case of national technical standards.

It may be beyond the scope of the Export Helpdesk to supply up-to-date and detailed information on all of these standards. However, the service should attempt to raise awareness of their importance by referring to sources that provide further details. The current outline in the “General Overview” section would be more useful if it contained references to

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5 A number of voluntary standards are refereed to in the "Links" section, but the list so far includes food standards only, and there is no bridge to the "Requirements and Taxes" section.
product-specific requirements as background information. Exporters who have certified their product to a given national standard, for example, need to know that when a New Approach Directive comes into force, a new European Standard may override an older, divergent national standard.

Three of the experts consulted as part of this study explicitly stated that the Export Helpdesk gave insufficient coverage to standards. One expert stated that it was important that the Export Helpdesk indicated where the information provided on the site was incomplete – i.e. that is should mention what other things were needed to export to the EU that were not covered on the site. That way, it would “become complete by showing its incompleteness”.

Under the heading “Internal Taxes”, the site gives the current VAT rate in the country of destination. Further excises are listed where applicable.

The sub-chapter “General Requirements for all Products” features six explanatory documents on further provisions deriving from general customs law. These are as follows:

- Commercial invoice
- Customs value declaration
- Freight insurance
- Customs import declaration (SAD – Single Administrative Document)
- Freight documents
- Packing list.

The explanations are concise and easy to understand. Where a legal norm or an official form is mentioned, the site provides a link. However, there are no references to further sources of information, such as the DG Taxation and Customs Union.

The “General Overview of Import Procedures” touches on a number of key issues. These are discussed in the form of an introduction with paragraphs on each of the following:

- **Product classification** in HS, CN, and Taric nomenclatures: This introduction is necessary in order to understand the principles and importance of the product classification system (see Supplementary Note for more information on product code selection);

- The **European Single Market** and **Customs Union** (including an introduction to the different customs procedures, customs declaration and the valuation of goods for customs purposes): the entry “the Hellenic Republic” should have “Greece” added in brackets to avoid irritation. A link to DG Taxation and Customs Union should be added. For the calculation of import duties, the site so far explains the concept of “transaction value”, but the difference between "ad valorem" and specific duty rates is set out in the User Guide, which is little consulted by users. Duties for agricultural goods in particular are often based on weight, rather than on commercial value;

- The **Import trade regime** (setting out the motivation and impacts of surveillance and safeguard measures, as well as quotas) gives a cursory overview of import restrictions in the agricultural, textiles, and iron/steel sector. To facilitate orientation in this complex subject matter, the paragraph could include a reference to the specific requirements,
where essential further details and assistance are given (e.g. DG Taxation and Customs Union, MS customs authorities);

- **Animal health**;
- **Plant health**;
- **Food and feed safety and marketing standards**;
- **Public health**;

These three paragraphs give a concise overview of relevant Community law and the underlying principles of the respective sector policies, such as consumer protection. For each paragraph it would be helpful to add external references to the relevant authorities (e.g. DG Health and Consumer Protection) that can provide further information.

- **Environment protection**: Here, a number of EC policies pertaining to products or production should be added that could be of interest for manufacturers in the supply industry. This includes the policies on Integrated Pollution Prevention Control (96/61/EC), Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (2002/96/EG), Energy-using Products (2005/32/EG) Directives, the RoHS Directive 2002/95/EG and (with a view to the supply industry) the REACH Directive 2001/14/EG and a link to DG Environment;

- **Product safety**: The brief introduction covers the General Product Safety Directive, the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Directive, and Directive 686/1989/EEC, which applies to products that are not edible but can be mistaken for foodstuffs. Further policies should be mentioned in this context, e.g. the;

- **Technical standardisation**: The description of the New Approach and the development of standards and conformity assessment is very well done. However, the entire paragraph should be given in the product-specific requirements as well to facilitate understanding in this area. An introduction to further technical and other voluntary standard should be added. This should be combined somehow with the information on “Private Food Quality Standards” in the "Links" section;

- **Packaging**: Here, again, the overarching principles are explained and applicable legislation listed, but there are no references for further guidance. These should be added;

- **Labelling**: This paragraph takes the opposite approach: the user is referred to Scadplus for further information about mandatory labelling standards in the EU and the relevant legal norms are not indicated. However, the page referred to on Scadplus does not contain information on this topic. The reason is likely to be that a change in URLs on the Scadplus web-site went unnoticed by the Export Helpdesk. To avoid this problem, the list available at Scadplus should be provided on the Export Helpdesk as well.

Both the “General Requirements for All Products” and “Overview of Import Procedures” sub-sections contain valuable background information, especially for first-time exporters.

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“Overview” is the main document setting out general aspects of trade policy in the EU. As much of this information must be understood first in order to understand the details given in product-specific requirements and other sections, these two sub-sections should be moved further up and turned into a section in their own right. Another reason for doing this is that one would expect to find product-specific information when submitting a product-code-based query.

The delineation between the two sub-sections "General Requirements for All Products" and "Overview of Import Procedures" is also unclear. Thus the “Overview” section refers to the SAD, which is described in greater detail under “General Requirements”. At the same time, information on packaging and labelling are to be found in “Overview of Import Procedures”, although this information applies to products manufactured within the EU no less than to imported goods.

Our recommendation is thus that the two sub-sections be merged into one. This new section could be expanded to provide an overall introduction to the EU under trade-related aspects, encompassing the following information: data on the Directorate Generals, their fields of competence and contact details; the historic development of the European Union; the partition of legislative competencies between the EC and Member States (explaining why in many cases exporters will have to deal with both EC and national law); and the main features of the EC external trade policy.

Overall, the content of this section is very comprehensive. All relevant issues are covered to some extent. However, voluntary standards are not treated in as much detail as they should be, given their importance, and specific requirements for product components and packaging that may apply are not included in the product-specific requirements. Exporters need a full picture of the requirements.

This competence is available within the EC Commission – the missing information can be found on the website of DG Enterprise and Industry. We therefore recommend closer cooperation between the Helpdesk and DG Enterprise and Industry with the aim of identifying what information should be included for each sector and communicating any changes in sector policies.

C. User-friendliness

The layout of the main page is functional and straightforward. Links to results pages indicate whether the item in question is significant on the level of the EU or of the individual Member State. This facilitates orientation. However, different sections display results differently. For example, all items open in a new browser window except for “Internal Taxes”, which reloads the main page, with the result that the initial index of contents disappears. The “Overview of Import Procedures” compiles several headings into one document. In “General Requirements for All Products”, individual items are treated in separate documents. These inconsistencies should be removed (see chapter 3.15).

The contents of the section are fairly complex. However, unlike other online services, the Export Helpdesk does not embed the list of applicable legislation in a tutorial, but presents it rather in the manner of a “chest of drawers”. This is very useful for intermediaries and other users regularly carrying out queries. But it is more challenging for inexperienced users who have to piece the picture together themselves. Overall, the information is comprehensive and
well produced, but it is difficult for the user to read from the first to the last page, as there is no indication of how the information is ordered.

Some of the users surveyed for the purposes of this report found it difficult to understand or use the information. Comments included that the section should give more detailed information on what exporters needed, or that they could not work out how to get information about the conditions for market access.

The following issues also emerged from user feedback:

- In its current form, the information on the Export Helpdesk requires a lot of prior technical and legal knowledge. Without this, the information will in many cases be confusing
- The language and terminology relating to legal issues and trade policy are often complicated. This makes the information difficult to understand for non-professionals in the export business
- More guidance is needed on what to do with the information provided.\(^7\)

The Export Helpdesk is thought of by a number of users and experts as a "tool for experts". Some users suggested that the Helpdesk should give more details of what to do with the information provided.

Much would be gained by adding a glossary of trade and customs terms. It would also be helpful to present a model query within the section, illustrating how information can be retrieved, interpreted and applied.

### D. Up-to-dateness

At the moment, it is foreseen that information on internal taxes should be updated every six months, and product requirements three times per year. Researching a particular tax rate shortly before an update may therefore yield a result that is incorrect at the time the research is undertaken, if for example a tax increase has taken place in the meantime.\(^8\) While a delay is to some extent inevitable given the amount of data to be processed, this again points to the importance of indicating the last update on the results page, as is the case on the MADB. Currently, no mention is made of when the information was last updated or how often it is usually revised. Giving such information would increase the reliability of the site.

Users reported that they found the information in this section to be generally up-to-date. The experts consulted were less unanimous on this point, partially due to their different perception of what "up-to-date" actually means. Thus, for example, legal requirements on product properties have a direct impact on product design and may entail time-consuming conformity assessment procedures. Tax increases need to be taken into account when assessing the expected return on sales of a transaction. Being up-to-date could therefore be taken to mean not only reproducing the current laws and taxes, but also announcing

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\(^7\) Almost 44% of users stated that they needed further advice on how to use the information obtained, compared to 34% who did not (the remaining 22% were unable to judge or gave no answer).

\(^8\) For example the increase of VAT in Germany from 16 to 19% as of Jan 1, 2007 was only included from the beginning of May.
forthcoming changes. However, as the Export Helpdesk provides a link to the Official Journal, it often ignores the most recent amendments to legislation. One expert stated that they had ceased to use the Export Helpdesk for this very reason, and several other users and experts called for updates on changes in legal norms, VAT, etc. to be included. A solution here would be to provide a link to consolidated versions of legislation and to establish a news service giving informing about recent or forthcoming changes in product requirements, taxes, etc. DG Enterprise and Industry currently offers such a news service, and this could be linked to or included in the Export Helpdesk.

E. Conclusions

Despite the criticisms above, most of the experts surveyed for this report stated that the "Requirements and Taxes" section was superior to similar services offered by other sites, and described it as very useful. The majority of users agreed that its contents were either "good" or "excellent".  

The overall picture that emerges is that the section is useful and much appreciated by those who know how to use it, but remains a closed book for many users. This is due to the complexity of the subject matter. It is particularly true for exporters in developing countries, who represent the Helpdesk’s main target group. The challenge is therefore clearly to improve user-friendliness.

Our recommendations for further adjustments to this section are as follows:

• Move the “General Requirements for All Products” and the “Overview of Import Requirements” to the section level, i.e. a place in the information hierarchy where they are accessible prior to any product code-based query, and likely to be read before reading the product-specific requirements. All background information that would be essential to inexperienced exporters should be assembled in an individual section (e.g. a “Getting started” or “Exporting to the EU market”);

• Highlight the importance of standards for successful marketing in EU markets and give an overview all major voluntary (i.e. technical, social, environmental) standards, including key references;

• Customise product-specific information better to avoid frustrating the users;

• Use the sector competence of other DGs (e.g. DG Enterprise and Industry, DG Health and Consumer Protection) to identify relevant information that should be included;

• Expand references to external sources of information, especially relevant DGs, Scadplus and EUR-Lex;

• Include an overview of consolidated legislation and information on pending changes in relevant legislation, taxes, etc;

• Use as simple wording as possible, especially as information is only provided in English.

9 Of those answering this question, 41.7% considered the contents "good", 30.4% "excellent", 17.4% "could be improved", 1.4% "poor", and 9.1% were "unable to judge".
3.2 Import Tariffs

A. Overview

The "Import Tariffs" section provides users with the rates of import duties and other customs administration measures, such as unit rates, airworthiness tariff suspensions, information on preferential and non-preferential tariff quotas, import licences, and supplementary unit imports.

The search is based on the product code, country of origin, and simulated date of import. The results are displayed in a list indicating the countries of origin affected by the measure, the type of measure, tariff rate, source (regulation or decision) and a footnote providing further explanation where necessary.

B. Completeness

The "Import Tariffs" sections gives all information available in the Taric database. It provides a link to the Official Journal for the regulation or decision in which the applicable measure is stipulated, and includes footnotes indicating the conditions under which the measure applies.

Where applicable, the indication of the type of measure includes a direct link to other sources of information. For example, for preferential quotas there is a direct link to DG Taxud; for supplementary unit imports, there is a list of units and labels.

At the bottom of the page, there is a link marked "More Information" to the statistics section of the Export Helpdesk and to a list of trade agreements by country, as well as FAQ on their applicability, both of which are located on the DG Taxud web-site.

Information on import duties is summarized in a concise overview and supported by further links.

C. User-friendliness

All in all, the section is well conceived. It offers a clear overview and consistently links to the relevant resources. However, the user-friendliness of the results, however, suffers due to the use of technical terms from the area of customs law and unclear abbreviations. The service would gain considerably in terms of user-friendliness if explanations of technical terms were offered.

However, these links should be checked from time to time; some links at the moment produce error messages (e.g. links to information on preferential quotas on DG Taxud).
The section includes information on those preferential trade agreements (PTAs) which are discussed in detail in the "Customs Documents" section. For all queries that fall under a PTA, therefore, the references at the bottom of the page should guide users to the "Customs Documents" section for further details.

Finally, a short note underneath the section heading reads that "[this] section provides information to take full advantage of the EU's preferential trade regimes." This implies that users are in principle familiar with the Community's non-preferential trade regimes. However, the only information on import trade regimes is included in the "Overview of Import Procedures" subsection of the "Requirements and Taxes" section, in the form of a short introduction. This introduction should be repositioned in the "Import Tariffs" section, or a link provided to it. To help users understand the tariff rates indicated, it should be complemented by an outline of the GATT valuation code and the concepts of *ad valorem* duties and specific duty rates, which are important in the context of sector-specific trade policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

D. Up-to-dateness

This section is directly linked to the database of DG Taxation and Customs Union, Taric. This aspect of the service is therefore down to DG Taxud. The Taric database on the DG Taxud web-site offers the same search function and is updated daily.

E. Conclusions

Overall, the "Import Tariffs" section provides an excellent service. It is user-friendly for those users familiar with customs terminology and procedures. For those new to the export business, further guidance would be useful on how to understand and use the information that is retrieved.

Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

- Add explanations to the terms and abbreviations used on the page (e.g. "supplementary unit import", "airworthiness tariff suspension"). This can be done in the form of pop-ups linked to the term in question, as is currently done for the footnotes, or by linking them to a comprehensive trade glossary (we recommend creating such a glossary, see chapter 4);
3.3 Customs Documents

A. Overview

The "Customs Documents" section explains aspiring exporters what documentation they require in order to benefit from preferential duty treatment under one of the Community’s preferential or free trade agreements with developing countries. These include:

- The Generalised System of Preferences (including provisions under the Everything but Arms Initiative);
- The Cotonou Agreement benefiting ACP (African, Caribbean, Pacific) states;
- The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, under which FTAs have been negotiated with Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza Strip, Algeria and Tunisia;
- Individual FTAs with Chile, Mexico, and South Africa.

In a short introduction on each arrangement, the Export Helpdesk provides links to further sources of reference (FAQ, User Guides etc.) in other Directorate Generals. Proofs of origin under the various trade arrangements are presented in brief, including links to sections giving more detail on the relevant annexes and forms for the agreements.

For further trade agreements, i.e. those pertaining to countries that are not developing countries, the user is referred to a list maintained by DG Taxation and Customs Union.

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**Example:**

An investigation of duties for strawberries from Benin produces the following result:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Add. Code</th>
<th>Measure Type</th>
<th>Tariff</th>
<th>Footnote</th>
<th>Regulation/Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erga omnes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Third country duty</td>
<td>12.8% MBN/2.4 EUR/100 kg</td>
<td>R8615499</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erga omnes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unit price</td>
<td>249.16 EUR/100 kg</td>
<td>R8602150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSP (A.01/2001) - Annex I Column H Excl (MM)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tariff preference</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>R8509902</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

No direct explanation (i.e. only in the User Guide) is offered for the Latin term *erga omnes*, the abbreviation for the source in which the origin is set down ("Annex I Column H Excl (MM)"), the measure types, or the third country duty.
B. Completeness

The question of completeness is strongly related to user-friendliness here. The links currently presented do eventually lead the user to all the necessary information; however, it would aid orientation if this section itself provided further information on all the arrangements. This should include:

- The text of the agreement (at the moment the section provides a link to some agreements, but not all\(^{11}\));
- A list of beneficiary countries (available for Cotonou, but not for the GSP/EBA);
- A list (or summary) of eligible products or product categories;
- Links to further guidance on how to proceed, if available (this is currently offered for Cotonou and GSP, but not for the FTAs).

Current preferential trade arrangements are well-covered. However, given the time-spans and long-term strategic planning involved in opening up an export market, exporters in fact need to know more than just what the current situation is. The Export Helpdesk should therefore provide a summary of current and potential future developments in bi- and multilateral trade arrangements, or links to where this information can be found.

**Example:**

The Cotonou Agreement foresees the establishment of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and regional economic communities of ACP countries by 2007. Although talks on these agreements have been delayed, the derogation granted by the WTO will end in January 2008. The gradual establishment of free-trade zones in this context will considerably change the position of ACP developing countries vis à vis European trade partners.

As the section itself states, in the note underneath its heading, it “provide[s] information concerning the documents to be produced in order to qualify for preferential duty treatment”. The title "Customs Documents", however, suggests more generally that all documents required for customs clearance will be discussed, irrespective of preferential duty treatment. In fact, this kind of information is provided not in the "Customs Documents" section but in the “General Requirements for All Products” and “Overview of Import Procedures” subsections of “Requirements and Taxes”. The information structure should be reconsidered here. It would be helpful to put all the general information on external trade and customs matters in a separate section that could be reached via links from other sections (see chapter 3.1 and 4). At the very least, the "Customs Documents" section should provide links to the above-mentioned subsections of the "Requirements and Taxes" section.

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\(^{11}\) Agreements currently linked to are the Euro-Mediterranean FTAs and the FTA with Chile.
C. User-friendliness

In general, user-friendliness is good. The page has a clear layout, the structure is easy to follow and the language, although technical, is understandable. The user is not likely to encounter difficulties in retrieving information. As indicated above, further detail would further facilitate queries and save time.

Here, more than in the other sections, the small font size of the main pages is problematic (see chapter 3.15). This is because the "Customs Documents" section contains considerably more text than other sections, and although spacing is good, this tends to become fatiguing for the eyes.

Finally, it would be better to spell out abbreviations such as "SPS" or explain them in a trade glossary or suchlike.

D. Up-to-dateness

The contents of the section reflect the provisions currently applicable for the preferential trade agreements discussed.

E. Conclusion

The "Customs Documents" section is easy to use and complete in terms of the scope it sets itself. However, a number of improvements are possible: the section should include information on pending changes to current preferential trade arrangements; the title suggests that more comprehensive information is included on customs-related documentation in general; and user-friendliness could be enhanced by offering the same core information on each arrangement within the section, not only via links.

Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

- Include a standard set of information on each arrangement (as outlined above);
- Provide a survey of forthcoming changes to preferential trade arrangements, or provide a link to such a survey;
- Give (or provide a link to) full information on the documents needed for customs clearance, drawing on the introduction currently included in the "Requirements and Taxes" section.

3.4 Rules of Origin

A. Overview

Like the "Customs Documents" section, the "Rules of Origin" section deals with preferential trade agreements (PTAs). For each trade arrangement, the specific conditions are given under which a given good will acquire the originating status of the eligible country, and thereby qualify for preferential duty treatment.
To this end, users must select a preferential trade arrangement and specify a product code consisting of 2 to 8 digits. The results are displayed in a table and comprise the list rules as stipulated in the trade arrangement. In the case of the GSP, for example, the table contains an excerpt from Annexe 15 to the Regulation.

The rules of origin specify the working or processing that has to be carried out on non-originating materials for products that are not wholly obtained in the country of origin. Beyond the table, further provisions are indicated on how to apply the rules. Irrespective of the length of the specified product code, the list rules for an entire chapter of the Harmonized System are displayed, i.e. the rules of origin are given by 2-digit HS code.

The "Rules of Origin" section thus complements the general introduction to preferential trade arrangements given in the "Customs Documents" section, allowing users to search the product-specific conditions for each agreement by product code.

B. Completeness

The "Rules of Origin" section brings together the list rules located in various protocols and annexes for all preferential trade arrangements that are of interest to developing countries. This saves potential exporters considerable time.

The information provided in this section is by and large complete. Additional links would be useful, for example a link to the source of the list rules (the full Annexe or protocol cited). This would enhance transparency and credibility. Since this section is closely related to the "Customs Documents" in terms of its subject matter, a link to the latter should be added at the bottom of the page.

More importantly, perhaps, the "Rules of Origin" section should refer to the revision of the Harmonized System, applicable as of January 2007, and the need for users to verify which of the rules apply. This is important, as the product codes indicated in the trade agreements have not been adapted. Since the Export Helpdesk quotes the rules of origin for an entire product chapter, users may be presented with several rules to choose from. If the HS position of the investigated good has changed, they could include the product under an incorrect rule of origin (see Preliminary Note: The Product Code Selection). This should be indicated on the results page and a link added if further information is required.

Rules of origin not only help exporters to benefit from preferential duty treatment. Non-preferential rules of origin are also used for various kinds of commercial policy measures, for example anti-dumping duties and countervailing duties, tariff quotas and import restrictions. In this respect, the "Rules of Origin" section could be improved by highlighting the relevance of non-preferential rules of origin and supplying further links. Alternatively, the non-preferential rules of origin could be included in the database.

C. User-friendliness

The "Rules of Origin" section is one of the four sections requiring a product code to be used effectively. Unlike the other three, however, this section does not have a link to the “Nomenclature” tool for finding the right product code. Consequently, the user has to look up the code in one of the other sections and then copy or type it into this page – a rather laborious process.
The layout of the results page is based on the lists of originating rules as stipulated in the trade agreements. Depending on the specified good, the list of rules can be very long\textsuperscript{12}. As a result, it would be helpful to move the notes on “How to read the rules of origin” from the bottom to the top of the page.

Users need to be familiar with the concept of origin as the “economic nationality” of goods before they can use this section effectively. It would therefore be helpful to provide an introductory explanation here (such as that given for the product classification system or the Customs Union).

As in other sections, it would be helpful to include a model query. This would show users how they can carry out a search, and apply the rules obtained to a specified product.

D. Up-to-dateness

The contents of this section reflect the provisions currently applicable for the preferential trade agreements covered in this section.

E. Conclusion

As the only database bringing together all the preferential rules of origin benefiting developing countries, the Export Helpdesk offers a uniquely valuable service in its "Rules of Origin" section. However, the important information on non-preferential rules of origin should also be given in some form or another. In its current form, the section also requires prior understanding of the concept of "origin".

Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

- The section should refer explicitly to the recent revision of the Harmonized System and provide links to sites giving further details;

\textsuperscript{12} See, for example, the results for HS chapter 84.
• An introduction to the concept of the “originating status” of products should be included, with links to sites providing further details;

• The section should give an outline of non-preferential rules of origin, with links to sites giving further details; alternatively, these rules should be included in the database.

3.5 Trade Statistics

A. Overview

The "Trade Statistics" section draws on data from the Comext database of Eurostat. For any product or product group with a 2- to 8-digit product code, users can call up trade flows in merchandise by year, reporting country, and partner country. They can select either a single or multiple indicators (import/export value, quantity, supplementary quantity), and one or more years between 2000 and 2006. Reporting countries include individual countries of the EU or the total of EU-25 or EU-27; for both reporting and partner country only one entry can be selected at a time.

Results are displayed in a table on the page. They can be exported into text (.txt) or Excel (.xls) format. The trade statistics given by the Export Helpdesk are considerably easier to retrieve than those offered by the Comext database, although the query structure is slightly less flexible. For example, the statistics in the Helpdesk follow a default layout, while in Comext where the layout of the table is customised by the user.

According to the survey, the "Trade Statistics" section is one of the three most important sections for users13.

B. Completeness

Current data and search options allow users to carry out fairly detailed searches of EU foreign trade in the past six years. Most comparable online sources of statistics are either payment-based or more complex to use. Users who need more detailed information are referred to Comext at the bottom of the page.

The survey, interviews and comparisons with other sources of trade statistics point to a number of functionalities and additional data that would be helpful to include on the site. For example, users said they would like to have data for a time-span of ten years or so, allowing trend analyses. They would also like to see the data presented in the form of graphs, as in the ITC’s Product Map.

Users also wanted to see statistics on the services sector. This would be logical in the case that the Export Helpdesk covers trade in services as such. They also pointed out that although the data is good, raw data alone is often difficult to interpret for exporters – market analyses are needed. Users also suggested that statistics on trade between DC countries

13 Chosen by 45.8% of respondents as one of their top three sections in terms of usefulness (see User profile, chapter 3.13).
should be included; however, this would require another source of international statistics, such as UN Comtrade\(^\text{14}\).

C. User-friendliness

Once the product code has been identified, information retrieval in the "Trade Statistics" section is simple. However, not all users were aware of the fact that more than one indicator or year could be viewed at a time, by pressing the ctrl-key while selecting. The download option for exporting data into an Excel file is also easily overlooked in the current layout – as we may conclude from the fact that some users stated that they would like this functionality to be added.

Several users wanted to be able to view data in either a more disaggregated or more aggregated form, or see the data for several different products at the same time. Whether or not details on one 8-digit product code can be displayed depends on the availability of the statistical figures; however, it is already possible to view more aggregated data (e.g. for an entire product group or HS chapter). The comment by users appears to indicate that the instructions on inputting product codes are unclear. This could be solved by integrating the relevant chapter from the User Guide into the page, or by giving a sample query.

Compiling a selection of different product codes would require more far-reaching changes. In the HS classification system, different products from the same raw material can fall under entirely different chapters. For a wood processing enterprise, for example, users may want to know whether furniture or construction timber is following an upward trend. To enable this type of query, the input form would have to allow for several product codes, as in the Comext database.

D. Up-to-dateness

Up-to-dateness is an important quality for trade statistics. Here there is room for improvement. Data for the year 2006 was uploaded in May 2007 – at the same time as the latest enlargement to a EU-27 in the input form. This was the major point of criticism raised by users and experts in our investigation. By contrast, the Comext database (which is the source of the information in this section) incorporates data up to three months ago.

E. Conclusion

The "Trade Statistics" section is one of the most frequently consulted services in the Helpdesk. The majority of users and experts rate the quality of the information as either "good" or "excellent". A number of experts state that the trade statistics are superior to comparable online services, and rate the quantity of information as a particular strength.

Compared to statistical databases such as Comext or UN Comtrade, the trade statistics in the Export Helpdesk strike a good balance by placing a considerable amount of data at the

\(^{14}\) This addition would be useful for supporting south-south trade, which is part of the idea of a cooperation between the Export Helpdesk and the Market Access Database.
disposal of the user while maintaining ease of use. However, many users feel strongly that the data should be more up-to-date, and a number of additional functionalities and extra contents were suggested.

Our recommendations are as follows:

- The statistics should be kept more up-to-date. This would probably entail aggregating data on a half-yearly or quarterly basis (instead of, or in addition to, the current yearly aggregation). This would also allow for a more detailed analysis of market trends;

- The need for market analyses was frequently voiced. The site should therefore provide links to other service providers such as CBI or DIPP, where a range of surveys and studies are already available for free;

- Users are asking for statistics on trade in services. This supports the recommendation to cover services trade in general. If the scope of the Helpdesk is extended to cover trade in services, this should include trade statistics;

- Some users requested functionalities that are in fact already available. The “Trade Statistics” section should there include instructions or a model query.

### 3.6 Marketplace

**A. Overview**

The "Marketplace" section is a business-to-business (B2B) platform where exporters from developing countries and importers from the EU can lodge offers and requests for goods. While in principle the Export Helpdesk is concerned with import requirements and conditions, here it takes into account that exporters need to find market contacts.

Entries can be viewed without prior registration. However, registration is required in order to advertise an offer or demand for goods. Helpdesk staff checks the advertisements submitted for reliability and then upload them onto the web-site if appropriate. Offers and demands for goods are listed with information on the country, title, and date of publication.

**B. Completeness**

Completeness here is a matter of the choice of functionalities and the comprehensiveness of information on offers and demands for goods. Entries consist of a brief description of the goods, the full heading of the product category, and the company’s contact details.

In comparison with other online marketplaces, the information given in the entries is rather limited. Entries in large B2B platforms usually also give details such as technical specifications, payment terms, supply ability, and minimum order size. Usually, they also include pictures (see chapter 3.13). This allows interested parties to decide quickly whether

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15 Interestingly, a number of requests come from developing countries themselves, so the section may actually be used not only for export to the EU but also for intra-regional trade.
the conditions match their needs, saving them considerable time. Bank references also sometimes form part of the profile, which enhances credibility.

About half of the users and a number of experts stated that the entries should be much more detailed, and their structure altered accordingly. Some commented that the information provided seemed almost random. They commented that the entries should include details such as product specifications, information on the origin of products, pictures of the products, company details (e.g. the date of establishment and number of employees), terms of delivery, and price and payment conditions.

Some users indicated they had not found their sector of interest in the section. This pertained partly to sectors in services trade (e.g. business process optimisation) and partly to sectors more difficult to find in the classification (e.g. the naval industry, medical devices). One expert suggested introducing further subdivisions into the categories. This is a potential solution.

The Marketplace is well-conceived in terms of its functionalities. It can do most of what commercial marketplaces can do and the service it offers is straightforward to use. Entries are classified according to the 21 HS sections and can be searched by keyword, section, type (offer/demand), country, or any combination of these. Entries open in pop-up windows that feature “close window” and “print” options.

C. User-friendlyness

The marketplace is easy to use and well structured. Instructions on how to navigate the section are provided where necessary, and the section has its own User Guide which is concise and easy to access. Search results are presented in the form of a list that can be sorted by title, country, or date by clicking on the appropriate column headings.

The “close window” and “print” options in the pop-up windows facilitate usage. Here, the Marketplace is actually a step ahead of the other sections. Indeed, the Marketplace is exemplary with regard to user-friendliness, particularly in its clear layout.

Experts and the majority of users had not experienced any difficulties in accessing or understanding the information contained in this section.

D. Up-to-dateness

Recently, information on the date of publication of the entries has been added to the section. Entries can be ranked by date, so users can decide themselves how far back they want to look. After six months advertisements are taken off the site by Helpdesk staff unless the request is renewed; the oldest advertisements currently on the site are from the beginning of 2007.

E. Reliability

Online marketing offers a number of advantages, such as lower supply prices, optimised supply chains and administrative processes, and access to wider markets. These advantages, however, have to be seen alongside the difficulty of ensuring reliability. With no
personal contact or intermediary between trade partners, the risk of financial loss is higher than in traditional trade, unless the information obtained via the Internet can be verified. Verifying offers and demands for goods forms part of the essential added value of online marketplaces; often such verification is offered as an additional service that the advertisers or users have to pay for.

At present, the Marketplace does not verify entries. Introducing this service would exceed available resources. The site's disclaimer is sufficient safeguard against liability for misrepresentations. However, the lack of verification still represents a considerable risk to the credibility of the Export Helpdesk, and ultimately DG Trade.

The issue of verification and quality control was raised by almost all experts familiar with the service. The majority held that this was a crucial feature of any serious online marketplace, and that not providing it significantly reduces the credibility and usefulness of the service.

Some respondents suggested that the accuracy of the information should be confirmed by working with foreign embassies or by only allowing accredited intermediaries to submit offers and demands for goods. However, this would reduce the number of entries, as well as requiring additional resources in terms of both time and money.

F. Usage

Market contacts are a key success factor in the export business. Respondents stated that finding trade partners was a major challenge. Consequently, the Marketplace ranks among the three sections that are most important to users, and is one of the sections with the highest website traffic.

Despite this, only a small percentage of respondents said they actually used the service from time to time, and even fewer said they did so on a regular basis. Users said less often that the service actually helped their business than they did for any of the core services\(^\text{16}\). Likewise, the overall rating of the Marketplace's contents was much less favourable than for the core services (see chapter 3.11). Several users stated that the information contained in entries was incorrect, although they did not give any further details.

In a number of cases, a concrete commercial transaction has actually taken place, although respondents rarely gave details of these. This does not appear to be due to the large number of entries, as many users and experts stated that this was insufficient and that further promotion was needed.

Several experts questioned whether this kind of service should be offered at all by the Helpdesk. Some held that it was a “nice idea”, while others stated that it did not fall within the original remit of the Helpdesk. More broadly, some questioned the usefulness of general platforms as compared to sector-specific ones. The majority of experts believed the Marketplace needed considerable improvement; it was considered worse than the other sections and commercial marketplaces in terms of quality.

\(^{16}\) All services except for Links, Events, and the User Guide.
G. Conclusion

The picture arising from the investigation is highly ambivalent. The Marketplace is one of the most frequently consulted services, yet its impact remains limited. This is due at least in part to the small number of entries, particularly requests. Experts also repeatedly pointed out the importance of verifying entries – an issue that should definitely be reconsidered given the potential risk to the reputation of the site, and ultimately DG Trade.

All in all, the service needs substantial improvement. It would take considerable effort to raise it to the standard of the other sections. Given that the provision of market contacts is not one of the core competences of the Helpdesk, we recommend withdrawing this service or finding another way of offering users help in forming commercial contacts.

If it is decided to continue with the Marketplace, we recommend making the following improvements:

- The input form should be expanded to include more mandatory detail; advertisements failing to give this information should not be published on the web-site;
- To reduce risk to the reputation of the site, and ultimately DG Trade, a verification procedure should be established. Prior to this different options should be examined, given the available resources. For example, some marketplaces cooperate with local or regional trade institutions who undertake verification on behalf of the online service. These would charge either the advertiser or the online service provider;
- As the current number of entries is insufficient to bind users over the long term and to achieve scale effects, the service requires further promotion. This should concentrate on the Internet as potentially the most cost-efficient and effective medium. Rather than advertisements, the promotion should take the form of links from reputable trade-related web-sites directly to the Marketplace.

3.7 Links

A. Overview

The “Links” section of the Export Helpdesk provides links to other sites that are in some way related to international trade and market access. It contains six categories of links:

1. Links to customs web-sites

   Subcategories: EU institutions, candidate countries for EU accession, international organisations

2. Links to trade and other professional associations

   Subcategories: EU-27 Member States, EU level, international level

17 Possible solutions would be a directory of sector associations, trade associations and chambers of commerce, or links to other online marketplaces; see chapter 4.
3. **Links to organisations involved in trade and development policy**
   Subcategories: EU Member States, EC, others

4. **Statistics resources**

5. **Links to private sector and economic cooperation and development programmes**

6. **Links to private food quality standards**

Each category contains a list of links arranged into subcategories (where such exist) and sorted alphabetically. In the case of the EU Member States, the name of the country is the first word used. The number of links in each category ranges from 5 to 76; the number in each subcategory from 1 to 51. Apart from the latest category "Links to Private Food Quality Standards", which includes a brief introductory note to the use of the links in this section, no descriptions are given.

**B. Completeness**

The "Links" section has recently been updated. The new category on private food quality standards provides considerable added value. However, the "Links" section could be made still more complete.

In the user survey, only a small sample answered the question on whether they thought any specific links or categories of links were lacking. In this small sample, 3 out of 10 felt that certain links and categories of links were lacking. This is a significant minority.

The majority of experts that gave feedback on the links section were critical of its coverage. Many complained about the lack of links to chambers of commerce; these are included for some countries but not for major importers such as Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Some experts mentioned that there were no links to related portals or to their own organisations. A few experts said that the section was complete, and one remarked that a limited number of good links was better than a lot of seemingly arbitrary links.

The Benchmark study (see chapter 3.13) identifies an example of best practice regarding the number of links. This is the Danish Import Promotion Portal DIPP, which has a short list of general trade portal, national information sites on import/export, and web-sites pertaining to export promotion in developing countries. The list is clearly structured and contains a short description of each link. The Canadian import promotion portal TFOC can also serve as a best practice example. It lists 89 links with descriptions of organisations in Canada and a multitude of links to developing countries worldwide with comments on each one, which can be searched by country.
C. User-friendliness

The "Links" section scores relatively well for user-friendliness in the user survey. Only a small percentage of users found the section either difficult to access or hard to understand; indeed, this section scores better than most other sections on these points. However, a few of the experts interviewed criticised the user-friendliness of the section, suggesting that descriptions of the links should be added.

The impression that the links are arbitrary or meaningful depends in part on how they are grouped and whether there are comments on them. The structure of the "Links" section could be easily improved by the following measures:

- Provide a separate subcategory for national chambers of commerce and make this list more complete;
- Provide a separate sub-category for bilateral and multilateral chambers of commerce and make this list more complete;
- Move the list of national customs organisations from the sub-category "Organisations Involved in Trade and Development Policy" to the sub-category "Customs Web-sites";
- Move national import promotion portals (e.g. the Dutch CBI and the Swedish Open Trade Gate) from "Trade and Other Professional Associations" to "Organisations Involved in Trade and Development Policy", and make this list more complete.

Adding descriptions would improve user-friendliness. However, how this is done requires careful consideration. Simply adding descriptions to individual links will improve their intelligibility, but may also make the pages longer and more difficult to understand and navigate. Alternatively, an introduction could be added to each category, plus a brief description of each sub-category. If these introductions are clearly structured, user-friendliness would improve.

It is important to strike a balance between providing meaningful, understandable links and not overloading the page. Having too many sections and sub-sections may make the page just as difficult to navigate as adding individual comments to each of the links.

D. Up-to-dateness

The "Links" section does not have particularly bad ratings compared to other sections. The percentage of users who think that it is "not" or "mostly not" up-to-date is low. However, the percentage of users who think that it is entirely up-to-date is the lowest for any section. This perception may be due to a lack of communication about updates, broken links or links that users expect to find but which are not included. The problem of communication could be remedied simply by including a brief note on when each category or sub-category was last updated. This could be placed on the page for that category or sub-category, after the title (in the form “Updated: dd-mm-yy”).
E. Reliability

User feedback with regard to reliability is similar to that for up-to-dateness, although the section does slightly worse on reliability. Reliability essentially means whether the links work or not, so it would seem that users have experienced some broken links, but not many. Actual and perceived reliability could be improved by adding more interaction on the "Links" page in the form of a "Report broken link" function.

F. Usefulness

The "Links" section did quite well on the question of whether it helps users in their business. However, its score was considerably worse than for the main informative sections of the site. This section was also assessed by fewer people, reflecting lower usage.

The "Links" section could be improved in terms of its usefulness by adding a context-giving introduction to each category and providing information on the function of the links. This would be particularly useful for links to sources of information not provided by the Helpdesk, as is already done in the case of the "Links to Private Food Quality Standards" category. For example, many users asked for lists of importing companies in the EU, which the Export Helpdesk cannot provide for legal reasons. However, the "Links" section could provide contact details of associations and chambers of commerce; indeed, such links are already provided in the FAQ section.

The usefulness of the section could also be improved by including more private product standards (technical standards, eco-label standards, non-food agricultural standards) and by interlinking it better with the rest of the site. The "Requirements and Taxes" section, for instance, should refer to the private quality standards in its results.

G. Conclusion

Overall, users gave the "Links" section the lowest number of "excellent" ratings and the highest number of "good" ratings. It would seem that users believe that the section serves a purpose, and serves it well enough, but does not really go beyond their basic expectations. Moreover, the section does not get a lot of traffic, although the majority of users taking the survey found the site themselves through an Internet search.

To push user ratings up from "good enough" to "excellent", the section needs more descriptions, greater clarity, additional interaction, improved coverage and better interlinking with the rest of the site.
3.8 User Guide/FAQ

A. Overview

The User Guide is a PDF document of about 40 pages which gives the reader detailed instructions on how to use each section of the Export Helpdesk.

B. Completeness

The User Guide covers all sections. In some cases it includes links to pages on the site, giving more detailed information and brief explanations of the contents of particular sections (e.g. "Customs Documents", "Rules of Origin" and "Trade Statistics"). The User Guide offers users comprehensive help in using the Helpdesk, particularly the database tools.

C. User-friendliness

The results of the survey carried out for the purpose of this study show that the vast majority of respondents have no difficulties accessing and understanding the User Guide. The contents of the User Guide are well-structured and user-friendly.

Throughout the User Guide, screenshots illustrate the explanations. Although this is very helpful, the pictures result in a file size of approximately one Megabyte. This has two disadvantages: first, it causes older computers to run slowly, and second, it increases the download time. Many regions – e.g. parts of Africa – typically have low connection speeds as they use a dial-up modem. For users in these areas it is hard to download the User Guide. In addition, the PDF reader needed to open the document is not standard internet software worldwide.

One solution would be to put the document on a separate page and provide a link to a free download of the PDF reader needed on that page. The size of the document should also be indicated next to the link to a PDF document. To help users with slow connection speeds, some experts suggested that the individual chapters of the User Guide should be integrated into the relevant sections of the Helpdesk. As well as avoiding long download times, this would also put the advice where it was needed, i.e. in the sections themselves. Experience shows that people do not like to read long texts when surfing the Internet; breaking the User Guide down into shorter instructions would therefore actually encourage users to read it.

D. Usage

The User Guide is one of the least-used services of the Helpdesk. Obviously, regular users do not need to refer to it once they are familiar with the web-site. However, a large proportion of the questions submitted through the Contact form are actually answered in the User Guide, which suggests that users do not look in the Guide for help first.

Despite the low usage of the User Guide, more users feel they need further assistance in using the web-site than not. As discussed above, some experts suggested integrating the
contents of the User Guide into the relevant sections. Some also suggested that support be
given in the form of model queries in each section. These would effectively illustrate not only
how to carry out the search, but also how to understand and use the information obtained.

One expert mentioned that quite often people do not know exactly what they need, and that
another online service was therefore looking into the possibility of providing interactive
assistance.

E. Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the majority of experts believed that the User Guide was very helpful and offered
sufficient guidance to the site. Some held that the contents should be incorporated into the
individual sections. This would also be desirable from the point of view of the size of the PDF
file.

Users do not make much use of the User Guide at the moment. However, there is a need for
assistance both on how to use the site (i.e. information retrieval) and how to interpret the
results (i.e. use of the information). This is a further argument in favour of integrating the
contents of the User Guide into the relevant sections.

F. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The "Frequently Asked Questions" section (FAQ) takes the form of a PDF document, like the
User Guide. Its size is not a problem, but if it is provided as a PDF document it should be
provided on a separate page and a link to a free download of the necessary PDF reader
should be added. It should be considered to provide the FAQ as a normal html page, as the
"Marketplace"-specific FAQ already is.

The FAQ was launched after our evaluation had already begun. For this reason it was not
considered in the survey or expert interviews. However, in one interview – shortly before the
FAQ was launched – an expert suggested that it would be good to respond to recurring
questions in the manner of a FAQ. This confirms that the FAQ answers users' needs.

The answers in the FAQ are easy to understand. In many cases they include links both to the
Helpdesk and to other sources. The choice of questions reflects issues of major concern to
users. In this way, the FAQ actually contains some pieces of information that are not found
elsewhere in the Export Helpdesk, e.g. where to find importers’ contact details or Binding
Tariff Information. This would argue in favour of setting up links from the different sections –
which is where most of the questions arise – to the FAQ. Otherwise the FAQ may be
overlooked.

3.9 Events

A. Overview

The "Events" section was added to the Export Helpdesk in December 2006. It contains a list
of trade-related events, such as fairs, shows and exhibitions. The events are listed and
ranked by date. It also gives the title of the event, the city, country and region, the sector or sectors it relates to in the Harmonized System, the sub-sector or sub-sectors, contact details including an address and telephone number, and a link to the event's web-site. The "Events" section is run by an external service provider.

B. Completeness

The "Events" section is usually updated quarterly for the following quarter. This means that it sometimes only covers a short period of time – one month – before the next update. For example, at the time of writing the section lists events for July 2007, which is less than one month ahead. By contrast, at the time that the user survey was carried out, the section covered several months ahead. This should be taken into account when evaluating the results of the survey.

The event calendars of the sites showing "best practice" in the Benchmark Study have a broader coverage and a much longer time horizon. For example, the "J-Messe" section of the Japanese JETRO site lists trade fairs worldwide and is searchable up to 2010 for most regions; for regular trade fairs, it also gives information on the number of exhibitors attending the last trade fair and the size of the exhibition in terms of space. This information should be included in the "Events" section of the Export Helpdesk.

The web-site of the German trade-fair industry, AUMA, also offers a highly comprehensive events calendar. It has a similar time horizon as the "J-Messe" section of the JETRO site and even greater coverage in some areas. It also provides information on the venue and the project team and, for regular events, the time between trade fairs and statistics relating to the previous event (e.g. space in square meters, number of exhibitors, and number of visitors).

The user survey did not contain a specific question on the completeness of the "Events" section. Nevertheless, one user stated that additional information on B2B events would be desirable. Users were asked whether they could find answers to their questions in this section: the response was largely positive from those able to assess it. Not all experts interviewed were familiar with the section, but among those who gave feedback, most felt that it should have a longer time horizon, covering at least the current year. One expert remarked that most serious events are planned at least nine months in advance, and trade fairs at least twelve months ahead.

Even within its time-span of one month, the calendar is not comprehensive. For the month of July, the section lists 17 events. One of these is repeated. For the same interval, the AUMA site lists 103 fairs worldwide, and J-Messe gives 106. Since the number of events listed in the section is rather limited, the list of countries has only eleven entries, none of them in the EU.

18 Ausstellungs- und Messeausschuss der deutschen Wirtschaft e.V. (http://www.auma.de)
C. User-friendliness

The structure of the "Events" section is quite clear and easy to understand. In the user survey, it scores fairly well for user-friendliness, although no higher than most other sections. Three-quarters of all users felt that the section was easy to access and understand.

The experts interviewed for this study made a few suggestions for improving the user-friendliness of this section. One of these suggestions – from several experts – was to make it possible to search the events calendar by region. The section already lists the regions in which events take place, so making the calendar searchable by region should be simple. Some experts also suggested adding a product-specific search. At present, events are searchable by general sector, using the terminology of the Harmonized System. Exporters may not always know what specific sector their product belongs to. Here further assistance might be helpful.

Additional description of the section would also be of assistance to users. At the moment, the section does not state what its coverage is, or what the purpose of events is.

Both AUMA and J-Messe provide a more precise search function for events than the Export Helpdesk, permitting searches by both keyword and industry sector, as well as – in the case of J-Messe – by industry sub-sector. Offering a search by keyword option, in addition to the search by goods sector option, would substantially improve the "Events" tool. AUMA and J-Messe also both provide the option of searching by geographical region and city; this should also be provided by the Export Helpdesk.

D. Up-to-dateness

The "Events" section is not rated very highly in terms of its up-to-dateness, compared to the other sections of the Export Helpdesk. Indeed, it gets one of the lowest ratings, with more users feeling that it is "mostly up-to-date" rather than that it is "entirely up-to-date". This is very likely due to its short time horizon.

Moreover, the page does not indicate when it was last updated. Much would be gained by communicating to users when a month or sector is updated, and when additional months have been added. Another aspect that may damage the perceived up-to-dateness of the section is the number of events for which just the month is given, rather than the exact date. In July 2007, for example, the month available at the time of writing, for almost half the events listed only the month is given; it should be possible to ascertain the precise dates for events that will take place soon or have already taken place.

E. Reliability

The user rating for reliability is neither very high nor very low compared to other sections. Likewise, the experts who gave feedback on this section did not give particularly negative feedback. Nonetheless, there are a number of errors in the listing for July 2007. For instance,
the country given for a trade event in Dar-el-Salaam is Madagascar, while the same event is listed again further down the list as taking place in Addis Ababa, Tanzania.

One expert noted that higher verifiability would be desirable, in terms of where the information comes from and what criteria are considered when selecting events. This could be done by providing a short description of the section. Another aspect that would increase perceived reliability would be greater precision in the dates of events, as noted above.

**F. Usefulness**

The majority of users answering the question of whether the section had helped them with their undertaking gave a positive reply (stating that it had done so, or had mostly done so). This shows that users generally appreciate information about events and the concrete information given by the section. The survey also found that users often use events as a source of information about market access. Compared to the main databases of the Export Helpdesk, however, the Events section received a much lower rating for this question. In other words, users think that there is room for improvement. This is backed up by users’ overall rating for the service.

**G. Conclusion**

As it has only recently been launched, the Events section was not included in the analysis of website traffic. However, the available figures show that usage has been rather low: from December 2006 to April 2007, the "Events" section received roughly half a percent of the overall traffic, which is similar to the traffic for the "Contact" section or the User Guide.

The low level of traffic for the Events section is in sharp contrast with the importance users attribute to trade events. More than 40% indicated in the user survey that they used trade fairs and exhibitions as another source of information for market access. This figure is more than double the amount of those who actually used the "Events" section. This means that users get their information on events through other means than the internet, or that they use other online services to obtain information on events.

The low level of usage for this section could be due to many reasons. For instance, it is displayed less prominently on the page than many other sections. Although the link blinks, this may in fact be counterproductive (see chapter 3.15). It is also possible that users do not consider the section very useful, but their overall rating of its performance is by and large positive.

Overall, the "Events" section received the smallest amount of answers in the user survey, as the number of users who indicated that they had used the section was the lowest. Even among those who indicated that they had used it, one in five was generally unable to assess it on its individual strengths, which points to a low level of usage even here. This is unfortunate, as trade fairs can be a good opportunity for developing contacts between
exporters to and EU-based importers. Indeed, one expert commented that trade fairs are often useful for giving exporters in developing countries access to the market.

A comprehensive events calendar is often offered as an online service in its own right. Considerable resources are required to identify events and keep a large database such as that of J-Messe or AUMA up-to-date. If the Helpdesk's "Events" section cannot be maintained at a higher quality, it might be better to withdraw it and link to other calendars instead. An alternative would be to reduce its range to events in Europe. Another possibility would be to pool resources, making the section a cooperation between the Export Helpdesk and the Market Access Database; such a list of events would also be valuable on the Market Access Database.

In order to provide real added value for companies based in the EU and in developing countries, the "Events" section needs to be expanded and brought up to the level of best practice.

3.10   Contact – Individual Queries Service

A.  Overview

The Export Helpdesk allows its users to ask concrete questions about “real-life situations encountered by exporters" in the "Contact" section. The "Contact" section consists of a single form, which allows users to submit questions. The aim is to answer requests for information within 15 working days of receipt. The service is free of charge.

B.  Work Flow

Once a question has been posed to the Export Helpdesk team through the "Contact" section, the team has to decide whether they will answer the request personally or forward it to a network ranging over a number of Directorates General. The main DGs are Taxation and Customs Union; Environment; Development; Internal Market; Health and Consumer Protection; and External Trade itself.

Once a question has been received, the user is sent notification from the EH team that his question has been received and is being dealt with. If the question has been forwarded, the team or person providing the answer will respond directly to the user and carbon copy the EH team. In some cases, the EH team will send an accompanying reply.

C.  User-friendliness

The "Contact" section does not provide information on who will deal with questions, and the confirmation mail sent by the EH team does not specify this either. Some users and experts
have seen this as an obstacle. One expert, in particular, found the response given to be too anonymous, and a number of users and experts requested individual and direct contact to the relevant experts, in particular their e-mail addresses and telephone numbers. Whether this would be possible within the current scope of the Export Helpdesk and within the responsibilities of the broader team to which questions are forwarded remains to be seen. However, more information on the process would improve clarity for the users.

The placement as well as the size of the link to the "Contact" section is also an obstacle to its greater use. One of the experts interviewed noted that the section was displayed unfavourably, and one user in the user survey explicitly asked for the provision of a contact form, not a specific kind of contact possibility. As noted above, however, a large increase in the volume of questions would overload current capacity.

D. Timeliness of response

Two out of five users who indicated in the user survey that they had used the "Contact" section received a reply to their questions within two weeks time. Another two out of five users failed to answer the survey question. Of the remaining one out of five users, half got an answer within four weeks time whilst half had to wait for longer than four weeks. This means that the timeliness of the response varied, but that most responses were timely. This conclusion can also be drawn from the expert interviews, where two of the experts who used the service indicated that they received a reply within three working days, whilst a few others had to wait for two weeks or indicated that the waiting time was variable. Two questions sent to the contact section as part of the in-house investigation of the Export Helpdesk led to the same conclusion: one question was answered on the same day, whilst another question was answered after three weeks.

E. Adequacy of response

Only a few users answered the question as to whether the response they had received was helpful. Of these, two thirds thought that the response was helpful or mostly helpful, whereas one third thought it was not helpful or mostly not helpful. One user explicitly pointed out that the quality of the responses to the questions varied, as did one of the experts who were interviewed.

Of the two questions that were sent as part of the in-house investigation, one received an excellent same-day response, whereas another question received a mostly unhelpful response after three weeks from the competent Directorate General. In the latter case, the question concerned regulations, import duties and a question about statistics on a particular product type; the response stated that the question could not be answered without the provision of a product code and gave some assistance on how to search for the right product code.

In the other case, the question was about the code of a particular product in the Combined Nomenclature and specific regulations affecting the product; the question was answered
instantly by the provision of the code and ample references, as well as a website and a few email addresses of officials within the EU who had expertise on the particular product. This mail was accompanied by a further response from the Export Helpdesk team itself, which pointed to its "Requirements and Taxes" section.

F. Conclusion

One interviewed expert remarked that the "Contact" section is a ‘first class service’. If a question is given a helpful answer within three working days by a competent expert at the European Commission, this eliminates the need to search for the information in the Commission’s internet pages, and can save the cost of consulting a professional intermediary. This can definitely be described as first class.

Offering individual advice thus adds a considerable added value to the online service. This view is shared by users: One out of five users of the Helpdesk ranks the "Contact" section among the three sections most important to him. This figure might be higher if awareness of the service was increased. In the course of the interviews, it emerged that even a number of experts using the Helpdesk fairly regularly were not aware of this service, as the link is rather inconspicuous.

Promoting the service could therefore make the Helpdesk more attractive to its users in general.

However, maintenance of the "Contact" section already takes up a considerable proportion of the Helpdesk team’s time. Current capacities will in all likelihood prove insufficient to deal with any great increase in questions.

Moreover, it seems that the quality and timeliness of responses is somewhat variable. The service as such is valuable; however the reasons for the occurrence of inadequate responses should be looked into. The way forward for the "Contact" section thus raises the question of how to provide the capacity to meet increasing demand whilst at the same time ensuring consistent quality.

19 In both answers, a reference was given to the “Explanatory notes to the combined nomenclature of the European Communities”, published by the EU, and the “Explanatory notes to the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System”, published by the World Customs Organisation. Inclusion of these documents in the Export Helpdesk should be considered.
3.11 Users, Usages and Awareness of the Export Helpdesk

The following chapter draws on findings from the user survey and the analysis of website traffic and attempts to characterise the users of the Helpdesk and their patterns of usage.

We ask

- where users come from, and how this is related to availability of internet access and a number of macroeconomic indicators;
- what type of organisation they work for, and in which sector;
- for what purpose and how often they use the Export Helpdesk;
- which sections they use; and
- what their information needs and sources are.

The website traffic analysis should also help provide an indication of what impact promotion activities carried out so far have had on usage of the service.

A. User survey

The online questionnaire was answered by users who were actually visiting the Helpdesk at the time they responded; it thus reflects typical traffic on the website more accurately than the offline questionnaire. For some aspects of the user profile, we have therefore drawn on the online questionnaire exclusively. This will be indicated where appropriate.

In other cases, a distinction was made between first-time users and regular users, as first-time users are unlikely to be familiar with the service. For this reason, the sample size of respondents varies and is indicated for each question.

As the Export Helpdesk is a service explicitly aimed at developing countries, the analysis concentrates on users from developing countries, and those from within the EU who are their trading partners. Users from North America are therefore indicated, but are not examined further.

Users of the Export Helpdesk

Most users of the Helpdesk come from South America (32%); the EU (21%); and Asia (24%). It is used considerably less in the ACP (13%) and MENA (2%) regions. This finding is not in itself new and is in fact in line with the DG Trade’s own observations, based on the monitoring of website traffic.

The regional breakdown combines the geographical position of countries and their trade relations with the EU.
Figure 3: Regional distribution of users (online questionnaire, sample size: 685)

![Pie chart showing regional distribution of users.]

Central and South America: 37%
Europe: 24%
Asia: 24%
ACP: 10%
North America: 1%
MENA: 4%

Figure 4: Distribution of users by subregions (online, sample size: 695, one answer possible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>(total)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-EU</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and South America</td>
<td>257</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Eastern Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are many possible reasons for these striking differences, ranging from a lack of awareness of the Helpdesk through differences in population size and availability of internet access, to differing shares in world trade.

As our analysis of website traffic shows, Helpdesk use in Africa and the Middle East is indeed marginal in relation to population figures (see below). This is, however, also true for Asia. As a proportion of internet users, the number of Helpdesk visitors in Africa is actually surprisingly high, and much higher than is the case for Middle Eastern countries.

A number of experts active in trade promotion in Africa made the point that in order to benefit from the service of such a trade-facilitation portal, it is first necessary to have something to export. Indeed, while the developing countries' share of world exports increased from 29.5% in 1980 to 33.5% in 2004, Africa's share decreased from 5.9% to 2.5% over the same period. Between 1980 and 2003, the average annual export growth rate of all developing countries stood at 7.8%, the rate for Africa, however, amounted to just 2.6%.  

These figures appear to indicate that use of the Helpdesk in different regions has to be seen in the light of overall macroeconomic and infrastructure conditions.

An examination of users' professional background reveals that industry accounts for more than 40% of Helpdesk visitors (32% producers; 9% companies in distribution and importers). Intermediaries make up another 12%; governments 9%, and international institutions together with European Union bodies account for about 7%. Academic and media users amount to 5%. Intermediaries and producers, then, are the largest individual user groups.

Figure 5: Respondents by organisation type (online, sample size 690)

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21 see http://www.unctad.org/Templates/WebFlyer.asp?intItemID=3631&lang=1

22 “Others” include users in the process of establishing an enterprise (predominantly export businesses), students, and organisations working on behalf of exporters/ importers who did not classify themselves as intermediaries (e.g. chambers of commerce).
An examination of the frequency with which the various user groups consult the Helpdesk modifies the impression gained from the overall chart (see Figure 5). The percentage of first-time users is generally quite high, amounting to some 50% overall. Among producers, however, that share is much higher (67%) than for any of the other user groups. Governments and EU/ international institutions, by contrast, rank significantly lower (24% and 16%, respectively).

Figure 6: Frequency of usage by user group (online and offline, sample size 682)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Several times a week</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Once a month</th>
<th>Once to several times a year</th>
<th>Never before/ For the first time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company - Production</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company - Distribution or Import</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU or International Institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic or Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is noticeable that users from the latter group indicate more frequent use of online services as a source of information for market access to the EU than do exporters (see further below). Possibly, staff at these institutions are less prone to “googling” for certain keywords on the internet. Experts from these or similar bodies who were interviewed in the course of the investigation often indicated having been introduced to the relevant services by their colleagues. They usually have a repertoire of online services which they are familiar with and use regularly.

For government and EU organisations, usage is spread out fairly evenly over the time intervals. Among industry and intermediaries, though, there is a stark contrast between a majority of first-time users, and those who use the service intensively. Leaving first-time visitors out, frequent usage is highest for importers and other companies in the logistics chain. Most industry and intermediary visitors use the Helpdesk several times a week,
slightly less do so once a week and less still once a month. A similar pattern applies to the academic and media users.

The large number of first-time visitors is perhaps unsurprising given that many people start by researching freely on the internet when looking for information on a topic. This is in line with the fact that manufacturers in particular report they first became aware of the Export Helpdesk through internet research (see Figure 11).

The reclassification of users by the sector (or sectors) they work in is illustrated below (see Figure 7). All sectors are represented, and the number of responses varies between about 50 and 100 for each sector. Four sectors stand out from this overall pattern: These are the vegetable products (26% of users) and foodstuffs sectors (23%); textiles (21%); and services/consultancy (28%). Apart from the services industry, which includes intermediaries, these are the sectors that dominate exports from developing countries.

Next come machinery and mechanical appliances and miscellaneous manufactured articles, which amount to 11% each. “Others” include education and media, handicrafts; quite often, respondents who classified themselves as “other” indicated they are in fact active in all sectors.

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23 Classified as in the Helpdesk’s „Marketplace“ and „Events“ sections, plus options „Services/Consultancy“ and „Other“. Please note that users had the possibility of indicating several sectors, as importers or logistics enterprises for example usually operate in more than one sector. The percentage figures thus refer to the number of users involved in the sector, not to the proportion of responses as a whole.
Usages of the Export Helpdesk

Of all sections, “Import Tariffs”, “Requirements and Taxes” and “Trade statistics” are those most frequently consulted by users, followed by the “Marketplace” section. This picture is fairly consistent for visitors who use the Helpdesk often and those who consult it at greater intervals.

When asked to select the three sections that are most important to them, visitors most often indicated the “Requirements and Taxes”, “Marketplace” and “Trade Statistics” sections. These last two sections both confirm the great interest in market contacts and market information shown by responses to a number of parts of the survey (see Figure 8 and below).

Figure 8: Ranking of the three most important sections (offline, sample size 192, three answers possible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.Requirements and Taxes</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Marketplace</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Trade Statistics</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Import Tariffs</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Customs Documents</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rules of Origin</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Links</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Events</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Contact Form</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. User guide</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The various user groups consult the Helpdesk for different purposes. Further division of the ranking of sections by purpose of use reveals that “Marketplace” is the most important section for exporters and importers, whereas those who are involved in capacity-building and consultancy, rank the “Requirements and Taxes” section highest.

Certain clusters of priorities emerge; for all purposes, the “top four” are identical, followed by “Customs Documents” and “Rules of Origin”. As regards the “Contact Section”, “Links”, “Events” and “User Guide”, the ranking is absolutely identical for all purposes.

Figure 9: Ranking of sections correlated with purpose (partly equal scores for 2 sections; offline, sample size 192, three answers possible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>To facilitate export of my company’s products</th>
<th>To facilitate import of partner companies’ products</th>
<th>To conduct export-related (or other) trainings</th>
<th>To supply third parties with information services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requirements and Taxes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import Tariffs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customs Documents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of Origin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Statistics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, some 68% of respondents answered they were using the Helpdesk to facilitate export of their company’s goods. The next largest group comprised those who said their research was aimed at providing information services (37%), followed by users involved with capacity-building (19%) and importers (16%).

### Information needs and sources

Entering into export business entails numerous challenges, from identifying market potential to finding trade partners and complying with the target market’s product and import requirements. For some of these factors, it is more difficult to find information than for others. Finding out which kinds of information these are should provide a rough indicator of how valuable the information services of the Helpdesk are to exporters.

**Figure 10: When you plan for export, which kinds of information are most difficult to obtain? (offline, sample size: 177, three answers possible)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Export marketing planning</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends in buying behaviour</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade and distribution system</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic alliances for market penetration</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards and regulations</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of internet for market research, relation management, promotion</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, trade relations comes top of the list (71%), followed by standards and regulations (61%). Compliance with import and product requirements is mandatory in order to introduce a product to an export market. With that in mind, the service of collating otherwise dispersed information on legal and import regulations does indeed help enhance transparency and facilitate market access.

Given that few exporters will actually try to open up a new market single-handedly, trade relations are, of course, crucial. Online marketplaces offer one possibility of providing market

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24 „For which purpose(s) do you use the Export Helpdesk’s information and services?“; several answers possible.
contacts, and as such are helpful resources. Findings and considerations regarding the Export Helpdesk’s “Marketplace” are discussed in chapter 3.6.

Other kinds of information given include information on prices, technical product specifications in the EU, (phyto-)sanitary requirements and quotas.

How did users first learn about the Export Helpdesk? This may be of particular interest for awareness-raising and promotion purposes. Most users first became aware of it through searching the internet. For industry users, newsletters and publications have been an effective medium of promotion. Respondents from government and EU or international institutions frequently got to know the Helpdesk in the course of a presentation or event.

**Figure 11: How did you get to know the Export Helpdesk? (online, sample size: 868, one answer possible)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>Internet search</th>
<th>Intermediary organisations</th>
<th>Presentations and events</th>
<th>Publications and newsletters</th>
<th>Personal contacts</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company Production</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Distribution or Import</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediary</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU or International Institution</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic or Media</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among other sources of information on EU market access, personal contacts rank highest, followed by exhibitions and fairs, and intermediaries.

**Figure 12: Other sources of information on EU market access (online and offline, sample size: 835, multiple answers possible)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other online information services</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediary organisations</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals, newspapers, TV</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions, fairs</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/ Personal network</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examination of the sources preferred in different regions reveals that the internet ranks slightly higher in Asia, Europe and MENA countries, while intermediaries play a greater role in South America and ACP countries.

Trade fairs and personal networks have a large share across all regions. This would suggest that information sources involving direct personal contact generally play a more significant role than the media. Experience shows that personal contacts tend to be crucial to exporters. This tendency is particularly true for Africa; several experts who were interviewed reported that oral communication enjoys a higher degree of trust than the media in this region. With regard to awareness raising, this would suggest a need to focus on establishing a network of multipliers.

Figure 13: Sources of information used by type of organisation (sample size: 835; Sources of Information: Several answers possible)

Preferences vary slightly between users from different professional backgrounds. Producers seem to be less prone to resort to the internet, preferring to receive information from intermediaries and trade fairs (see Figure 14). With regard to awareness-raising, however, no single medium or source of information is clearly more suitable to address any of the particular user groups.
Figure 14: Sources of information used by region (sample size: 835; Sources of Information: Several answers possible)

Of the online services consulted by Helpdesk users, CBI and ITC rank highest, followed by the Taric online database, the MADB and other trade-related EU portals\textsuperscript{25}, and finally Alibaba as a large online marketplace and a number of national portals.

All in all, the key findings on user profiles and usage patterns of the Helpdesk are:

- The Export Helpdesk is most used in South America, Southern Asia, and in the EU itself. However, while total user figures are lower, use in ACP and MENA countries is considerably higher in relation to the overall number of internet users:

- It is most used by industry, intermediaries, and government officials. While producers represent the largest user group in total, the share of users who consult the Helpdesk very frequently is higher for importers than for the other user groups. Together with the high level of use within the EU, it seems that importers cooperating with producers from developing countries constitute a fairly large user group of the Export Helpdesk:

- In terms of sectors, visitors from the agrifood, textiles, and services/consultancy sectors prevail, otherwise use is fairly evenly spread out over all sectors;

- Most users got to know the Export Helpdesk through searching the internet.

\textsuperscript{25} For further details on CBI and ITC, see Benchmark study, chapter 3.13.
B. Analysis of Website traffic

Studying the development of a web-site's traffic can yield key insights into its performance. There are a large number of tools available for looking at the characteristics of a web-site’s visitors and their use of the site. The quality of the analyses generated by such tools – the web analytics – depends on the amount of data collected by the site’s server and on the use of such a tool on the web-site itself.

For the purposes of this evaluation, we based our analysis on web-server log-files for the Export Helpdesk, and two evaluation reports which are based on the logfiles and used for monitoring by the Export Helpdesk team. One of these reports was on the individual pages requested and the directories under which they fall. The other was a report on the monthly requests per country from January 2005 to November 2006. The log-files were analysed with the assistance of a log-file analyser.\(^{26}\)

The development of the Export Helpdesk’s website traffic over time shows two related trends. Traffic spiked following the launch of the Export Helpdesk in February 2004. This was followed by a downwards curve and stabilisation at about a third of the traffic in February 2004. This trend was reversed following the launch of the improved, multilingual version of the Helpdesk in February 2005.\(^{27}\) Since February 2005, there has been a clear upwards trend in traffic. This is shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Website traffic

\(^{26}\) AWStats (see [http://awstats.sourceforge.net](http://awstats.sourceforge.net)).

\(^{27}\) See RAPID press release IP/05/142.
Total Number of Users

Figure 15 shows the number of unique monthly visitors on the left, and the number of hits on the right. The scale differs by a factor of 10. Until January 2005, the lines track each other quite closely. This means that the average unique monthly visitor made about 10 hits in a month. From February 2005, the lines start to diverge, meaning that the number of hits per unique monthly visitor went up. In other words, the web-site was being used more intensively by those who visited it.

However, neither of these figures can claim complete accuracy:

- A hit is registered when a visitor requests a page from the server hosting the Helpdesk. However, it does not necessarily register each time a page is viewed, as pages can be stored in the memory (cache file) of a web browser, and can then be viewed without being retrieved from the server. The front page of a web-site is one of the pages that will typically be stored in a browser’s memory.

- In a web-server log-file analysis, the concept of a unique visitor is based on the unique IP (Internet protocol) address, which is assigned to the computer (or other device) communicating with the Internet. This figure can be distorted in two ways. First, it is possible that the computer has a dynamic IP address which changes at certain intervals. In this case, a single visitor may be counted as multiple visitors. Second, it is possible that the computer uses a remote or “proxy” server to access the Internet, and only the IP address of this server is seen. In this case, multiple visitors may be counted as a single visitor.

Nevertheless, the figures can be taken as good indications of actual traffic and are a reliable reflection of the trends displayed over time. These trends are examined in greater detail below.

Traffic by Region

In terms of hits, traffic can be divided on a country-by-country basis. It is also technically possible to divide traffic in terms of visits and unique visitors on this basis; however, this requires special software. For a precise country-level analysis, hits in themselves are not statistically accurate enough. In addition, the Export Helpdesk team already has an analysis of the aggregate numbers for 2005 and 2006 up to November, and of trend lines per country. Accordingly, the analysis here is on a regional level.

The geographic location of an Internet user can be detected by tracking the user’s IP address, which can usually be accurately determined to a single location within a country. However, the location of an IP address can be false if a user is accessing the Internet via a proxy server, or via a regular server based in another country. It is possible, therefore, that a

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28 Software used for surfing the Internet, such as Firefox, Opera, Internet Explorer or Safari.
small percentage of requests that show up as being from Europe and North America actually come from Africa and Latin America.\textsuperscript{29}

Breaking down the Export Helpdesk’s traffic by region reveals greatest usage in Latin America, the EU itself and Asia. The rate of increase is also highest in these regions. This is displayed in Figure 16.\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{Figure 16: Traffic Development (Hits) by World Region}

As can be seen from Figure 16, there was an unusual spike in traffic for North America in September 2005. This spike can also be seen in the Figure 15 (Website traffic) above. It was caused by one international organisation copying Helpdesk data in order to set up a similar, sector-specific service. A similar spike occurred in March 2007 in Asia, probably also caused by an organisation copying the site.\textsuperscript{31} Other spikes cannot be tracked down to individual

\textsuperscript{29} Internet hosts are to a large extent based in Europe and North America. See UNCTAD: ‘The Digital Divide Report: ICT Diffusion Index 2005’, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{30} Regions are defined as follows: North America – Canada and the United States; Latin America – the rest of America; Africa – the entire continent of Africa; Europe and Central Asia – all countries entirely or partially located in Europe that were not part of the EU in December 2006, Greenland and all former Soviet Republics. Note also that Asia includes Afghanistan, the Middle East includes Iran, and Australia and Pacific includes Papua New Guinea.

\textsuperscript{31} The spike in traffic can be tracked down to two specific days and two individual IP addresses in China.
organisations or specific days; they are more likely to be the result of promotion or natural fluctuation.32

It was not possible to calculate the total amount of visitors on a country-by-country basis within the scope of the evaluation. However, each region's share in the total number of site hits can be compared to their share in the top 1,000 users for 2006 (Figure 17). This is an interesting statistic, as it indicates which users accessed the site most frequently and intensively. The 1000th user in 2006 registered 197 hits, whereas the top user registered 21,940 hits. The top user therefore used the site frequently and intensively, while the 1000th user either used the site intensively during a small number of visits, or less intensively during ten to twenty visits. As the graph demonstrates, the figures for these two statistics differ slightly, but not drastically for most regions.

Figure 17: Traffic Development (Hits) by Region

As shown by Figure 17, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and North America have lower shares of the top 1000 users than they do of the total number of hits, while Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the EU25 have slightly higher shares.

32 The June 2006 spike in Asian traffic, for example, was caused mainly by India. However, it cannot be tracked down to one single day and was caused by over 100 different IP addresses. The most likely explanation is promotion of the site by DG Aidco.
Traffic by Income Level

Countries can be classified in many different ways; however, not all classifications are relevant here. Since the Export Helpdesk should be seen in the light of the EU’s trade and development strategy, it makes sense to look at the different income levels of the various countries, as this relates to the extent to which they can benefit from the EU’s preferential tariffs. An authoritative classification scheme in this regard is the World Bank’s country classification, which is also used in the EU’s legislative framework on trade preferences to decide whether or not a country is eligible for preferential tariffs. The World Bank groups countries into different income levels: low income, middle income (divided into lower and upper-middle income), and high income. The European Union, in its configuration from May 2004 to December 2006 as a Union of 25, is largely high income, but also has a few upper middle-income countries.

It is interesting to compare the share of each of these four income groups in the Export Helpdesk’s traffic. Grouping countries in this manner and separating out the EU from the countries that seek to export to it, we arrive at Figure 18.

Figure 18: Traffic Development (Hits) by Income Group

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33 Regulation 980/2005 stipulates the scheme of generalised tariff preferences. Article XX states that a country is no longer eligible for preferential tariffs if it has been classified as high income by the World Bank for three consecutive years, subject to certain qualifying terms. An alternative would be the UN’s Human Development Index, which uses multiple criteria. The UN’s list of the least developed countries – which is used in the EU’s “Everything But Arms” initiative – uses a different standard again: low income, “human resource weakness” and economic vulnerability.

34 The standard of income used in the scheme at the time of writing is annual Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in 2005. The division is as follows: low income: < USD 876; lower-middle income: USD 876 - 3,465; upper-middle income: USD 3,466 - 10,725; high income: > USD 10,725.
We can also compare the total share of each income group in 2006 to the share of the site’s top 1000 users, as in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Traffic by Income Level in 2006

Figure 19 shows more marked differences between the percentage of hits and the percentage of top 1000 users than Figure 17. The trend in Figure 19 reveals that the percentage of frequent and intensive users is lower in upper-middle income and high income countries. This would support the hypothesis that there are more users from richer countries that come across the site randomly, owing to the larger amount of Internet users per capita. However, this hypothesis is not supported by the larger amount of frequent users from the EU, which would also be expected to provide more activity.

Comparison with Population and Internet Penetration Statistics

Tracking the development of use by different country groupings reveals a clear overall trend: use of the Export Helpdesk is growing strongly in lower-middle income countries and in the EU. There is less growth in high income countries and upper-middle income countries. The trend in low income countries, which is rising very slowly, is potentially worrying. To give a more precise indication of the level of use compared to population numbers, and the amount of Internet users per group, we can examine the share of overall use per group (see Figure 20).

35 Population, number of Internet users and Internet penetration statistics are derived from http://www.internetworldstats.com
Figure 20: Traffic (Hits) by Population and Internet Use in 2006

Figure 20 shows that although the level of use is extremely low in low income countries compared to their population, this relationship changes markedly when use of the Helpdesk is compared to the number of Internet users in those regions. Nevertheless, it is desirable that the relative level of use of the Helpdesk in low income countries should be higher than that of other groups, as these countries can benefit most from the EU’s preferential market access.

The low level of use in low income countries may be due to a number of factors. These include slower Internet connections, a lower level of Internet availability and accordingly a smaller amount of users, problems with the Export Helpdesk itself and the lack of promotion for the site.

Figure 21 takes the same data and breaks it down by geographical region.

Figure 21: Traffic (Hits) by Region/Population and Internet Use in 2006
Figure 21 shows the high level of use in Latin America more clearly. It also shows that African countries have the second-highest level of use compared to the overall number of Internet users in that region. By contrast, use in Asia is comparatively low.

**Visits and Popularity of the Sections**

Generalising the statistics over 2006, we find that the site registers a high number of average hits per visit (8.25). This means that it is generally well-used. However, these statistics also show that a large number of visits last for under 30 seconds, indicating that many visitors do not really use the site (see Figure 22).

Visit duration is calculated on the basis of a visit session. All requests made from the server by an individual IP address are grouped in one session, as long as they occur no more than one hour after the previous request made by the same IP address. If an IP address makes a request after being inactive for more than one hour, this is counted as a new visit. Because hits can only be registered when requests are made from the server, the visit duration is the time between the first and the last request within a visit session. If only one request is made, the time displayed will be zero seconds.

**Figure 22: Visit Duration in 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visit Duration</th>
<th>Number of Visits (2006)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 30 seconds</td>
<td>112,992</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 seconds - 2 minutes</td>
<td>18,787</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 5 minutes</td>
<td>17,369</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 15 minutes</td>
<td>23,180</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 30 minutes</td>
<td>13,694</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 minutes - 1 hour</td>
<td>12,827</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 hour and over</td>
<td>8,367</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A duration of 30 seconds or less is insufficient to make a request for information from one of the site’s sections and actually read the information on it. However, it is enough time to check if there are updates on the marketplace in one or two product groups. While we cannot therefore automatically assume that the entire 0-30 second visits figure reflects non-utilisation, a large part of this figure will relate to visits with one hit, where visitors does not continue through the site form the page on which they land.

55% of visits do not last longer than 30 seconds. This figure initially seems very high. However, Internet research indicates that this is more or less in line with how people surf the Internet today. Jakob Nielsen has described the situation as one in which people tend to forage for information on the web, making decisions whether they will stay or go from a web-
site very quickly.\textsuperscript{36} Our online user survey seems to indicate that a large proportion of the visitors on the site are in fact first-time visitors (see above). This, together with the data on visit duration, indicates that a large part of the traffic is constituted by people who visit the web-site and decide not to delve into it further, for whatever reason.

Conversely, this high level of non-utilisation implies an even higher level of usage for those individuals that do actually utilise the web-site. This is reflected in the statistics. The majority of visits that last over 30 seconds in fact last over 5 minutes, and the average duration of all visits is 8 minutes, 21 seconds.

**Figure 23: Popularity of Sections in 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>% of pages requested</th>
<th>% of entries</th>
<th>% of exits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front Page</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomenclature</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements and Taxes</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import Tariffs</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customs Documents</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of Origin</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketplace</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Guide</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Nomenclature" is the most popular tool on the web-site. This tool helps users find a product code in the Combined Nomenclature (CN) of the EU.\textsuperscript{37} Users need this product code to access the databases behind the Helpdesk ("Requirements and Taxes", "Import Tariffs", "Rules of Origin", "Trade Statistics"). The Nomenclature tool can only be accessed when searching for information in one of these databases, and is therefore not likely to be used much as a stand-alone service. This is corroborated by the relatively low number of visits that

\textsuperscript{36} See, for example, Jakob Nielsen’s Alertbox column Information Foraging: Why Google Makes People Leave Your Site Faster

\textsuperscript{37} The CN is a system of numbers representing product codes. It is used by the EU for trade statistics and customs purposes and based on the Harmonized System (HS) of product codes from the World Custom Organisation (WCO). The first six numbers in a product code come from the HS; the last two are added by the EU, giving what is known as a "combined" code.
enter the site via the Nomenclature service. The percentage of queries in individual databases that are aided by selecting the product code through the Nomenclature service cannot be calculated, but it is likely to be high.\textsuperscript{38}

The relative popularity of the individual services is skewed by the number of requests (page-loads) required to get information from an individual service, and the amount of information offered. For example, the “Requirements and Taxes” database offers far more information that can be requested than the “Import Tariffs” database; the “Import Tariffs” database, in turn, provides more information than the “Rules of Origin” database. Only one request is required to go directly to the “Customs Documents” section; two are required to get information from the “Trade Statistics” section; and three requests are required to find an individual product code in the Nomenclature section.

Bearing this in mind, the services that appear to be most popular are the “Marketplace” and the “Trade Statistics”. The least popular services are the mailbox (“Contact” section) and the “User Guide”. The low popularity of the “Contact” section is likely to be due to its placement at the bottom left of the page and its small font size. The low popularity of the User Guide may be due to its format, file size or the fact that it, too, is not displayed in a prominent position. It might, however, also be due to the fact that people do not feel a need for general or personal assistance.

Looking at the pages used for entry and exit, it would appear that the individual services are often accessed directly by more frequent users. Alternatively, it may be that many frequent users have the front page cached in their browser and only make requests for individual sections. The high number of visit entries and exits via the front page of the “Rules of Origin” section cannot be explained through normal use of the site; requests in this service are made in a similar way to the “Requirements and Taxes” and the “Import Tariffs” sections, but the section gets much less overall traffic than these two sections. It may be the case that the “Rules of Origin” page is linked to directly from a relatively popular page. Currently the server used by the Export Helpdesk cannot track the origin of users in terms of how they came to the site, i.e. whether they arrived directly or via a link (and if so, what link this was). Determining this would require moving to a server that can perform this task, or having an external server perform it through a page-tagging tool.\textsuperscript{39}

The entry and exit pages also give some indication of where the large amount of 0-30 second visits come from. A user who enters the Export Helpdesk through the front page and then moves further into the site is not likely to return to the home page to exit. As the home page has no particular functionality other than being an entry point (one that is also available

\textsuperscript{38} The percentages are 20% in the Nomenclature tool and 44% in the databases. However, they do not allow for a quick comparison because the average number of requests that are made per query in both areas is unknown (and impossible to calculate on the basis of current statistics).

\textsuperscript{39} Page-tagging is a method used by web-sites to identify and track individual users as they navigate through a web-site. Usually, this is done through sending an http cookie – a small piece of software – to a user’s web browser (see below). A cookie allows a user to be identified. A page-tagging tool is a piece of software that stores and analyses the data made available through page-tagging. This software can be run in-house, but it is usually done by a service provider.
from the individual sections), there is no real reason for visitors to return to it, unless they want to go back to the page they were on before they entered the Export Helpdesk. The majority of the 20% of exits via the front page will therefore be part of the 50% of visitors leaving the site immediately after entering. The same also goes for much of the 26% of exits via the “Rules of Origin” section. The amount of traffic going into this section would suggest an exit rate of 4 to 5%. The remainder will come from visitors who entered the site via this page and then immediately left again.

**Languages**

The Export Helpdesk is offered in four different languages. At present it is not possible to evaluate the native or preferred language of the site’s users directly, although this would be interesting with respect to regional distribution.

As most browsers offer a multitude of language settings, the preferred language of users could be evaluated directly by detecting the language setting of the browser employed by users to access the web-site. This information could then be stored using a page-tagging tool or a server that can detect and register this information. However, this is not currently done by the Helpdesk.

To some degree we can see from the page requests whether an alternative language is chosen. However, this does not show up for all sections. The report on page requests shows the web addresses of the requested pages and the number of times they were requested. When the language setting is displayed in the page address and this is in turn included in the report, it is possible to evaluate the percentage of requests made in that language. This is possible for five sections of the Export Helpdesk (see Figure 24).

**Figure 24: Website traffic by Language in 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requirements and Taxes (FP)⁴⁰</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tariffs (FP)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of Origin (FP)</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics (FP)</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Guide</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data on the percentage of requests varies considerably from section to section. However, in terms of order it is clear that English is the principal language used, followed by Spanish, French and Portuguese. Comparing this with the country-by-country data would

⁴⁰FP = front page. For Requirements and Taxes, Tariffs, Rules of Origin and Statistics it was only possible to evaluate the percentage of users requesting the front page of these services, since individual requests could not all be traced.
appear to indicate that the three non-English languages are slightly underrepresented in this statistic. Traffic originating from countries where Portuguese is the official language (Portugal, Brazil and others) accounts for about 5% of total traffic in 2006. Traffic from Spanish-speaking countries accounts for around 35%. If a similar correction is applied to French, the distribution in terms of hits would be roughly 51% English, 35% Spanish, 9% French, and 5% Portuguese.

Correlation with Promotional Events and Press Releases

Website traffic analysis is particularly useful for evaluating the success of different promotion strategies. The extent to which traffic from a particular country increases, and the duration of increased traffic, can be tracked quite precisely by measuring the number of unique visitors per country. This statistic can be checked against data on how users found the web-site, for example. The effect of promotion is currently measured by the Export Helpdesk by hits per month, but this figure does not in fact necessarily give a good indication of the success of promotion. This is because an increase in the number of hits per month could be due to just a few sources, or even a single source. Ideally, the number of hits should be contrasted with the number of visitors.

The primary purpose promoting the Export Helpdesk is to increase long-term usage of the site. To evaluate the success of promotional events, it is necessary to monitor not only daily traffic in the period following the events, but also monthly traffic for the few months afterwards.

External promotion of the Export Helpdesk takes three different forms. The first is presentations or tours given in Europe by the Export Helpdesk team. The second is in-situ promotion performed by the Export Helpdesk team, either at specially-organised meetings or in more general forums. The third is promotion through regional contacts or EU organisations. In general, presentations by the Export Helpdesk team itself do not seem to have had much long-term effect on usage of the web-site in the target country or region where they occurred. Promotion through regional organisations shows slightly more success, although this success is inconsistent. Press releases by the Commission have also been significant for the development of traffic, and are therefore included in our analysis.

Figure 25: Correlation of events and statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Event</th>
<th>No. of Events</th>
<th>Correlated Website traffic Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External Presentations in Europe</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Thirteen of the sixteen events had no noticeable impact on traffic. A presentation on October 2005 in Malta caused a small spike in Maltese traffic, but had no long-term effect. A tour for Vietnamese officials in May 2006 correlated to higher traffic that lasted for three months. A presentation in Switzerland for UNCTAD, made in July 2006, correlated to a strong increase in Swiss traffic; this was in part a lasting impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-situ Promotion</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>In-situ promotion in four small countries in the Caribbean in May/June 2006 and in September 2006 caused small spikes in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
traffic, but had no clear lasting effect. In-situ promotion in Tunisia in September 2006 caused a major spike in traffic and had a more lasting effect. A presentation at the November 2006 Cape Connect Forum caused a small spike in traffic in the Republic of South Africa and in Africa in general, but had no clear lasting impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentations/Letters to Regional EU Organisations</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letters and presentations to EU organisations targeting Asia and Latin America seem to have had a major lasting impact on traffic. However, presentations and letters to Aidco Africa had no impact. A letter sent to the EC Delegation in the Philippines also had no impact.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RAPID Press Releases 11 RAPID press releases have a major and sometimes lasting impact when they contain a link to the Export Helpdesk. This is even truer when they deal directly with the Export Helpdesk. However, mentioning the Export Helpdesk in press releases without a specific link, or mentioning it in speeches, has no impact.

It is interesting to note that presentations given in Europe have little noticeable effect upon traffic. In-situ promotion also has little effect, but there may be room for improvement if we look at the background to the events. The Caribbean tour, for example, had little actual effect. The events here consisted of an in-situ promotion in May 2006 in Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, in June in Barbados, and in September again in Trinidad and Tobago. After the October spike in Trinidad and Tobago, November levels were down to seven hits, and in December there was no traffic at all. Traffic did pick up again in 2007. A look at the monthly top-1000 users shows that in each case almost all of the traffic came from between one and three IP addresses. In other words, the presentations did not reach a broad audience.

What could lie behind this? Three of these countries (Guyana, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago) have identical Internet population statistics – 160,000 users in each case. In Barbados, this amounts to 60% of the population, in Guyana 18% and in Trinidad and Tobago 12%. In Suriname, there are 32,000 Internet users, or 6% of the population. While it is not clear whether Internet penetration plays an important role in the success of promotional activities, in the case of Suriname at least, low penetration and the small Internet population correlates with less success. Use of the site in Barbados has been a bit more constant, although it is quite low and has not really spread.

Promotional events in bigger countries with larger Internet populations have been more successful. The tour for Vietnamese officials in May 2006 is correlated with an increase in use in that country by 800 hits per month. This lasted for three months before reverting to its previous level. A presentation in Tunisia in September 2006 resulted in significantly higher use for three months, rising from 400 to 5400 hits, then down to 2200 and then 1400 hits. After this, the rate settled at a higher level than that prior to the presentation, at 500-1000 hits per month, which continued until April 2007. In both of these cases the number of monthly
top-1000 users after the events in these countries also increased greatly, indicating that the presentation reached a broad audience.

However, there are exceptions. Presentations given in China (for the EU’s Asia Invest programme) and South Africa in November 2006 show that impact is not always longer-lasting in larger countries with some degree of Internet use. In both China and South Africa, the presentations had a much larger impact in absolute terms than the presentations in the Caribbean, but the increase disappeared again in the months that followed. In South Africa, the usage pattern remained irregular up until April 2007. In China there was constant usage, but, discounting the March 2007 spike, this was not at a higher level than prior to the presentation.

**Conclusion**

As discussed further above, our analysis of website traffic comes with a number of caveats. The data could contain more details, some areas are neglected, and in some cases figures are very general. What is clear, however, is that there are large differences in use of the web-site.

In part, these differences can be explained by the stated purpose of the Export Helpdesk — "to facilitate market access for developing countries to the European Union". It is only to be expected, therefore, that high income countries outside the EU do not use the service as much as the developing countries for which the Export Helpdesk is intended.

Differences can also be explained to some extent by the generally lower level of Internet connections in developing countries. For example, use of the web-site in Africa is not as low as it initially seems when we adjust for the total number of Internet users there.

However, this should not be taken to mean that there are no problems at all with the use of the Export Helpdesk in Africa. For one, use of the site in Africa is not increasing as much as it is in South America or Asia. Moreover, use is very irregular in many countries in Africa, and is largely concentrated in North Africa and the Republic of South Africa.

The statistics on the use of the web-site show that a large number of users that visit the front page do not go on to the individual sections of the site or make requests for information. This may indicate that the front page is not inviting enough for first time visitors, who as a result leave the site quite quickly. This is even truer for the front page of the Rules of Origin section.

An alternative hypothesis is that many people who access the site come across it more or less randomly and are not particularly interested in the information they can get from the site. The data on traffic from upper-middle income countries and high income countries supports this hypothesis; these groups have relatively few frequent users for the amount of traffic generated. However, this is only a partial explanation of the problem.

Enabling the web-site to detect the language settings of the user’s browser automatically would provide us with useful information about users’ language preferences. This would also mean that the site could automatically set its language to that preferred by users on the front page.

Improving web analytics is essential if we wish to be able to evaluate the Export Helpdesk’s promotion strategy better. To date, external promotions have not been consistently successful in creating more long-term use of the Helpdesk. Promotional events should be
focused on the countries and organisations where they can have the biggest impact. To do this, we need better web analytics to monitoring of their effects. It is also worth noting that promotion by regional EU organisations and programmes seems to function quite well in Asia and Latin America, but not in Africa.

Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

- Monitor the use of the Export Helpdesk and the effects of promotion better by using more advanced web analytics.
- Increase the accessibility and usability (see chapter 3.15) of the Export Helpdesk's front page and other pages where first-time visitors often land.
- Focus on promoting the Export Helpdesk through regional organisations and programmes such as Al Invest, Asia Invest, and so on. Increase efforts to improve cooperation with such organisations and programmes in Africa.
- Country-specific promotion, if carried out at all, should prioritise poor countries (low income and lower-middle income levels) with relatively high Internet populations and Internet penetration and low levels of current Helpdesk use. The case of Tunisia suggests that this offers the best chance of making a real impact.
- Write more press releases related to the Export Helpdesk when newsworthy items appear.

With regard to Recommendation No. 4, the most attractive countries are as follows:

- Latin America: Guatemala, El Salvador;
- The Caribbean: Haiti, Jamaica, Dominican Republic;
- Africa: Zimbabwe, Sudan, Morocco; to a lesser extent Benin, Togo, Senegal; to an even lesser extent Nigeria;
- Asia: Pakistan; to a lesser extent Indonesia, Philippines;
- Central Asia: Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan;
- Middle East: Jordan, Syria.

Of these, the Caribbean countries are especially attractive as their current use of the Helpdesk is virtually nil, despite their large Internet populations and high levels of Internet penetration. For these countries there are also no issues with regard to political sensitivity.
3.12 The Helpdesk in the opinion of its users

How do users evaluate the Export Helpdesk? What do they particularly like and what do they find to criticize? Do they find it useful?

The first question has, to some extent, been answered by the question as to how frequently users visit the Helpdesk. Clearly, those who consult it once or several times a week must find it useful. This was also stated explicitly by several of the experts interviewed, and a number of respondents to the survey expressed their gratitude for the provision of this service.

Users’ overall rating of the service presents a very positive picture (see Figure 26): 21% rate the Helpdesk as “excellent”, another 50% as “good”. 13% state that it "could be improved". Only 1% hold that it is "poor".

Figure 26: Overall rating of the Helpdesk’s services by users (online and offline, sample size: 901)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could be improved</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not able to assess</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequent users of the Helpdesk in particular regard it as being an "excellent" tool (see Fig 27). The proportion of those who rate it "poor" and "could be improved" is somewhat higher for first-time users. This may be due more to the aspect of user-friendliness aspect than to the quality of the service. Feedback received from the interviews appears to support this; several interviewees believed the Export Helpdesk to be an expert tool.
As regards the website’s user-friendliness, the majority of users rate it as being easy and intuitive to use. However, the less often users visit the tool, the more critical they seem to be concerning this issue. Of users consulting it on a weekly basis, almost 50% consider it easy to use, while less than 40% of those using it once a month or a couple of times per year agree, with the majority of respondents stating that this is not or not entirely the case (see Figure 28).

The evaluation of the website’s layout is likewise predominantly positive. Users were asked to rate several aspects of the layout separately, including the navigation bar, menu structure, fonts and font size, as well as the colours deployed. Generally speaking, between 80 and 86% of users found that the layout was clear and that it was easy to obtain an overview and...
find a specific item. The only observation that deviates from this overall impression is a slightly less positive rating for the menu structure, and a slightly higher rating for the choice of colours and the fonts.

As regards users' general evaluation of the section contents, the rate of response was comparatively low. The general impression that emerges is that users tend to regard the content of the sections as being "good" or "excellent". Although the "Marketplace" section is much appreciated and often used (see chapter 3.11) in comparison with the other sections, it is also more frequently rated "could be improved" or "poor".

A detailed discussion of the individual sections may be found in chapter 3.1-3.10.

**Figure 29: Rating of the contents of sections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Could be improved</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not able to assess</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requirements and Taxes</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import Tariffs</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customs Documents</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of Origin</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Statistics</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketplace</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Guide</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As regards the scope of contents, about 61% state that the Helpdesk contains all the kinds of information that they expected to find. 32% of users say they would have expected further information; items mentioned repeatedly here include for example trade statistics on the EU-27 (not included at that time), information on bio-fuels, traceability of agrifood, import restrictions, information and statistics on trade in services, and more links. Information on standards, particularly for organic food was requested a number of times; in the meantime this has been covered by a new category in the "Links" section. The most frequent request was for market information, such as surveys and market prices, and for the provision of market contacts in the form of links, lists of importers or similar information.

The free comments section in the survey evoked requests for further information or additional functions, criticism on certain issues, and expressions of gratitude for the provision of the service.

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41 The differences in sample size are due to the different extent of usage of the sections.
Many experts held that, seen as a whole, the Helpdesk is comprehensive. It was highlighted several times that the “Requirements and Taxes” and “Trade Statistics” sections are particularly thorough. One interviewee who had recently investigated a number of similar web portals of this kind stated that this was in fact the most complete service he had found.

Nevertheless, a number of issues that were raised should be taken up. In the following mention will only be made of those which were raised more than once. Most often, interviewees felt a need for market information to be introduced, or effectively linked to. A two-tier introduction to the European Union and its member states was requested several times.

Strengths of the Helpdesk as perceived by experts include:

- the fact that it is free of charge;
- its comprehensiveness, especially in the “Requirements and Taxes”, “Import Tariffs”, and “Trade Statistics” sections;
- the systematic provision of all relevant information by product;
- the usefulness of the information provided (i.e. it is the kind of information exporters/importers need).

Asked for an appraisal of its weaknesses, interviewees stated that:

- it is not yet widely known;
- voluntary standards and trade in services are not sufficiently covered as yet;
- the “Trade Statistics” are not up-to-date;
- the “Marketplace” section is not of the same quality as the other services; or that the quality of offer profiles is low; or that there is a risk involved, or that the added value of this service is not obvious.

As a final remark, the launch of a survey has elicited diverse and lively feedback, reflecting the wishes and views of the Helpdesk’s users. We suggest that this dialogue ought to be continued, perhaps by offering single-question surveys on the homepage.
3.13 Impact of the service

The Helpdesk’s users’ view of its usefulness as a tool has been assessed above. The question of impact, however, cannot be answered conclusively.

Generally, the impact of any online information service is difficult to assess: Its users are remote and, for the most part, anonymous; and the impact of information in itself depends on various factors.

For the Helpdesk, it would seem easiest to measure the impact of the “Marketplace” in terms of concrete commercial transactions. In the survey, we asked whether users’ advertisements had resulted in any business deals. Of the 106 respondents who indicated having posted an offer or demand once, several times, or even regularly, 66 affirmed this had indeed been the case. No further details were given however; only one stated the transaction had been an export deal, and one further respondent stated the product concerned had been a garments trimming.

When the experts interviewed in the evaluation were asked whether they knew of concrete success stories, one reported the case of an entrepreneur who, initially drawing on a wholesaler, had improved her supply chain by importing goods herself using information retrieved from the Export Helpdesk. Another interviewee mentioned a jelly producer in Bosnia who had succeeded in supplying a large European supermarket chain; here, too, information was drawn from the Helpdesk. One said that, though he did not know of any particular stories, he knew that such examples did exist. The kind of information the users in each of these cases had benefited from was not further specified.

There is an impact, then, but it is hard to measure. Staff of trade facilitation portals similar to the Helpdesk confirmed from their own experience that immediate feedback from users concerning any concrete outcome resulting from use of the portal’s services is rare. As many such portals are part of an official development programme, however, the success stories of beneficiaries from the programme will often be gathered by staff in target country offices, and will, to some extent, be success stories of the online service as well. This would argue in favour of linking up with capacity-builders in target countries with the aim of embedding the Export Helpdesk as part of the curriculum in export-related training.

Another possible way to obtain feedback of this kind would be to continue dialogue with users by launching brief (e.g. single question) questionnaires on the website at regular intervals. Several respondents to the survey expressed their appreciation at being asked to provide feedback. This would the most straightforward way to find out about the impact of the online service.

A key requirement for dependable impact assessment is a set of indicators that has been produced with the project’s overall objective in mind. Answering the question of impact, therefore, has to be preceded by clarifying the mission of the Helpdesk. Starting from there, the development of targets for different time horizons will contribute to making the impact of the Helpdesk measurable.
3.14 Comparison with similar services (Benchmark study)

A number of institutions worldwide are active in the field of export information. These institutions function on different levels and with different target groups and resources. An essential part of their work is the operation of an Internet portal. Depending on their aim, strategy and instrumentation, these Internet sites differ in the scope and outreach of their services. Thus, the global market for information sources in this field presents a multicoloured spectrum, ranging from privately-owned business-to-business platforms and country-specific all-round information portals to tools exclusively for the use of enterprises from DCs.

No two sites are quite alike in the presentation and combination of their services and information. However, they can be compared and rated according to certain criteria. The objective of this benchmark analysis is to provide an overview of sites that are similar to the Export Helpdesk. We therefore chose the content, services and features of the Export Helpdesk as a starting point for the selection of suitable sites.

Nine of the original twenty-five portals considered were selected for detailed analysis. An overview of these nine benchmark sites analysed in detail is given in the table below. Special features are highlighted which show a particular user-friendly approach in terms of layout as well as content delivery.

These benchmark sites have a roughly similar set-up to that of the Export Helpdesk. However, as can be seen from the table, not all of them have the same spectrum of sections and services.

The detailed analysis of the benchmark sites draws attention to relevant features. These relate to:

- Institutional background;
- General content;
- Structure and accessibility;
- Special features compared to the Export Helpdesk.

Seven other portals were considered because of particular characteristics. The section dealing with these sites contains only a brief presentation, highlighting the particular features that are of interest.

The outcomes of both analysis of the sites are then conceived with respect to best practices and the possibility of synergies with the Export Helpdesk.

Finally, the results of both the detailed and general analyses are summarised and particular strengths and weaknesses of the Helpdesk with respect to other services are pointed out.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark Portal</th>
<th>Institutional Background</th>
<th>Language(s)</th>
<th>Accessivity</th>
<th>Import Requirements/Taxes</th>
<th>Import Tariff/HS-Code Inquiry</th>
<th>Trade Statistics</th>
<th>Custom Documents</th>
<th>Marked Place</th>
<th>Links</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Contact Option</th>
<th>Editor: Transcriber</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Seed Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Free of charge</td>
<td>Registration advisable</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIIP</td>
<td>Danish International Development Assistance/ Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>EN, DK</td>
<td>Free of Charge</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBP</td>
<td>German Federal Ministry of Economy/ German Office for Foreign Trade</td>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Free of charge</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITC</td>
<td>WTO/UNCTAD</td>
<td>EN, FR, ES</td>
<td>Submission required for advanced use</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JETRO</td>
<td>Government Agency, Japan</td>
<td>EN, JP</td>
<td>Free of charge</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTGS</td>
<td>Open trade Gate Sweden</td>
<td>EN (FR, ES, PT)</td>
<td>Free of charge</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPPPO</td>
<td>Swiss Secretariat for Economic Affairs</td>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Free of charge</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TFOCC</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
<td>EN, FR</td>
<td>Free of charge, Registration advisable</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTTPF</td>
<td>International Organisation Initiating by UNCTAD</td>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Registration and changeable Membership</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
<td>☻</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:**
- ☻: best practice (feature provided in a user-friendly way)
- ☻: exists partly or embedded in text form
- ☻: not relevant/not existing on portal
Center for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (CBI), Netherlands (www.cbi.nl)

The Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (CBI) is an agency of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the CBI, its mission is to contribute to the economic development of developing countries. Capacity-building is one of the main fields of activity of this body. As it is run by a Dutch development co-operation institution, it is an example of an EU national approach in this field of activities.

A. Profile of the Portal

The CBI offers comprehensive information on markets, products and production improvement, quality control, export marketing and management, and market entry.

It focuses specifically on export promotion for developing countries, without regional restrictions. With regard to market information, the CBI covers almost forty product categories ranging from “Business Process Outsourcing” to “Tourism”.

Additionally, the site offers tailor-made training programmes for exporters and BSOs on general export marketing, trade fair participation, trade promotion, and other areas. The CBI also hosts a marketplace where interested exporters or importers from the EU can find potential business partners.
B. Overview of Contents

One of CBI’s focal areas is “Market Information”. This provides a search tool for browsing the CBI database and publications. The database contains various types of documents, including material on legislation, labelling, certificates, tariffs and quotas, sector and product surveys and marketing guidelines. The database can be searched by product category, country and keyword. Publications are arranged by publication type (CBI Export manual, CBI Fashion forecasts, CBI News Bulletins).

The CBI’s product information pages under “European Markets” are closely connected to the searchable market information. Here, information on 36 product categories can be accessed. Most other CBI services are referenced from each product page, so the user can easily access all the resources relevant for his selected product. These include a fact sheet of the selected product category, including forecasts on respective sectors and links to related news topics.

The CBI also directly links to a number of its own services and programmes. These include Export Coaching, BSO Development, Company Database and Trainings.

The “Export Coaching” programmes address enterprises in target countries with the capacity to export to the EU. The “BSO Development” programme, by contrast, focuses on similar intermediary organisations involved in export activities with the EU. “Company Database” – comparable to the Helpdesk’s Marketplace – provides access to an “Exporter's Database” that can be searched by keyword, HS code, and country. Only exporters from developing countries and European buyers who register with CBI are allowed to access this database. “Training” presents different training modules and seminars for BSOs and exporters from developing countries.

Three online instruction courses are offered, aimed at each of the CBI’s target groups: exporters, BSOs, and European buyers. While the courses for exporters and organisations have an elaborate step-by-step structure, the information provided to buyers is compact, combining advice on how to do business with information on the resources offered by the CBI.

The CBI also features online tools for a quick and easy introduction to exporting, namely the “Export Marketing Plan Builder” and the “Export Readiness Checker”.

For all documents available for download, the CBI states the estimated download time for a 56k modem. This is useful for users in countries with slow Internet connections.

C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk

The CBI’s comprehensive approach aims to enable individual exporters and BSOs from developing countries to access – or support access to – European markets. It assumes that they are not acquainted with administrative business processes involved.

The CBI takes a product-based approach: administrative, legal and political guidelines are searchable by product and embedded in a wider context. The site guides its users through all aspects of exporting by offering easily understandable, comprehensive overviews, and by skilfully interlinking the information provided in its various sections. In this way, the CBI is an excellent starting point for newcomers who need orientation. The services and content
offered by the CBI can thus be seen as complementary to those offered by the Export Helpdesk. In particular:

The publications provided by CBI, especially its manuals and forecasts, provide knowledge that can be of fundamental value to companies from developing countries, especially if they are newcomers to exporting.

The company-matching database is a well-conceived and professionally-implemented tool and an excellent example of credibility and real assistance to exporters.

The online tools “Export Readiness Checker” and “Export Marketing Plan Builder” are valuable and useful instruments to help exporters in their decision-making.

The contact possibilities offered by the CBI are customised and customer-oriented. Contact persons are listed with their email addresses and phone numbers, and contact options are given for specific reports and services.

Danish Import Promotion Programme (DIPP), Denmark (www.dipp.eu)

The Danish Import Promotion Programme (DIPP) is part of the Danish Chamber of Commerce and operated under a contract with The Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA). It thus represents a cooperative project between an institution for development assistance and a chamber of commerce. In terms of features, its Internet site should be seen as one component of the programme, rather than as a stand-alone service.

Figure 31: Screenshot of the DIPP web-site
A. Profile of the Portal

The DIPP aims to help exporters from Asia, Africa and Latin America enter the Danish market, with a focus on the 17 programme countries of the DANIDA. Support is also provided to BSOs and embassies.

Market information includes a general guide on “Exporting to Scandinavia” and 12 focused product studies, ranging from garments to footwear. Exporters have the opportunity to register their business and products/services in a database.

B. Overview of Contents

Core features are the 13 “Market Surveys” for specific products, including garments, furniture, organic food and footwear, and its business marketplace. In addition, the DIPP gives useful links to trade promotion organisations from other countries and regional and worldwide trade information programmes (e.g. the Export Helpdesk and the ITC).

A general guide on “Exporting to Scandinavia” is also available. This is updated every four years. The report comprises market information on Norway, Denmark and Sweden, details of market access procedures and special assistance programmes to exporters from DC.

Technical information on import requirements and tariffs are presented in the “Market Surveys”. These are quite detailed and constitute a good source of relevant information on the Danish market and on how to overcome trade barriers. Moreover, the papers give general country information and forecasts for specific sectors, as well as detailed hints on commercial practices. Each market survey concludes with a collection of important addresses, trade fairs for the market segment and useful Internet addresses.

Export companies also have the possibility to register their product offer on the DIPP’s “Market Place” (“Markedsplads”). Registration requests are checked by the DIPP team and then uploaded onto the marketplace, where Danish and other Scandinavian importers or BSOs can search by product and country. Additionally, a description of the exporter’s business is distributed in a regular newsletter sent via email to relevant importers.

The link section is clustered into European trade promotion portals and regional/worldwide institutions, plus DANIDA trade facilitation offices in the 17 partner countries. In addition to the entity’s name, the links offer a brief description on what the organisation does and how exporters can classify it.

Contacting single staff members is possible via telephone, post or email. The Internet site employs three full-time staff members. General contact information is displayed at the bottom of the site. The service is also available in Danish (for importers); here the contents differ due to the different information needs of importers.

C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk

Unlike the Export Helpdesk, the DIPP focuses on providing information on exporting to one specific European country, i.e. Denmark. Through its core service – the market surveys – exporters from DCs can obtain valuable information on specific market sectors in Denmark.
Also, practical advice on etiquette for meetings with Danish partners is given. The surveys are thus a mixture of technical information and practical advice.

It should be noted that surveys are only available for key sectors. If users want information on other products, they either have to consult other information platforms or contact the DIPP directly with an individual enquiry.

**German Business Portal (GBP), Germany**

(www.german-business-portal.info)

The “German Business Portal” (GBP) is an online information service on Germany for foreign companies. It was initiated by the Federal Ministry of Economics and is operated by the “German Office for Foreign Trade” (bfai).

**Figure 32: Screenshot of the GBP web-site**

A. **Profile of the Portal**

The GBP focuses on helping foreign companies import to Germany. It does not specifically focus on developing or emerging economies. The site provides comprehensive information on various business-related topics, as well as practical guidance on Germany for individuals travelling or staying in Germany. The GBP does not deal with all sectors of industry, but gives information on four key German sectors: chemicals, automotive, engineering, and renewable energy.
B. Overview of Contents
Besides general information about living and travelling in Germany, two sections provide an overview of business-related topics. The first is the “Business Location” section, which provides rather general information on the German market. The second is “Business Information”, which gives a well-structured overview of issues involved in exporting to Germany, such as tax and duty, import regulations and legal requirements. Instead of aiming at completeness, the service limits itself to a brief, almost glossary-like description, and refers to relevant internal and external sources for further detail. GBP is therefore not sector-specific, but aims to give a general introduction to exporting to Germany.

The “Service” section offers different types of services, mainly links and contact details to institutions and authorities. This section also provides a discussion forum in which users can post individual enquiries on related topics. An “Addresses” section provides details of German business-related institutions and authorities in Germany and worldwide, providing links. Finally, an “Experts” section provides contact details for regional or sector-specific institutions. The information provided in these last two sections is partly overlapping.

C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk
The GBP is an introductory information source for potential exporters. It aims to promote Germany as business location and partner. It offers a concise overview of import-related issues and practical hints on travelling and living in Germany. This approach is quite similar to the JETRO portal (see below), but much more superficial. Its core service is to facilitate orientation and to reference qualified external resources such as associations, chambers of commerce, Federal ministries and business promotion agencies.

Unlike the Export Helpdesk, the GBP offers no systematic search facility for different types of information for specific products or countries. Its strengths lie in its grouping and listing of information resources under specific topics.

International Trade Centre (ITC), International
(www.intracen.org)

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is a technical cooperation agency of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for the operational, enterprise-oriented aspects of trade development. This site is another example of the activities of international organisations in the field of trade facilitation.

A. Profile of the Portal
The ITC supports developing and transitional economies, and particularly their business sectors, by providing information on markets and market access. Its work covers product and market development, the development of trade support services, trade information, human resource development, international purchasing and supply management, needs assessment, and programme design for trade promotion.
The main operational tools provided by the ITC are “Market Development Services” and “Market Analysis Services”.

According to the ITC’s mission statement, technical assistance concentrates on the three issues for which it believes the need for national capacity-building is most critical. These issues are helping people to understand WTO rules, strengthening enterprise competitiveness, and developing new trade-promotion strategies.

**B. Overview of Contents**

Our analysis concentrates on the ITC’s operational tools, especially “Market Analysis Services” (MAS). The features of MAS are similar to those of the Export Helpdesk, whereas the “Market Development Services” tool offers information on various market segments.

The MAS is divided up into the following five Internet portals:

- Country Map
- Market Map
- Product Map
- Trade Map
- Investment Map.

Additionally, MAS provides three information services – Market News Service, Market Briefs, and PC-TAS or SITA – capacity building programmes and tailored market studies.
C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk

The ITC comprises a vast range of information on its main web page and its numerous sub-pages. The layout of the main web page is well-structured, but might be confusing for first-time users because of the sheer quantity of information and the interlinking of homepages.

Each of the main portals in the MAS has features similar to the Helpdesk. However, one obvious difference is the different geographical approach, as ITC’s portals cover bilateral trade actions worldwide.

Most of the services that resemble those of the Helpdesk are found in the “Market Access Map”. This allows both a tariff search based on the HS product code, and specifications on Rules of Origin. This service is only provided on subscription; companies from DC pay a reduced fee compared to those from industrialized countries.

Trade statistics are spread across various sites. The most comprehensive data that is freely accessible is the Country Map. However, trade statistics for specific product ranges are only available to subscribers via the Product Map.

Most of the sites also feature a user guide giving practical hints on how to use each sub-page. They also include a valuable glossary of key trade terms.

Within the framework of the general “Market Analysis Service”, the ITC also offers a variety of capacity-building programmes, such as workshops and seminars. The purpose of these is to train market analysts and export-oriented managers in the public and private sectors to conduct effective market analyses using the ITC’s export tools.

Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), Japan

(www.jetro.go.jp)

The Japan External Trade Organisation is the Japanese government’s main body facilitating external trade. The scope of services offered is partially comparable to those of the Export Helpdesk. We therefore examined this site to see if there are any fundamental differences in the way services are provided in sites from different regions.

A. Profile of the Portal

The focus of JETRO is not directly on export facilitation for developing countries. JETRO’s core focus has in fact shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small and medium-sized Japanese firms maximise their global export potential. However, the services provided by JETRO can also be accessed by developing countries. Indeed, one of JETRO’s main activities is directly aimed at facilitating economic growth in developing countries by helping foreign firms enter the Japanese market and cooperate in economic partnership agreements (EPAs).
B. Overview of Contents

JETRO provides information on a broad range of sectors, some of which are treated in detail. The site provides statistics, surveys, success stories and tailored sector analyses. JETRO also offers a business matching database.

The section on “Market Information” provides documents on different topics and sectors in the Japanese market. While navigating JETRO, a site path facilitates orientation by indicating the user’s position within the site structure.

“Trends and Topics” features analytical reports on key trends and developments in Japan. “Attractive Sectors” identifies six Japanese key sectors which are described in greater detail.

“Standards and Regulations” presents legal and technical norms relevant for imports to Japan; the texts here can be downloaded as PDF files. “JETRO Market Reports” covers single products from eight product categories: Food, Clothing and Fashion Goods, Sporting and Leisure Goods, Household Goods, Health Care Goods, Machinery and Equipment, IT and Bio Technology.

In the section “Email Newsletters”, users can subscribe to any of the five JETRO email newsletters. JETROS’ marketplace contains approximately 35,000 entries (one third from Japan, and two thirds from the rest of the world). It offers details of companies, including date of registration and revision, delivery times and trade terms. However, the marketplace has no associated verification process, hence it cannot fully assure the accuracy of its information. "Trade Fair Information (J-messe)" is a database offering information on trade fairs and
exhibitions in Japan and worldwide between 2001 and 2010. Users can search the database by industry, location and date. This section also offers a range of interesting additional services:

- Virtual trade fairs, i.e. online exhibitions that link importers in Japan with product suppliers around the world;
- A monthly ranking of the top ten trade fairs in Japan and around the world;
- A listing of related links, mainly to exhibition and convention centres in Asia.

C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk

JETRO’s focus is on attracting investments and large-scale supply to Japan, and promoting Japanese industry. Therefore, actual trade facilitation for small and medium-sized exporters, especially from developing countries, is only provided to a limited extent. This approach is mirrored by the fact that the sections on investment and attractive economic sectors primarily deal with sectors that are not typically addressed by developing countries.

On the other hand, the site offers a sophisticated marketplace tool that also addresses small enterprises. JETRO’s marketplace tool allows users to search for the products/services offered and required by companies all over the world. The tool allows different types of searches and fine-tuning options, such as type of offer, product category and sub-category, country, JETRO programme and keywords. Contact details for the companies can be viewed only following registration.

Overall, the information services provided in the section “Business Opportunities” can be considered comprehensive and useful for small exporters.

JETRO has no event calendar of its own, but trade fairs can be located using the tool “J-messe”. Research results are comprehensive and up-to-date.

**Opentrade Gate Sweden (OTGS), Sweden**

(www.opentradegate.se)

Open Trade Gate Sweden (OTGS) is a part of the National Board of Trade. It represents another approach to trade facilitation on a national level in the EU.

**A. Profile of the Portal**

The OTGS is constructed as a one-stop information centre for exporters in developing countries for trade regulations in Sweden. It provides introductory information on exporting to Sweden, trade barriers, and typical questions on exporting. The overall objective is to facilitate access to the Swedish market for developing countries.
Three sample queries for specific products are displayed. The main service provided by the site, however, is direct communication with interested exporters, who are welcome to submit their specific questions on exporting goods to Sweden.

Individual consultation as well as information on the web-page are available free of charge. The portal is available in English; introductory statements are also translated into French, Spanish and Portuguese.

B. Overview of Contents

The OTGS covers the basics of exporting to the EU, especially Sweden, with its sections “Export Regulations”, “Trade and Barriers”, “Tariffs and Preferences” and “Technical Regulations and Standards”.

Key procedures for exporting are explained and forms attached for contacting the OTGS. Rather than in-depth information on specific products, OTGS offers answers to individual queries. In order to receive detailed answers, exporters are asked to describe their product in as much detail as possible. It is not indicated how the enquiry form will be processed and how long the exporter will have to wait for an answer.

Three sample queries – for prawns, organic coffee and cosmetics – are presented. These function as examples for answers to individual requests. Model answers provide information on the specific HS or CN product codes, applicable tariffs, requirements to be met, labelling information, and specific import restrictions. To help potential exporters find business
partners, the OTGS provides links to the marketplace on the web-site of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce.

Besides export information, the site contains several relevant publications giving general trade information, such as trade facilitation and the rules of the WTO. The link section is very limited, with only four links in total, including the Helpdesk and three Swedish institutions.

C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk

Unlike the Export Helpdesk, the OTGS does not provide detailed information on the platform itself, but concentrates on direct dialogue and tailor-made answers to individual requests.

Although the focus of the OTGS differs from that of the Export Helpdesk, it is a good example for a well-structured page approaching its target group directly with a number of well-designed communication and layout features. The “print”, “send to a friend”, “sitemap” and “text size” options in particular facilitate navigation through the site and potential dissemination of information.

Overall, the OTGS is written in an easy and welcoming way while using non-bureaucratic language. Its clear layout structure guides the user through its services in a straightforward manner.

Swiss Import Promotion Programme (SIPPO), Switzerland
(www.sippo.ch)

The Swiss Import Promotion Programme (SIPPO) was set up by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and is part of the Swiss Economic Development Cooperation. Its work is based on the principle of helping enterprises to help themselves. SIPPO supports small and medium-sized enterprises that are ready to export, but not yet able to enter the Western European market using their own resources.

A. Profile of the Portal

The service specifically aims at strengthening the export capacities of small and medium-sized companies in emerging and transitional markets, and improving their trade contacts with Switzerland and the EU. In addition, SIPPO provides information to Swiss importers on how to target markets in the partner countries.

For the selected countries and trade sectors, SIPPO provides in-depth analysis of specific product categories, success stories and introductory country information. SIPPO also hosts a marketplace section that includes offers from exporters and importers.
In line with its mission statement, SIPPO pays close attention to the environmental compatibility of the products in question and the social policies of the manufacturers, based on the ten principles of the Global Compact in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption.

B. Overview of Contents

SIPPO provides a searchable marketplace tool that is functional and easy to use. The marketplace comprises approximately 3,200 offers from exporters, mainly from DCs. The entries can be searched by region and country, full text entry, product category and quality certificate. Quality certificates cover several standards – e.g. ISO, HACCP, organic certificates – which is useful additional information for potential business partners. As stated on the site, most companies have participated in a training or trade promotion event organised by SIPPO. However, no information as to how up-to-date the entries are, and detailed product information is lacking.

On the demand side, SIPPO provides a short list of Swiss importers interested in trade cooperation. For inclusion on the web-site and the general marketplace, importers and exporters must contact SIPPO directly via email.

The sub-section “Country- and Sector-specified Directories” lists company directories for the trade sectors and product groups that SIPPO deals with, generally for one specific country in each case. Each directory functions as an independent online search tool. The functionalities and complexity of the search functions differ for each directory according to product and country. For some product groups, directories are provided as part of market report brochures that can be downloaded.
One overall contact option is provided. However, within the sub-sections “Country- and Sector-specified Directories” and “Offers by Exporters”, the site gives contact details (email address and phone number) of the relevant project managers.

C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk

SIPPO’s web-based services are closely linked to its specific activities in the field of capacity-building and technical assistance. Therefore, in contrast to the Export Helpdesk, the type and quality of the information it gives relate to the specific needs and objectives identified through interaction with particular target groups.

As a result, the site does not represent a general, methodical and neutral instrument supplying information on administrative and legal requirements such as regulations, agreements, rules and classifications.

On the one hand, this makes it less universal. However, it also results in a number of excellent features that are not provided by the Export Helpdesk, such as practical guidance, targeted business matchmaking and networking.

The publications provided by SIPPO, in particular its manuals and training guides, provide knowledge that can be fundamental to companies from developing and transitional economies, particularly if they are true newcomers to the field of exporting.

The country- and sector-specific exporter directories are exemplary with regard to reliability and actual assistance to exporters.

Trade Facilitation Office Canada (TFOC), Canada

(www.tfoc.ca)

The Trade Facilitation Office Canada (TFOC) was founded by the Canadian International Development Agency. Its primary aim is to assist developing countries in entering the Canadian market through promotional programmes. Conversely, the TFOC also offers market information for Canadian importers – a typical approach in Anglo-Saxon countries. The site reflects the activities of a major international actor in the field of development cooperation.

A. Profile of the Portal

The information provided includes a general overview of the Canadian market, an export planning tool and an extensive list of links. In-depth information on a range of products can be accessed by country, which covers mostly transitional and developing countries. It is also possible to access the marketplace database and register one’s own business with it.
B. Overview of Contents

The TFOC site offers practical material on market access to experienced exporters aiming to enter the Canadian market.

Key sections of the TFOC site are as follows: “Checking Export Readiness”, “Market Information for Canada” and “Market Entry Information”. There are also supplementary features such as FAQ, links and an event calendar.

Most information on the site is only accessible after registering as an export company from a transitional or developing country. After doing so, the user gains access to technical information regarding market entry requirements and detailed market descriptions of 27 sectors, ranging from apparel to textiles.

The information on the site is extremely comprehensive. It gives practical hints on how to target the Canadian market in its sector studies and export guides. Where appropriate, the site is linked to other information services, such as the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA).

One interesting feature of the TFOC is the gradual registration process. If an export company is able to follow this through to its end, the TFOC will include the company’s information on its “Import Info Newsletter”. This newsletter is available online and also distributed to registered importing entities in Canada; according to the TFOC, there are currently 1,000 such entities.

Another interesting feature is the “Related Info” box, in which similar topics of interest are presented to the user. This helps the exporting company to find related background information on the requested topic easily, such as links to the FAQ “How can I find buyers?”. 
C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk

The structure of the TFOC site follows the main sections listed above. Thus many topics similar to the Helpdesk are dealt with, but within the general export guides and market segment studies. The most important difference compared to the Helpdesk is that import requirements, tariffs and rules of origin are included in the detailed sector studies and not searchable by product code. Trade statistics are structured along the site’s main 28 sectors and presented in the form of a written trend analysis.

For users who are not fully registered, the marketplace of TFOC is connected to Canadian industry web-pages. Here, the user can search for potential partners in Canada.

The link section is extensive, containing a very large number of Canadian trade intermediaries, sector organisations and relevant administrative offices. After registering for a specific country, users can see links in a customised version for that country. If users are not logged in, links to almost all DCs are available. Links are generally presented with a short note on what the organisation is and what it provides.

World Tradepoint Federation (WTPF), International

(www.tradepoint.org)

The World Trade Point Federation (WTPF), an international non-governmental organisation established in 2000, grew out of a programme of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). It is an umbrella organisation comprising more than 140 trade information and facilitation centres, known as Trade Points, in 85 countries.

A. Profile of the Portal

The aim of the WTPF is to assist small and medium-sized enterprises in international trade through the use of electronic commerce technologies. Hence, the site does not focus on bilateral trade promotion, but connects a wide range of trade-related institutions.

Its combines a freely accessible, extensive B2B platform with market and sector-specific information to which access is restricted.
B. Overview of Contents

The WTPF portal provides a complex “Electronic Trade Opportunities” (ETO) marketplace tool that allows users to search for products/services offered or sought by keyword, HS code, validity, category and sub-category of the HS code.

The marketplace allows registered SMEs to post and receive trade offers free of charge. Similar to the ETO system, companies can register with one of the Trade Points of the WTPF. After payment of a set fee, they can also reserve a permanent place on the database of the “Global Trade Directory System” (GTDS).

Further relevant functions of the “ETO System” include a tool to create one’s own entries, and an alert tool which informs users by email about the latest entries according to individually configured criteria. This tool is accessible for WTPF members only.

Detailed posts on specific products provide full contact details of the company in question and a further description. Translation of the post into German, Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese is offered using the translation service of the Internet search engine “Google” (“Google Translate”).

The WTPF also provides a dictionary of trade terms that can be searched alphabetically. In addition, it provides links to external glossaries and databases (the WTO Terminology Database or WTOTERM, the E-commerce Transport Glossary, and the Glossary of Transport Statistics).

Access to the sections “Market Points” and “Knowledge Points” is restricted to members. “Market Points” gives market information on over 70 countries, sector-specific information, a trade-fair calendar and a list of further references (with comments) and international trade
terms. “Knowledge Points” deals with trade policy, international trade terms, standards and codes, and provides a trade library.

C. Features compared to the Export Helpdesk

Similarly to the TFOC, the WTPF offers a gradual registration process. In order to use the ETO marketplace system, for example, a simple registration is sufficient. This also enables entrepreneurs to design their own product information free of charge. If users require more advanced options, they are requested to contact the local trade-point office. The marketplace tool “ETO System” is clearly a valuable instrument for exporting companies.

Overall, the WTPF offers one-stop shop in terms of trade-related information and online trade facilitation.

General Overview of the Seven Internet Portals Featuring Particular Characteristics

In this section we present seven further Internet portals, highlighting individual features or services that can either serve as best practice for a service available on the Export Helpdesk, or would represent a useful additional service.

These seven Internet portals show little similarity with the Export Helpdesk in terms of their institutional background, target groups, alignment or contents. However, they all deal with one or more of the topics trade facilitation, trade information, and development support.

The seven portals are as follows:

1. www.americanimporters.org

The web-site of the American Importers Association provides information for importers in the US and exporters from abroad.

The site has two notable features. Firstly, it offers a database of American importers and buying agents on CD-Rom. Secondly, it provides some concise how-to instructions for exporters on practical issues such as email marketing, using one’s own web-site, and business correspondence.

2. www.usitc.gov

The United States International Trade Commission (Commission) is an independent US Federal agency with broad investigative responsibilities on matters of trade. The Commission makes “most of its information and analysis” available to the public “to promote understanding of international trade issues”.

The USITC web-site provides a sophisticated, customisable (by choosing preferred key words) email newsletter on topic updates, such as changes in HS codes or tariffs. This is
a tool that is technically easy to realise and can be customised to the individual information needs of users.

3. **www.e-trade-center.de**
   The e-trade-center is the Internet database of several German trade-related institutions, including the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHKs), the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK), and the German Office for Foreign Trade (bfai). It enables German and foreign companies to publish their products and services on the Internet and search for the products and services they need.

   An outstanding characteristic of this site is the **differentiated types of business contact entries for companies**. Companies can make simple entries, which are only checked for content and formal integrity and plausibility. However, they may also make premium entries with the assistance of a premium partner of the site. This ensures additional credibility for the company and its entry, and is comparable to the approach taken by the WTPF (see above).

4. **www.expand-germany.com**
   This is the online presence of “Expand Online”, an initiative of the Federal Association of German Wholesale and Foreign Trade (BGA) and Global Project Partners e.V. (GPP). “Expand Online” is a Public Private Partnership project supported by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Foundation for Economic Cooperation and Vocational Training. Expand Online makes it possible to find partners for different products online.

   Its **easy-to-use, dropdown menu-based directory** allows users to search for relevant organisations, especially sector associations and federations, by products or sector. The search is structured on three levels, from product groups to single products, roughly following the HS classification system. Organisation profiles give contact details and a description of the field of activity. This approach is a good alternative to traditional lists of links.

5. **www.alibaba.com**
   A wholly-owned subsidiary of the Chinese Alibaba Group, alibaba.com is one of the world's largest online B2B marketplaces for global and domestic Chinese trade. With members in more than 200 countries and territories, alibaba.com is a well-known instrument for businesses to find buyers and suppliers from around the world.

   The site has an exemplary **comprehensive resources section** that provides an impressive spectrum of country-specific information relating to the media, labour market, economic indicators, etc. This helps exporters gain an initial insight into potential target markets.

6. **www.unido.org/doc/13090**
   This web-site of UNIDO highlights the benefits of export consortia upon entering export business. Export consortia are voluntary alliances of companies who join forces in the export of their goods with the aim of reducing risk and scaling up capacities. The assistance
provided to small and medium-sized enterprises consists of lessons learned in UNIDO’s experience of SME cluster and network development and other UNIDO areas of expertise in investment promotion, quality management, industrial upgrading and agro-industry development.

The resources offered by the site include a guide for export consortia, a training programme and a number of case studies. UNIDO takes one particular approach to exporting, and bundles online resources with real-life assistance.

7. ec.europa.eu/europedirect

This web-site is the portal of the “Europe Direct” contact service of the EC. It gives an overview of the history and institutions of the EU and presents information on other EU matters in all the official EU languages. It is also home to an information desk that can be contacted by email, phone or via an online chat interface.

The main value of this site lies in its individual and real-time support and feedback on all EU matters. For questions that require a specialised contact person, Europe Direct acts as an intermediary.

Summary of Best-practice Examples, Potential Linkages and Synergies

A. Examples of best practice

The examples of best practice presented here are intended as inspiration for improving the existing features of the Export Helpdesk, or ideas for new features. This relates particularly to the areas contact, feedback, and usability.

Examples of best practice include:

- Features aiding usability: clearly signposted language switch option (OTGS); print and PDF options (JETRO, WTPF); “recommend to a friend” option (OTGS); search option on each sub-page (OTGS); sitemap (OTGS); choice of font size (OTGS); and a page path item indicating page hierarchy down to the current page or sub-page (CBI, JETRO)
- Additional support on topics (glossary of trade terms) and use of services (step-by-step explanations, examples of use) (ITC)
- Personalised contact options grouped by topic (CBI)
- Comments on links, facilitating user orientation (DIPP, TFOC)
- Searchable, user-friendly calendar of trade fairs, allowing the user to filter events and access full details (JETRO)
- Quality management of entries on marketplace – business entries checked by partner institutions to ensure reliability (WTPF, TFOC, e-trade-center).
B. Linkages

Some of the sites examined already appear in the link section of the Export Helpdesk, including OTGS, DIPP, CBI, ITC and WTPF. However, none of these links is accurate except for the ITC. These links should therefore be revised.

Other sites that should be included in the Export Helpdesk’s link section are:

- SIPPO, for its useful information on trade-related issues in the EU, despite its concentration on the Swiss market
- GBP, for its well-structured overview of trade-related issues and exhaustive collection of links to relevant German institutions.

C. Synergies

By “synergies” we mean cooperation between the Export Helpdesk and other sites of a more formal nature, going beyond unilateral or mutual linking. Such cooperation would foster promotion of the Export Helpdesk by other platforms. It would also add new contents and services to the Export Helpdesk site, or replace existing ones. Technically, such cooperation would require more than simple listing in a link section. Potential partners for cooperation are as follows:

- CBI, in particular for its "Export Readiness Checker" and "Export Marketing Plan Builder" tools. These complement the systematic and technical approach of the Export Helpdesk by providing a service that gives individual guidance to inexperienced exporters.
- CBI, ITC, SIPPO are all strongly involved in capacity-building in DCs and providing trainings to BSO and SMEs. These organisations could carry out training programmes on behalf of the Export Helpdesk or promote training activities run by the Export Helpdesk itself (see section XX)
- WTPF, for its well-designed marketplace tools. These are more comprehensive and user-friendly than the existing marketplace tools offered by the Export Helpdesk. Moreover, the WTPF network covers a wide range of local trade points worldwide that can be contacted via the WTPF portal. These trade points are often linked to national institutions such as export promotion agencies. A more formal cooperation with WTPF would also help promote the Export Helpdesk in these local points.

Conclusion

Our analysis of service portals yields a number of conclusions regarding best practice and lessons learned.

Overall, we find that other portals overlap to some extent with the contents and services offered by the Export Helpdesk. Most, however, take an entirely different approach to that of Export Helpdesk. This can be seen in terms of their target groups and regional focus, institutional background, contents, accessibility, language options, and layout and design. Each of these areas is examined in turn below.
A. Target Groups and Regional Focus
Of the nine portals examined in detail, six (CBI, DIPP, OTGS, TFOC, ITC, SIPPO) have an explicit development support background and target small and medium-sized exporters from developing and/or transitional economies. The sites either have no explicit focus in terms of target countries and territories (e.g. ITC, WTPF, GBP, JETRO, OTGS) or prioritize certain countries and territories. 

B. Institutional Background
Two of the portals – ITC and WTPF – are part of an international organisation and have a global coverage. This provides them with a network of associated local institutions in various countries and the possibility of using existing infrastructures, while grouping them under one umbrella.

Most of the other portals – e.g. GBP (Germany), DIPP (Denmark), SIPPO (Switzerland), TFOC (Canada), American Importers (USA) and JETRO (Japan) – are nationally operated sites, part of whose purpose is to promote their home economies.

CBI falls into a special category. Although operated as an agency of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it provides information on the whole EU, plus Switzerland and Norway. CBI is also the European portal best connected to other organisations, both within Europe and globally.

Some of the portals (CBI, DIPP, SIPPO, ITC, UNIDO, TFOC) are operated by institutions that also undertake capacity-building for enterprises or act as intermediaries for supporting economic development.

C. Contents
The Export Helpdesk provides information on technical, administrative, and legal issues as well as statistics in a methodical and structured manner. By contrast, most other portals provide this information within a broader context, i.e. they provide in-depth information on specific sectors or products (see SIPPO, CBI, TFOC, DIPP). As a result, these sites usually offer no detailed search possibilities. Some sites provide this information indirectly through external links (GBP, WTPF), while others provide little or no information of this type (JETRO, OTGS). There are various possibilities for providing users with customised information using technical means, such as the USITC's newsletter or Expand Germany's structured search for links. It is also possible to provide additional practical information on countries and markets without producing in-depth publications, such as in the service section of Alibaba.

42 SIPPO: 23 priority countries; CBI: 45 low-income countries; TFOC: eligible countries according to the Canadian International Development Agency CIDA; DIPP: 17 DANIDA programme countries.
D. Accessibility

Most of the sites allow free and unrestricted access to their information resources and services. However, there are some exceptions: the ITC charges a fee for using its main services, and WTPF requires paid-up membership of a local trade point for full access to its resources (except the marketplace tool).

A number of other approaches exist. For example, the TFOC grants full access following free online registration. The CBI pursues a more restrictive registration policy: although its main services are fully accessible following free online registration, access to exporter and importer databases is only granted upon confirmation of registration and audit by CBI. SIPPO, DIPP and JETRO require free registration for users to post offers using their marketplace tools.

E. Language Options

Most portal offer very few different language options compared to the Export Helpdesk. All sites operate in English, and this is the only language offered by some (CBI, WTPF, SIPPO, GBP). Three sites offer one additional language: TFOC (French, the other official language of Canada), JETRO (Japanese, the official language) and DIPP (Danish, the official language). The ITC site offers two additional languages, French and Spanish. The OTGS site is mainly in English, but also provides introductory texts on its services in French, Portuguese and Spanish.

F. Layout and Design

In terms of user-friendliness, some sites perform poorly (ITC, WTPF, to some extent CBI). These sites are overloaded with text and graphics, lack a clear corporate design or consistent character encoding or size, or use excessive colour. The majority of sites, however, have a good design and clear structure (OTGS, DIPP, JETRO, GBP, TFOC).

Comparative strengths and weaknesses of the Export Helpdesk

Compared to the other portals examined, the Export Helpdesk can be seen to have core strengths in its systematic provision of technical information and easy accessibility. Most of the other sites examined provide this type of information indirectly via publications or links. The Export Helpdesk is also exemplary in the number of languages offered.

However, the Export Helpdesk also has a number of deficiencies. These occur in the fields of usability and services outside the core portfolio. Many sites offer easy access and use through their clear structure and design; the Export Helpdesk, by contrast, is in places difficult to read (with small font sizes, strong colour contrasts, etc.). Moreover, many sites provide additional usability features, e.g. a print option, a PDF option, site maps or navigation paths. Many of the sites are also superior to the Export Helpdesk in terms of their number of contact options, the presentation of event calendars, and marketplace tools.
3.15 Web accessibility and usability

Accessibility and usability are two related aspects that have major implications for a web-site’s success in achieving its objectives. In the case of the Export Helpdesk, the primary objective is to facilitate export to the EU from developing countries. Its usefulness therefore depends on how well it provides the necessary information. Accessibility and usability determine how easily this information can be found.

The concept of web accessibility focuses on the barriers to the Internet faced by user groups with disabilities, for example motor impairment, poor or no vision, poor or no hearing, and so on. According to the authoritative World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), “web accessibility means that people with disabilities can use the web”.44

Web accessibility is also relevant to other user groups, such as the elderly or people who are recovering from accidents, people with slow Internet connections or outdated technology, those with reading difficulties or limited proficiency in the language used, and new or infrequent Internet users.45 Designing for accessibility also tends to increase usability for all users.

Usability is a more general concept referring to the user-friendliness of the web-site. This includes elements such as the intuitiveness and efficiency of navigation, the degree to which users can accomplish tasks without making errors, and subjective user experience.46

A. Why focus on accessibility and usability?

The importance of making the web accessible for everyone has long been recognised by the EU institutions. In a 2001 Communication, the European Commission addressed the accessibility of public web-sites and their content, and referred to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) drafted by the W3C under its Web Accessibility Initiative.47 This Communication has since been reinforced by several Council Resolutions and further Communications from the Commission on the topic of web accessibility and the broader

44 W3C: Introduction to Web Accessibility.

45 See W3C: Social Factors in Developing a Web Accessibility Business Case for Your Organisation.

46 See Jakob Nielsen’s Alertbox Column: Usability 101: Introduction to Usability.

concept of "e-accessibility", which refers to the accessibility of all information and communication technology.48

The Export Helpdesk primarily seeks to provide information to a specific group. For this reason, the accessibility of the site to the broader public is not a primary concern. However, the Helpdesk should still aim at a high degree of web accessibility. Focusing on accessibility will have a direct impact for the average user in developing countries, as the share of fast Internet connections to all Internet connections tends to be lower in such countries, as does the average level of technology (for example, users tend to have older computers and monitors).49 The Internet is growing very quickly in these countries, and as a result a large proportion of users will have been on the Internet for a relatively short period of time.

According to the W3C, focusing on accessibility will also improve other metrics. It can increase traffic to the site, decrease the average "server load", decrease maintenance time and cost, and improve a site’s credibility.50 The increase in traffic is partially due to a potentially higher search engine ranking, and partially due to higher usability.

According to Jakob Nielsen, re-designing a web site for usability will typically improve performance metrics by between 100% and 202%.51 The metrics most relevant for the Export Helpdesk are visitor count, which shows an average improvement of 150%, "user performance", which improves by 161%, and the use of selected features, which improves by 202%.

The most important point with regard to accessibility and usability is that they improve "user performance" on the site. This means that users make fewer errors, spend less time navigating the site, and perform tasks such as finding desired information more successfully.

B. Performance of the Export Helpdesk

Although a number of elements of the Export Helpdesk’s design show that simplicity and ease of use were considered in the design, other aspects related to accessibility and usability can still be improved.


51 See Jakob Nielsen’s Alertbox Column: Return on Investment for Usability.
The home page is a good example of this. What is good about the home page is that it has a simple structure: it has a single purpose as an entry page leading into the site, little unnecessary information, a clear, professional design, and it allows simple navigation between the different sections. However, several technical aspects could be improved:

- The home page layout is fixed, i.e. it does not scale as monitor size increases or decreases. The layout is optimised for an 800 * 600 monitor resolution, although most modern monitors have higher resolutions, and many monitors used in developing countries may still have a 640 * 480 resolution or smaller. A fixed layout means that the homepage becomes a small element on the screen on a high-resolution monitor, which leaves a lot of empty space on the screen, and that horizontal scrolling is required on a low resolution monitor.

- The reason that the home page layout is fixed is that it uses a table to fix the design on the background image. This also goes for most parts of the main sections of the site. WCAG 5.2 and 5.3 deal with using tables as design elements – they should generally be avoided as they are not fully supported by all browsers.

- The important elements on the home page (i.e. the links to the individual sections) are located at the bottom of the page. As eye-tracking studies performed by Jakob Nielsen have shown, Internet users generally scan pages in an F-shaped pattern: they start by scanning a horizontal line from left to right at the top, go down a bit and scan a second, shorter horizontal line, and finally scan a vertical line from top to bottom on the left. If they scan the Export Helpdesk it in this manner, all that users initially see on the Helpdesk is a graphical design element at the top (the coloured bar) and the logo. They will then start searching for the functional elements. This will particularly be the case if their screen resolution is large and their browser does not vertically align the table in the centre.

- On this point, the layout of the homepage is inconsistent with that of the other pages, where the links to the sections are displayed at the top and the coloured bar graphic at the bottom.

- The “alt” html tags, that show alternate text when images are not displayed, are not filled in. This means that no meaningful representation is given when images are turned off in the browser setting. This is not necessarily a bad thing for images used merely for design purposes. However, images used as bullet points – such as the arrows at the bottom – should have a text equivalent such as the symbols * or >. The images used as links – such as the European flag at the bottom of the page – should also have a text equivalent, e.g. “europa.eu portal”. WCAG 1.1 deals with the use of the “alt” tag for image files.

52 See Jakob Nielsen’s Alertbox Column: [F-Shaped Pattern For Reading Web Content](https://www.useit.com/alertbox/051205f.html).

53 The European flag links to the External Trade portal on the home page, but to the europa.eu portal on all other pages. This is probably an error, as there is already a link to the External Trade portal on the home page. This needs to be corrected.
• The link to the "Events" section blinks. Users find blinking text irritating and less readable, and it tends to be ignored by longer-term Internet users (who associate it with advertising). Moreover, repeated stimuli such as blinking elements can cause seizures in people suffering from photosensitivity epilepsy. WCAG 7.2 deals with blinking and other animated text.

• The text used to describe the site contains unnecessary promotional fillers. Firstly, it states that it is an online service – which is unnecessary information on a web site. Secondly, it states that it is a "free and user-friendly service" and that it provides "relevant information". Using promotional adjectives in online writing tends to make it less clear and less credible.54 The limited amount of space for description should be used to communicate information about the site in a concise manner.

• The links to the User Guide and FAQ on the home page and throughout the site do not state that the documents are PDF files. They are also not accompanied by links to a free reader for PDF files (see Benchmark Study). The file size is also not indicated, which in the case of the User Guide is very large (almost one megabyte). Links to PDF files should not be included in the navigation bar rather provided on a separate page with an indication that they are PDF files, information about their size, and a link to a PDF reader.

• The link to the "important legal notice" leads to an external site. This is not clear from the link itself, and is not made clear in any other way. This practice is repeated throughout the site. The Export Helpdesk should employ some kind of graphic or text to indicate external links.

As the analysis of website traffic shows, the majority of visitors that enter the Export Helpdesk leave again within 30 seconds (see chapter 3.11). In part this can be ascribed to the layout of the home page. However, other sections may also prove daunting for first-time visitors. People who are not familiar with some of the terms used in international trade, or who are not proficient in searching databases for information, may also leave the site after clicking through it once or twice.

One of the main problems here is the amount of pop-up (new) windows that open when navigating the site and looking at results. There is no indication that these pop-ups are about to appear, and few of them are really necessary. Indeed, the only pop-up that performs a meaningful function, other than that of displaying information, is the Nomenclature service, which is opened when a user wants to browse for the product code for a database search. Here, too, the input forms should indicate that this service opens up in a new window. WCAG 10.1 deals with the use of pop-ups.

Obstacles to easy navigation – e.g. pop-up windows with different formats, links to PDF files and links to external sites, none of which are signposted – can have a cumulative effect on the usability of the site. The navigational structure should be simplified. At the same time, navigation between the different sections could be improved through new features that

54 See Jakob Nielsen’s Alertbox Column: How People Read on the Web.
increase the speed of navigation between the individual sections, such as further linkage between Helpdesk pages and path indication (known as “breadcrumbs”).

A further problem is that the search function for HS codes does not recognise mistyped keywords or keywords that are too long (for example: “lacquor” or “lacquer ware” instead of “lacquer”). It only searches for fragments of valid keywords. This reduces its usefulness. Instead, it should give the "best results" for each query.

The Export Helpdesk does not use many large graphics or other design elements that inflate the digital size of pages. As a result most of the pages have a size that ensures smooth use when navigated through a broadband connection. The largest page in our sample was the results page of the "Statistics" section, which is 65 Kilobytes and has an additional 16 Kilobytes in graphics (which can, however, be cached once they have been loaded).55 This means that the page, ignoring the server-side response to the database query, will load within one second. However, on a slow Internet connection this can take anywhere from 30 seconds to over a minute. This means that on a slow connection, the site cannot be navigated smoothly.56

Part of this is due to the design of the site, but the answer is not necessarily to cut down design elements – as a Stanford University research project found, Internet users evaluate the credibility of a site mainly on the basis of its design.57 The design of the Helpdesk, aside of the fact that the layout does not scale, looks professional. A better solution would be to ensure that the Export Helpdesk can also function well without the design elements, by following accessibility guidelines.

C. Recommendations for increasing accessibility and usability

Our initial review of the Export Helpdesk as regards accessibility and usability has revealed a number of issues where improvements are possible. To find out more, it would be possible to carry out user tests to see how typical users navigate the site and what obstacles they encounter. These tests could be run first using the current design, to see which of its characteristics are good and should be preserved, and then on any proposed redesign.

We may summarise our recommendations as follows:

1. Improve overall site structure/ site layout:
   - Change the layout to allow for scaling

55 The homepage, by contrast, has a size of 7 Kilobytes but has 50 Kilobytes in graphics. Most pages range between 15 and 40 Kilobytes.

56 See Jakob Nielsen’s Alertbox Sidebar: Size Limits for Web Pages.

57 See: Fogg et al: How Do People Evaluate a Web Site’s Credibility? Results from a Large Study.
• Fill in “alt” tags for image files that have a function
• Simplify the navigational structure
• Indicate external links, PDF files and pop-ups through consistent signage
• Ensure that level 1 WCAG criteria are followed and follow level 2 WCAG criteria where possible.

2. **Add new sections:**

• Add an "About Us" section to enhance recognition and credibility
• Add a "Getting Started" section to ease access for first-time visitors (see chapter 4)

3. **Include new navigational features:**

• Include a full text search function for the entire site
• Include breadcrumbs, i.e. small links below the top banner that indicate the location of the page in the overall site hierarchy, as is done on the European Commission’s page. These would take the following form, for example: Europa > Export Helpdesk > Import Tariffs > Results. (When "Results" is the current page, there should be no active link; when a link from the "Results" page is followed, a link to the results for the actual query should ideally be displayed.)
• Increase linkage between the sections. For instance, it is now possible to go from the results page of "Import Tariffs" to the results page of "Statistics" for a product. It should also be possible to go to "Rules of Origin" and "Requirements and Taxes". Going to "Rules of Origin" does not require additional input, and going to "Requirements and Taxes" only requires inputting a country of destination.
• Insert linkage between the detailed results in the "Requirements and Taxes" section. (Include links to the results pages for "General Requirements for All Products" and "Overview" on the results pages for the "Specific Requirements" and the "VAT and Other Duties".)
• Include more page-handling functions for the detailed results pages, located at the top of these pages. Functions could include "print this page" and "email this page". Include the copyright note at the top (see also chapter 3.13)

4. **Make changes to the home page:**

• Change the title of the html document for the home page from "External Trade – Export Helpdesk" to "Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries"
• Include a tagline which explains the site in one or two sentences, for example: “Market access information for exporting to the EU: product requirements, taxes, import tariffs, customs documents, rules of origin, statistics, ...”. Currently the site contains no
description of what it is when it is displayed as a search result. A tagline will help boost its search-engine profile and filter the visitors entering the site.

- Change the text of the site description on the home page so that it communicates the site's functionality in a more concrete way. For example, it should state that the site mainly provides detailed information through database queries. A link to the "Getting Started" section should be included at the end of the description (for example, “For more, see Getting Started”)

5. **Make changes to the robots exclusion standard:**

- The file robots.txt currently keeps Internet bots/spiders off the entire site. This means that no search engine will read information off the site, and that no links can be made beyond the home page. This greatly reduces the site’s search engine profile.

- It is recommended to change the exclusion to a site-specific exclusion included in the html documents where this is desired and removing the robots.txt file, or to exclude only certain directories in the robots.txt file. This does not really increase accessibility or usability on the site itself, but will improve its findability, as many people use search engines to look for specific information, or even specific information on the site itself.

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58 Internet bots/spiders are pieces of software that “crawl” web pages to download them, or pieces of information from them. They are used by search engines to compile pages. Page ranks in search-engine results partially depend on links from other pages. The robots.txt file is a common exclusion standard that tells robots what they can do. Search engines follow this standard.

59 This can be done in html through the no index tag in the document’s head and in the robots.txt file by replacing “Disallow: /” by, say: “Disallow: /thdapp/”, and adding further categories by repeatedly entering “Disallow: /category name/” below).
3.16 Back-end review

A. Introduction

The Export Helpdesk was established as part of the Market Access Unit (MAU) at DG Trade Unit G1, formerly Unit E3. This institutional setting was chosen so as to benefit from the Unit's experience gained in setting up and maintaining the Market Access Database, a portal aimed at assisting European exporters. The Helpdesk staff has grown from just one part-time expert in 2003, so that at the beginning of 2007 there were five officials working as part of the team (three persons full time, one person ¾ and one person working ½ time). The Helpdesk Team is supported by a team of five members of DG Trade A3 Information Technology who are responsible for development and technical support, all of whom also work on other projects at the same time.

The operational and management activities can be broadly classified as:

- internal activities (general coordination of the Helpdesk, content management of the different sections ("Marketplace", "Contact", "Links", "FAQ´s", "User Guide"), contract management with external service providers for promotional material, especially the "Requirements and Taxes" section, quality checks of the "Requirements and Taxes" section)

- external activities (presentations and missions to promote the Helpdesk, networking with other EU services, networking with other multilateral and international organisations, advising other EU services and international organisations on how to built market access databases for developing countries)

The current management structure of Helpdesk management is backed by a steering committee drawn from various departments of DG Trade Units A and G (ex-E). The functions of the Steering Committee are related to general management, programming, annual budgets, objectives and results, solving conflicts concerning data providers and external partners.

An overview of the administrative structure prior to the restructuring of units within DG Trade of the Helpdesk as followed:
Figure 39: Administrative structure of the Helpdesk

**STEERING COMMITTEE**

*Members:*
- Director, TRADE A Resources. Interinstitutional relations and communications policy. Information technology.
- Director, TRADE E Industrial trade issues. Bilateral trade relations II. Market access. Export-related trade policy.
- Head of Unit, TRADE A3 Information technology
- Head of Unit, TRADE E3 Market access strategy. Export Helpdesk for developing countries. Trade relations with USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, EFTA.
- IT project manager, TRADE A3
- Project Manager, TRADE E3
- Policy Officer, TRADE E3
- Policy Officer, TRADE E3
- Policy Officer, TRADE E3

**PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADE A3 Information Technology</th>
<th>TRADE E3 Export Helpdesk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Unit</td>
<td>Head of Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deputy Head of Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Project Manager</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information systems analyst</td>
<td>Policy Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webmaster</td>
<td>Policy Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webmaster</td>
<td>Policy Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local system administrator</td>
<td>Secretarial support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An inter-service network has also been established with other Directorates General (DGs SANCO, ENTR, TAXUD, AGRI, ENV, FISH, etc.) endorsing questions received in the Contact section.

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60 The following administrative structure reflect the structure valid at the beginning the evaluation and prior to the re-organisation of DG TRADE
A further steering committee has been set up for the current evaluation of the Helpdesk composed of representatives from DG Trade, namely from the Information Technology Unit and a representative of the evaluation function. This committee also includes representatives of other Commission services such as DG Health and Consumer Protection and one representative from DG Taxation and Customs Union.

B. Administration management processes, information sources and the Export Helpdesk

The responsibilities of the Helpdesk team include the implementation, maintenance, promotion, and information management of the online tool:

- General coordination of the Helpdesk (programming, budgeting, communication strategy, missions planning, distribution of tasks, and any other management documents);
- Convening and administering the Helpdesk steering committee meetings;
- Management of third-party sub-contractors and quality control responsibilities for activities transferred to them;
- Management of the “Marketplace”, and “Link” section, as well as updating of the FAQ/User Guide and of documents in the “Customs Documents” as need arises;
- Responding to requests from various stakeholders from developing countries as submitted through the mailbox (“Contact” section);
- Continued development of the “Links” section with food quality standards, fair trade;
- Language review of content being translated into French, Spanish and Portuguese;
- Organisation of communications and marketing initiatives for the Helpdesk including mailing of brochures, participation and presentation in seminars, workshops, conferences and symposia relevant for information dissemination of the Helpdesk;
- Networking with other EC services and programmes as well as multilateral and international organisations to extend cooperation and facilitate linkages;
- Exchange of information with other Commission services and delegations in third countries as well as business support organisations;
- Continued development of presentations for different target groups.

The Helpdesk team is thus currently directly responsible for the content management of the “Marketplace” and “Links” sections and the FAQ, and for the management of the Helpdesk
mailbox. For the operational and content management of the other sections ("Import Tariffs", "Trade Statistics", "Customs Documents", "Rules of Origin"; see chapter 1.2) the team coordinates its activities with other departments of DG Trade and the Commission’s Services as a whole.

The IT Unit of DG Trade is in charge of system developments and of technical coherence of the data included in the Helpdesk.

Currently, DG Trade has contracts with five different contractors:

- The database behind the “Requirements and Taxes” section has been outsourced to Taric-Mendel from 2004 to 2006, and Taric from 2007 to 2009;

- A package including provision of promotional materials and mailing lists, the calendar of events, promotional brochures, and short articles published in different languages has been delivered by ESN;

- MOSTRA has been instrumental in the design of the Helpdesk database, and the design of different promotion materials;

- IGEP has provided various promotional material like lanyards, shopping bags and mouse pads which the team uses to promote the Helpdesk worldwide;

- OPOCE is responsible for the printing of the promotional material.

As regards information sources and flows, one part of the Helpdesk’s services draws exclusively on data from internal sources of the European Commission. These are the “Import Tariffs”, “Customs Documents”, “Rules of Origin” and “Trade Statistics”. For these sections, information is retrieved directly from the competent Directorate General or service. The other sections draw on information obtained from external sources, which are partly processed by the Helpdesk team (see above) or one of the external service providers.

The graph below displays the typical information sources and flows involved with the maintenance of the Export Helpdesk.
C. Requirements and Taxes

One of the latter is the “Requirements and Taxes” section. It was introduced as part of a relaunch of the service in June 2005, which entailed a substantial enlargement of the Helpdesk. It contains the most comprehensive of the databases that are actually hosted by the portal itself. Data concerning EU and member states’ import requirements and internal taxes published here is obtained not only from the Official Journal of the European Commission, but also from a host of external sources (e.g., member states’ publications of record). Given the amount of work and the specialist know-how required to research and process data as well as to edit the articles, DG Trade has tendered this service out to an external provider.

The contracts with the past and current contractor to supply information for the “Requirements and Taxes” section run for periods of three years (e.g., 2004 to 2006, and 2007 to 2009) and over these six years have a total value of approximately Euros 2.4 million. The data management of the section consequently represents a considerable cost for DG Trade. However, the European Commission demands high standards of the information contracted for the “Requirements and Taxes” sections, which only few potential contractors are capable of fulfilling. During the second period of tender, the cost of this service has fallen by almost 30%.

It is true that, in terms of financial commitment, the “Requirements and Taxes” section consumes a significant budgetary contribution on the part of DG Trade but generally speaking, it is recognised by Helpdesk users as representing good value for money. The fact that the “Requirements and Taxes” section scores highest in importance for users in the online survey underscores this assessment. In simple economic terms, it is arguably more cost-effective to sub-contract the procurement of these information requirements rather than for the DG Trade to attempt to achieve the required standards in-house. Outsourcing this part of the service does, however, bring with it a number of disadvantages. For one, the service provider owns the copyright of the database, which makes cooperation with other...
services on content complicated or even impossible, as proved to be the case a couple of years ago. Over and above that, at the end of each contract period, there will be a transition period during which the database has to be rebuilt completely. This prolongs the usual interval of updating of two months, and may thus compromise the up-to-dateness of the service.

The “Requirements and Taxes” database was built-up progressively during the period 2004-2006 by the Taric-Mendel consortium. At the expiry of the contract, the data remained the property of the contractor according to the copyright notice included in the service contract (special conditions). An agreement was reached that the existing database would remain accessible online until the relaunch through the new service provider. The current contractor had to rebuild the datastock within a time span of six months starting in January 2007.

The expertise and resources required on the part of the contractors involved in preparing this information would seem to be significant. The Helpdesk team applies quality verification procedures before approving new or revised datasets for this information. An efficient content management system via an administration and public website is used to this end. The secure administration web site provides the contractor with facilities for delivering and checking required information. This dataset is uploaded to the administration web site hosted by DG Trade and undergoes an automated quality check and a human quality check performed by Commission officials before being published.

A typical workflow leading to successful dataset delivery is:

- the data provider attempts to upload a dataset;
- the admin web site checks the dataset (automated checking), in the case of non-compliance, it provides a feedback with the reason(s) for failure;
- the contractor fixes the dataset and attempts a new upload;
- if the upload was successful this time, the dataset becomes available in the draft area;
- the contractor previews the dataset in the draft area;
- if satisfied, the contractor submits the dataset to the Commission (the dataset is then transferred to the submitted area);
- the content administrator in the Helpdesk team checks the dataset (human checking);
- in the case of incongruities in the content, the content administrator alerts the service provider, who then revises the dataset as necessary, and uploads it once more;
- if satisfied, the content administrator accepts the dataset;
- the dataset is now in the production area and visible to the general public.

Although at first sight the processes may appear to be complicated, they do guarantee reliability of the data which is checked and proofread by a second person at various stages.
D. **Contact Section and Marketplace**

Some typical indicators over the last two years show how user interest towards the Helpdesk has increased. In 2005, the mailbox available under “Contact”, where users can submit individual information requests, received on average 120-140 questions per month; in 2006 the number of requests increased by 15 % (140 to 160 per month). Were the rate of increase to remain constant, this would imply an average of 160 to 180 for 2007, and for 2008 an average of 185 to 205 requests per month.

It may be assumed that if the "Contact" section is more prominently placed, and the website in general becomes increasingly used (see also chapter 3.11, website traffic growth of more than 200% in the last two years), one might expect an increased usage of the "Contact" section by more than 30 %.

The time needed to deal with the incoming enquiries varies from case to case, as questions may be highly intricate, and cover a wide range of topics.

The management of the contact section already takes up a considerable part of working time in the Helpdesk team. Current capacities are unlikely to prove sufficient to deal with a much larger stream of questions than that currently coming in. Even a simple extrapolation of service uptake through the website traffic of the last three years indicates a proportional increase of mailbox entries by far exceeding the current capacities of the team. Moreover, it seems that the quality and timeliness of responses is rather variable (see also chapter 3.10).

Assuming that the requests are increasing in number and complexity, several ways of servicing this demand are possible:

- Automation of answers through an intelligent knowledge management system slowly developed over time through the Helpdesk team which is capable of providing multi-client answers (FAQ is already a first step);
- Securing additional resources for the project by increasing the number of staff members with capabilities on export requirements;
- Outsourcing the mailbox service, assuming that an external service provider is operating already a similar system with which the service could be associated.

It has been agreed that an appropriate market analysis should be carried out to define the best operational methods in case the service keeps growing.

When considering alternatives, it should be remembered that the incoming enquiries provide valuable feedback as to the needs and problems of the Helpdesk’s users. Users have different backgrounds regarding (trade) culture, purposes of use, and capacities. Even now, communication with users is limited; meeting their interests without being in touch with them at all will be still more difficult.
A similar development in use of the service may be observed in the case of the “Marketplace” section, where the team is responsible for the entire administration, including checking that all mandatory information has been submitted and remains current (securing the quality and reliability of offers and requests is beyond the Helpdesk’s resources). In 2006, the “Marketplace” received an average of 90-100 offers and requests per month; in 2005, by contrast, this figure had been less than 80 to 90 offers and requests per month. One option here would again be to outsource maintenance.

E. Worktime and responsibilities

An approximate assessment of the daily tasks of the Helpdesk team is given in the following table:

Figure 41: Snapshot of allocation of tasks of the Helpdesk Team (07.02.2007)

Highlighted in Blue: Activities involving a large share of worktime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Head of Team</th>
<th>Team Member</th>
<th>Team Member</th>
<th>Team Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General coordination of the Helpdesk and the Helpdesk Team</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of service contracts (TARIC, ESN, MOSTRA, IGEP) (^{61})</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To control/check stock of promotion material monitoring and coordinate the distribution of promotion material to main partners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange of information with other Commission services and delegations in third countries</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of the &quot;Links&quot;, &quot;GSP&quot; and &quot;FAQ&quot; sections</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of the &quot;Marketplace&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of the &quot;Contact&quot; section (see above)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Helpdesk information displayed in the Trade-EC Delegations intranet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building networking with other EC Services</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building networking with other multilateral and international</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{61}\) Seeing as contracting accounts for about 55% of one staff, this would be an issue to be discussed when looking at possible synergies in the management of the MADB and Helpdesk (see Note on Synergies between MADB and EH).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Head of Team</th>
<th>Team Member</th>
<th>Team Member</th>
<th>Team Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>organisations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of the Helpdesk</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising other EC services and international organisations on how to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>build market access databases for developing countries</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Window Task Force</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations/Missions to promote the Helpdesk <em>(see below)</em></td>
<td>10% (ES)</td>
<td>20% (FR)</td>
<td>15% (PT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefings/ Press releases</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of all documents translated</td>
<td>10% (ES)</td>
<td>5% (FR)</td>
<td>5% (PT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The time spent on certain tasks is highly varied owing to the diverse nature of the Helpdesk sections and the different backgrounds of the team members. A major portion of the Helpdesk team's workload comes from the promotional and networking activities of the Helpdesk (more than 50% according to the head of the team); the management of the mailbox and “Contact” section (15 – 25%, depending on the person); quality checks of the "Requirement and Taxes" section; and language review of web content for all three additional languages (up to 20% overall).

Currently, the Helpdesk – as the most publicly visible element of the facilitation of developing country exports – has been relatively well supported in terms of both financial and human resources placed at the disposal of the Helpdesk team. The operational and management resources which the site requires have to be divided between providing general information to developing country exporters on the website, and responding to individual requests submitted from the "Contact" section.

The thorough quality check on updates to the "Requirements and Taxes" database takes up a significant amount of worktime. This would seem justified in order to warrant reliability, however.

Assuming that the Helpdesk team remains responsible for all the functions involved in the operation and running of the Helpdesk, such as the management of the online service, information-gathering, acting as a contact point for EU market access issues, marketing the Helpdesk, and coordination with Directorate Generals, EC delegations and other interested parties, the basic service approach can only be sustained at the current level by adding additional resources.
F. Promotion, awareness raising and networking operations improving the outreach of the Export Helpdesk

Over the last years, the Helpdesk team has undertaken intensive efforts to promote the Helpdesk. In cooperation with other EC services and donors, the level of awareness of the Helpdesk has been increased considerably, both inside and outside the EU.

Promotion and awareness-raising operations of the Export Helpdesk take three different forms. The first is presentations or tours given in Europe by the Export Helpdesk team. The second is in-situ promotion performed by the Export Helpdesk team, either at specially organised meetings or in more general forums. The third is promotion through regional contacts or EU organisations, the materials for which are provided by the Helpdesk team (see chapter 3.11). So far, the service has been promoted inter alia through: (1) EC (and other donors) programmes targeting the private sector in developing countries (Asia Invest, ALInvest, ProInvest, ESIPP), (2) Europe Direct (managed by DG COMM), (3) Euro Info Centres (the responsibility of DG Enterprise and Industry); (4) AIDCO “Cooperation Info Point” in Brussels; (5) other websites creating direct links to the Helpdesk in external websites and other EC services, and (6) external and internal newsletters.

A number of promotional materials have been developed in cooperation with an external service provider (see above), including brochures, lanyards, pens, rulers etc. A stock list of promotional items for recent years show a tremendous demand for brochures and other promotional material, especially by EC delegations in developing countries.

Recent promotional activities have concentrated on the ACP region, with a focus on the Sub Sahara region and Asian LDCs, and have taken the shape of cooperation with DG Trade departments responsible for the EPA and the ASEAN FTAs. The Helpdesk is also promoted through events in Brussels and third countries.

In addition, cooperations with relevant international organisations (UNCTAD, OECD, FAO, ITC, UNESCAP, SAARC, Commonwealth Secretariat, OIF, ILO, ISO; CEN and others) have been initiated. These cooperations may consist of supplying the partner with Helpdesk presentation slides; incorporation of the Helpdesk in the partner's training materials and presentations; the exchange of logos and links for display on both homepages, and exchange of promotional materials. In some cases, follow-up on these cooperations does not seem to have been consistent, leading to contacts not being pursued beyond the initial cooperation request. The time available for networking may be a problem here. Currently, each member of the Helpdesk team takes on one or several work packages in awareness-raising. Such activities may take a back seat as compared to the maintenance of the service. For this reason, it seems advisable to devote the organisation of such cooperations and promotional networking to one staff member, whose work time would concentrate on awareness raising and networking to a greater degree. Further, it seems worthwhile keeping an overview of presentations given by network partners, to document promotion and assess its impact.

Besides giving presentations in target countries themselves, Helpdesk staff engage in networking with relevant EC programmes and international or multilateral organisations, where local staff in the respective countries can engage in more frequent promotional
activity. According to annual reports and promotion strategy notes, some 100 presentations of the Helpdesk are being facilitated and held in person around the world each year.

When evaluating the list of events, it becomes evident that the Helpdesk team began its promotional activities mainly in Europe and extended them gradually, targeting international and multilateral organisations as well as local bodies responsible for export promotion and EU market access. Presentations are now also given in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, mostly to the private sector or business support organisations.

So far, Helpdesk staff have mainly followed invitations from the hosts of the various events, who had often been involved in some sort of cooperation with the Helpdesk before. The impact of such one-off events, however, does not appear to be sustainable, as the analysis of website traffic shows. As the example of Peru shows, a local network of multipliers carrying out promotion at certain intervals yields longer-lasting effects. It would therefore be worthwhile considering concentrating on a specified target region for a certain period of time. Personal presentations could thus be combined with the establishment of a formal network of multipliers in the target region. This network would follow up on promotion subsequently, thereby ensuring a higher level of sustainability.

Selecting the right European and international events on the basis of numbers of participants as well as the mixture of intermediaries and SME’s might be the key to promoting the Helpdesk in the future. For example, the Cape CONNECT Africa 2006 seems to have had a significant impact largely as a result of the participation of more than 50 business support organisations such as Chambers of Commerce and trade associations from the region and Europe. Other events focussing on sector specific SME trade fairs might be less relevant for the Helpdesk team, given their limited human and financial resources.

The impact of these efforts is hard to ascertain. As the expert interviews have shown, the Helpdesk is still largely unknown to a large number of relevant institutions, programmes and intermediaries as well as to the final beneficiary enterprises and industry. In addition, the follow-up and outcome of formal cooperations with international agencies in the light of an impact assessment remains unclear. The question remains therefore, whether other means of promotion, or more of the same, would be best suited to making the Helpdesk known to a wider audience of current and potential developing country exporters.

A detailed assessment of the cost effectiveness of the Helpdesk would however be feasible only if it were benchmarked towards similar services and/or if impact indicators were used (e.g. value of money of one long term user, steady increase of usage due to partnering effort of promotion in one country). Furthermore, assessing cost efficiency and short and long-term impact of the Helpdesk on developing country trade can also present problems arising from the complexity of isolating the Helpdesk's contribution from the entire range of possible contributing factors, such as other national programmes, national reforms or external changes. Thus, attributing a result to Helpdesk activity remains a challenge.

Peru is among the 10 countries with the highest use of the service, see chapter 3.11.
G. Findings along a SWOT - Pattern

The Helpdesk team has made significant improvements in the course of implementing the Helpdesk thus facilitating export by developing countries. Its major strengths as identified during discussions with the team, the steering committee as well as stakeholders are:

- The Helpdesk team is highly dedicated to carry the Helpdesk further;
- There is strong internal competence on legal market access issues inside the team;
- The international network initiated within a short time span has resulted in an increased visibility of the instrument;
- Management of the mailbox has over the years created a knowledge base, which is reflected inter alia in the FAQ.
- Helpdesk staff are flexible and demand-oriented in improving and changing content and outputs (FAQ, User Guide, Multi-lingual website).

The following weaknesses were identified during the back end analysis:

- The number of team members is fairly small for the provision of the timely and very relevant instrument, and are unlikely to have the resources of coping with the expected uptake of the online service.
- As no indicators have been identified as yet, impact assessment remains difficult.
- Knowledge of the target group and their informational needs appears to be limited. In the process to date, it seems that no prioritisation of target groups has been undertaken nor have their needs been assessed in a systematic and comprehensive manner on the basis of a stakeholder analysis.
- Follow-up of networking initiatives seems to have been inconsistent in some cases, i.e. first contact did not result in further communication. This may be due to time constraints and a split-up of responsibilities between staff.

However, the following opportunities can be identified:

- Building on cooperation with relevant intermediaries can increase support and impact significantly. Intermediaries are a major target group, and potentially powerful promoters and multipliers of the Helpdesk in developing countries.
- Regular feedback from users, user profile analysis and the results of steering committee and stakeholder dialogues could be used to continuously improve the service and obtain feedback and assessments.
- Financial and human resources investment during the first start up phase (e.g. development of the “Requirement and Taxes” database in 2004 to 2006; knowledge gained through the mailbox service which is embedded in the FAQ) may now be expected to bear first fruits that can be built upon, requiring less investment but resulting into more impact oriented activities.
• Potential for replication of the instrument to other countries: As a side effect of the successful implementation of the Helpdesk, other international initiatives on market access internet instruments have approached the team for advice on the lessons learned during the start up and initial running phase of the Helpdesk.

The following risks for future management of the Helpdesk are also worthy of consideration:

• Loss of cooperation success and internally gained knowledge due to fluctuation in staff is a general danger but one which particularly affects small teams with specialised knowledge and experience.

• Dependence on a provider with a high overall cost for a high quality service. An analysis is needed as to whether these costs can be further reduced in the future, for instance as a result of the incremental increase of information on "Requirements and Taxes". The copyright will in any case limit the power of disposal over the data, as will each change of service provider.

• An increased demand for and uptake of certain sections ("Contact", "Marketplace", "Links") without adequate resources to respond

H. Conclusion

Assuming that the Helpdesk team remains responsible for all the functions involved in the operation and running of the Helpdesk and the forecasted user demand takes up, the service can only be sustained at the current level by adding additional financial and human resources. This could be in the form of further internal staff members, or of outsourcing the management of further services, such as the “Marketplace” and the mailbox.

As regards the mailbox, the current situation sees most of the team take weekly turns in answering information requests. If outsourced, only one team member would be needed in addition to the experts in the Directorate Generals to ensure the back-up that is needed to maintain levels of quality and accuracy.

This question should be examined not only with a view to cost-effectiveness, however. Outsourcing the service would involve a loss of valuable information about user needs and their expectations. If it were outsourced, the momentum which comes from close contact with the target group might be lost.

Three years after its first launch, the Export Helpdesk has become a full-fledged online service that is appreciated by an increasing number of regular users. Its impact, as well as that of awareness raising activities remains difficult to assess, however, as no target setting has taken place up to now. The aim should be to make results measurable, and to adopt a collaborative, results-based management approach. This would allow clear, realistic and measurable programme objectives to be defined, which could be translated into expected outcomes and required output, as well as timetables for implementation and costing. The objectives should be agreed upon by the steering committee and relevant stakeholders, in line with, or linked to, the policy framework as stipulated in the Commission communication.
Taking this as the starting point, as set of adequate qualitative, and where possible quantitative, indicators for output, outcome and impact levels could then be developed. This would help monitoring to move beyond descriptive reporting.

In second instance, such a monitoring system could also be used to improve communications with networking and promotion partners, including more regular reporting from the countries about the presentations given and usage of promotional material and the Export Helpdesk. Success stories on EU market access from third countries could be used for improved marketing of the services and to encourage more input from and usage by associations and enterprises from developing countries.

The evaluation has revealed that the Helpdesk is still largely unknown among its stakeholders. Therefore, we recommend that promotion be given more importance, relying particularly on the establishment of an active network of promotion cooperations and linkings.

As regards organisation and resource allocation, it would seem helpful (1) to bundle and increase resources for awareness-raising and promotion activities; and (2) to set priorities, e.g. on a certain region or target group, for certain periods of time.

On (1), as has been set out above, for purely organisational reasons it is advisable to assign the organisational part of promotion to one staff member. This would include for instance the organisation (not necessarily the delivery) of presentations; promotion-related networking/cooperations; communication with promotion-related service providers; and the development of a distribution plan for promotional materials.

On (2), with a view to optimising the use of resources, promotional efforts should be concentrated for a certain time on particular regions or target groups. This would serve to develop customised promotion strategies, and allow more time to be invested in the initial phase of partnership building; once the cooperation has been consolidated the time investment entailed would then decrease.

Our understanding has been that promotional efforts have had better results when channelled through regional programmes, such as AsiaInvest and ALInvest. Once certain promotion routines have become established (for instance through regular integration of presentations by local staff in programme events), such a network can be highly cost-efficient, ensure feedback on the service from user groups, and enhance inter-agency cooperation within the Commission. A wider network of multipliers should first target EC delegations and relevant trade promotion and development co-operation programmes of the EU Commission as well as trade organisations with a worldwide network of offices (e.g. EuroChambres); this should also help enhance effectiveness.

Some further ideas regarding networking and cooperating are given in the following:

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Targeting direct beneficiaries, e.g. private trade associations, can lead to better results, as some associations have a better track record in providing and disseminating trade-related information than do government agencies. We also highlight the importance of carefully selecting networking partners and designing activities with a view to achieving better results. Partners should, for example, have adequate background knowledge and be expected to use the expertise acquired in their future work.

Promotion of the Helpdesk could be coupled with training of local intermediaries, who could then in turn act as multipliers (training of trainers). One interviewee suggested establishing twinning partnerships between more experienced EC delegation staff and other cooperation partners and intermediaries for an initial learning phase. On the whole, cooperating with European, international and NGO intermediary organisations (via EC delegations as multipliers) would seem highly suited to providing accounts of typical export strategies.

It may be useful to create incentives for EC delegation staff and to hold regular co-ordination meetings in Brussels. A project manager in charge of an EC delegation Economic Advice desk could undertake a typical activity in which it has a comparative advantage and demonstrate how to ensure that the activity is coherent with (or builds on) other in-the-field activities or programmes – this could encourage others to pursue a more consistent collective approach to the Helpdesk.

The Helpdesk team could further improve the visibility of the Helpdesk through partnering arrangements between the European Commission and EU and local trade associations in developing countries.

Consideration should be given to the use of pro-active electronic communication services to report EU market access issues and actions to interested parties in developing countries. Newsletters and similar media would further increase the database of users and provide a platform for the Helpdesk team to report on success stories and other high-profile actions undertaken within the Helpdesk.

Cooperation and synergies with upcoming new instruments (ENPI and DCI 2007-2013), should be established while these are still in the making. ENPI (European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument) and DCI (Development Cooperation Instrument) provide support on development policy and all forms of cooperation with developing countries and countries in transition to what is basically the same target audience as the Helpdesk.] The Helpdesk should envisage participating in the upcoming inter-service consultation meetings to embed the Helpdesk in successor programmes of Asia Invest and others.

Another approach could be to focus on small and medium enterprises (SME) as a target group. In almost every third country, official mechanisms exist that are designed to improve access to information for small businesses. These can take the form of a national database made available to business associations as well as official advisory services and covering regulation, particularly tax, company registration and property. Such databases also frequently cover advice about exporting, licensing etc., as well as information on business support programmes and incentives. One specific support service for SME with a wide reach is the network of Subcontracting and Partnership...
Exchanges (SPXs) supported by UNIDO. These act as centres for technical information, matchmaking and promotion as well as clearing houses for subcontracting and partnership enquiries and opportunities. Members and associate members of the SPX network can be found in many transition economies. Other possible targets for introducing the Helpdesk in developing countries include specialist organisations such as business centres, NGO training organisations, technology transfer bodies, incubators and science parks, and sector organisations.
3.17 **Key findings of the evaluation**

The following summary of the key findings of the investigation is arranged according to the questions that guided the evaluation (see chapter 1.3). Where applicable, reference to a more detailed discussion of an item is indicated, to allow the reader to read up on specific issues. Chapter 4 presents a set of practical recommendations derived from the findings indicated here.

### Usefulness

- Across all major user groups, a large proportion of people consult the Helpdesk several times a week. This shows the degree to which they find the service useful (see chapter 3.11).
- Users' overall rating of the services and functions of the Helpdesk is very positive (21% "excellent", 50% "good", 13% "could be improved", 1% "poor") (see chapter 3.12).
- The majority of the interviewed experts agree that the Helpdesk is a very useful information source for intermediaries and importers; several of them however state that it is more of an expert tool, and too demanding for exporters (see chapter 3.12).
- Usefulness strongly relates to user-friendliness, and therefore depends on the capacity of the user. Exporters in developing countries often face particular problems in using the service, but also in interpreting the information they retrieve. To make the Helpdesk a helpful service for exporters who are inexperienced in the export business, enhancing user-friendliness clearly has to be given first priority (see below).

### Completeness

- All in all, the Export Helpdesk is a comprehensive source of information on legal and customs provisions, and it is appreciated as such by the users and experts consulted in the investigation (see chapter 3.12).
- Regarding the scope of contents, several users and experts state that trade in services is missing and should be added (see chapter 3.12).
- The most comprehensive section, "Requirements and Taxes", has been improved since the beginning of the evaluation. Information concerning the various items is indicated, and references to key external sources (e.g. relevant web-pages of other DGs) are comprehensive. The section is particularly helpful for food and agriproducts, as well as textiles, three highly complex sectors in terms of legal requirements and customs regulations. The large proportion of users from these sectors shows that the quality service is indeed made use of (see chapters 3.1, 3.11).
- Provisions on the products themselves are generally well covered. What is, however, often lacking is information on specific requirements for components as well as on specific packaging. Examples would be safety requirements for buttons and packaging that is in direct contact with foodstuffs. Issues requiring further consideration such as
these differ from one sector to another, so that it would seem advisable to involve more sector competence in the maintenance of the "Requirements and Taxes" section. This could be done in cooperation with other Directorate Generals, such as DG ENTR and DG SANCO (see chapter 3.1).

- Voluntary standards are another item which deserving of coverage in greater detail. To date, the product-specific requirements only list European harmonised standards under the New Approach Directives, plus information for products from organic production. Several experts and users stated of their own accord that greater attention should be paid to technical standards, but also to social and environmental standards (see chapter 3.1).

- The "Trade statistics" section is particularly appreciated for the wealth of information offered. A few users and/or experts suggested that analyses of market trends and trade in statistics be included; but seen overall, both experts and users agree that this is a strong service (see chapter 3.5).

- The "Events" section, by contrast, is far from being satisfactory at the moment; currently, it covers the ongoing month, and even for this very short time-span, the list of events is incomplete, as is the information provided for each event (see chapter 3.9).

**User-Friendliness**

User-friendliness is a crucial quality for any online service. As most users do not have the possibility of getting immediate support when they encounter a problem, many will simply abandon the service altogether.

What user-friendliness means for the Helpdesk depends on the user group concerned. When defining the benchmark for user-friendliness it is important to identify the Helpdesk’s target users and their needs and capacities.

For users who are export business literate, the Export Helpdesk is an excellent source of information because it allows for systematic investigation of legal and customs requirements and import regulations by product. Skilled users can simply enter a product code and read up on what they need. They may feel that it would be desirable to be able to transfer the product code from one section to another by mouse-click, thus avoiding the need to reselect or copy and paste it, but apart from such niceties for enhancing website usability, they will be happy with the way the information is provided.

Hopeful exporters visiting the Helpdesk for the first time who succeed in identifying their product code under "Import Tariffs", are faced with "Erga omnes" under the heading "Origin". If they are not acquainted with the concept of origin, the information that follows will be useless to them. They may retrieve Form A for the GSP from the "Customs Documents" section, but will not be advised there that they will have to procure further regular documentation (the SAD) in addition.

There may be more and better examples. The point is that if the Export Helpdesk is to serve such inexperienced exporters as well as it does intermediaries or EU-based importers, user-friendliness is not just an added value to the service of compiling otherwise dispersed information. It is in itself half the service.
This, too, is an assessment many experts agree on, and one that is decisive for the Helpdesk’s usefulness (at least to inexperienced exporters). Several interviewees held that the Helpdesk is an excellent tool for intermediaries and importers who are familiar with the EU market and import conditions in general. They consider, however, that it requires too much prior knowledge on technical and legal matters to be of much use to exporters. That this appraisal does not always hold true can be seen from the user survey. But the notion that the Helpdesk should offer more guidance is confirmed by other findings, and is a core message of this evaluation.

- The systematic approach is very useful for skilled visitors, but it constitutes a challenge to inexperienced users, as they are largely on their own when it comes to combining the various pieces of the jigsaw. Advice is needed on how to understand and use the retrieved information, such as offering background information on import conditions and procedures. This should not take the form of a pdf-document as is the case with the current User Guide, but rather the form of a new section. It was also suggested that sample cases be developed to show first-comers how an exporter should proceed when gathering and using information (see chapters 3.1, 3.2, 3.12).

- The current product code selection procedure is time-consuming, and often great uncertainty remains as to whether the correct code has been identified. Several users reported encountering problems with the classification of their products, and the sample queries demonstrate that search results can be ambiguous for a number of reasons (see Supplementary Note).

- According to a majority of experts and users, the sections are well-designed and ease of use is maintained. Some others maintain that the structure of the sections takes a type-of-information approach which does not accommodate the fact that users search by product and country. It would be a better solution to provide one overall result covering all sections by product.

- Help as provided in the User Guide illustrates use of the Helpdesk quite well; this is also the prevalent view amongst users and interviewees. Because of its current position and the fact that it is a large pdf-document it is, however, little used in practice; instructions are therefore needed in the sections (see chapter 3.8).

- The vast majority of users and interviewees agree that the overall layout is well-designed and clear. A few features could however be improved to comply with website accessibility and usability standards. Most importantly, the website currently does not scale to different screen resolutions and the site should not feature flashing links, as these are irritating and can represent a danger to people prone to seizures (see Chapter 3.15).

- Research using the Helpdesk can become highly time-consuming, especially when involving a product code search, but also because of the amount and complexity of information available. A free-text (or keyword) based search function would enhance usability significantly in this respect (see Supplementary Note and chapter 3.15).
Up-to-dateness

The notion of what is up-to-date for the Helpdesk varies between sections and user groups. In the “Customs Documents” and “Rules of Origin” sections, up-to-dateness is not a high priority as the rate at which relevant provisions change is low. For the “Import Tariffs” section, however, it is a key quality of the service. Likewise, the perception of up-to-dateness is closely linked to the purpose underlying research. For training purposes, it may be sufficient to obtain the current state of provisions, planning for concrete export transactions on the other hand requires a more precise perspective on upcoming changes.

The key findings may be said to be as follows.

- Especially experts hold that up-to-dateness is another of the Helpdesk’s key qualities. Like interviewees, users agree that the information in most sections is up-to-date (see chapters 3.1, 3.2).

- The “Trade Statistics” are to some extent an exception to this finding. As the data delivered by Comext are aggregated by year, statistics on any given year will be supplied some time in spring of the following year. Data from the beginning of that year will by that time be some 15 months old. This is perceived as the weak point of an otherwise very valuable source of statistical information (see chapter 3.5).

- As stated above, planning for export involves greater time spans. A number of interviewees indicated that being up-to-date should mean offering a more future-oriented service on regulations, taxes and tariffs. Forthcoming changes on any of these items should be announced prior to their coming into effect. This could be accomplished in the form of a news alert, newsletter or news section, or by highlighting such information in the section (see 3.1).

- Taxes and requirements are currently updated twice and three times a year respectively. If changes have taken place in the meantime the results which users obtain will be outdated, and thus perhaps inaccurate indications. If it is unfeasible to update the section more often, this again would strengthen the case for taking a future-oriented approach and notifying users of forthcoming changes. Moreover, it suggests that the last update of information on the Helpdesk should be indicated for each section where up-to-dateness is crucial (cf. chapter 3.1).

- Perceived up-to-dateness partly depends on what is communicated about the date of information provided. A few experts reported that entries in the marketplace are partially outdated, and the survey reveals a slightly greater degree of uncertainty (“not able to assess”) and even of negative criticism (“not/ mostly not up-to-date”) than for the other sections. This may be due to the fact that, until recently, the launch date of advertisements was not displayed in the section. Once more, indicating the date of the most recent up-date would be advisable, not least with a view to increasing credibility (see chapter 3.6).

Reliability

Reliability is an "across the board" quality in that it is an issue that can be affected by up-to-dateness, accuracy or completeness, depending on the kind of information concerned.
As a service of the European Commission, the Export Helpdesk enjoys very high credibility; users expect information procured by the Helpdesk to be reliable.

The main results regarding reliability are:

- In our experience, information on legal provisions, taxes and tariffs is indeed predominantly reliable. The constraint here concerns, on the one hand, isolated pieces of outdated information as indicated above. On the other hand, the Helpdesk partially suggests that it is complete and comprehensive, where this is not entirely the case: (1) the section headings “Customs Documents” and “Rules of Origin” raise the expectation that the customs documentation and rules of origin will be included in their entirety (not just those relating to preferential duty treatment); (2) requirements for product components or product-specific packaging are not, or not fully, covered; (3) the Helpdesk does not yet sufficiently allow for voluntary standards (technical, social, ecological), although information on harmonised standards suggests that standards are covered in general. Each of these points has also been independently raised by one or several interviewees or users. Regarding the issue of up-to-dateness, if “real-time” updating is not possible, it would be advisable to indicate the most recent information update so as to ensure reliability. Highlighting changes in regulations and taxes prior to their entry into force would, however, be a better solution (see above). Where the Export Helpdesk does not provide full information because this would go beyond its scope, users should be advised of this (see chapters 3.1, 3.3, 3.4).

- Accuracy of information for the “Requirements and Taxes” section is ensured by the Helpdesk team through a thorough quality check. For the “Import Tariffs” and “Trade Statistics”, it is warranted by the original sources of information within the EC Commission. It is not ensured for the “Marketplace” section, however, where no verification of entries currently takes place. While liability is ruled out by the disclaimer, this constitutes a threat to the Helpdesk’s reputation (see chapters 3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 3.6).

User profiles and usage patterns (see chapter 3.11)

- The Export Helpdesk is most used in South America, Southern Asia and in the EU itself. In terms of individual countries, use is particularly high in Peru and India.

- While total user figures are lower in Africa and the Middle East, when seen as a proportion of internet users they are in fact higher. This said, awareness-raising in Africa should be given particular attention, as the upward trend in website traffic is not as marked as for the other regions, and is concentrated in North Africa and the Republic of South Africa.

- The Helpdesk is most used by industry, intermediaries, and government officials. While producers represent the largest user group in total, the share of users who consult the Helpdesk very frequently is higher for importers than for other user groups. Together with the high level of use within the EU, it would appear that importers cooperating with producers from developing countries constitute a fairly large user group of the Export Helpdesk.

- Seen in terms of sectors, more users come from the agrifood, textiles, and services/consultancy sectors than from any of the others. Otherwise, use is fairly evenly spread out over all sectors.
• The three sections that are most important to users, and which account for most website traffic, are “Requirements and Taxes”, “Trade Statistics” and “Marketplace”, followed by “Import Tariffs”.

**Awareness-raising and promotion**

• Awareness-raising should be made a focus of attention. The investigation has shown that the Helpdesk is still largely unknown amongst its potentially large audience. Even professionals in the export business, such as the staff of chambers of commerce in developing countries, had frequently not heard of the Export Helpdesk prior to our interview request. After becoming acquainted with the tool, most of them stated they would use it more often from now on. The same message was received occasionally through the offline survey.

• Most users (about 43%) got to know the Export Helpdesk through searching the internet. Intermediary organisations, presentations, newsletters and personal networks have approximately the same share in promoting the website (approximately between 13 and 17%). This suggests that systematic linking with trade-related websites would be an effective means of improving take-up rates (see chapter 3.11).

• One-off presentations in a given region have resulted only in temporary increases in use, according to website traffic. Use of the Helpdesk rises more sustainably in countries where an active network of multipliers enables continuous promotion of the Helpdesk (see chapter 3.11).

• Use of the internet as a source of information seems to vary between user groups and regions. Thus, in Asia more people tend to use online resources to investigate market access issues than in Africa. A few experts state that in Africa, oral communication enjoys a higher level of trust. Cultural differences regarding communication should therefore be taken into account in awareness-raising (see chapter 3.11).

**Backend-review (see chapter 3.16)**

• The number of team members is fairly small for the provision of the timely and very relevant instrument, and are unlikely to have the resources of coping with the expected uptake of the online service.

• Three years after its first launch, the Export Helpdesk has become a full-fledged online service that is appreciated by an increasing number of regular users. Its impact, as well as that of awareness raising activities remains difficult to assess, however, as no target setting has taken place up to now. The aim should be to make results measurable, and to adopt a collaborative, results-based management approach. In second instance, such a monitoring system could also be used to improve communications with networking and promotion partners, including more regular reporting from the countries about the presentations given and usage of promotional material and the Export Helpdesk.

• Follow-up of networking initiatives seems to have been inconsistent in some cases, i.e. first contact did not result in further communication. This may be due to time constraints and split-up of responsibilities between staff.
• Building on cooperation with relevant intermediaries can increase support and impact significantly. Intermediaries are a major target group, and potentially powerful promoters and multipliers of the Helpdesk in developing countries.

• Regular feedback from users, user profile analysis and the results of steering committee and stakeholder dialogues could be used to continuously improve the service and obtain feedback and assessments.
Supplementary Note: Synergies between the Market Access Database and the Export Helpdesk

DG Trade has been considering looking into possible synergies between the Market Access Database (MADB) and the Export Helpdesk. After all, both are online database services for exporters, both are – at least partially – concerned with formal import requirements, and, not least, both are located in the same unit at DG Trade.

On the other hand, the Market Access Database targets exporters from within Europe striving to export worldwide, whilst the Export Helpdesk exists to assist exporters from developing countries in their attempts to open up the EU market, so that the overlaps between the two user groups are fairly limited when seen in comparison with the size of each separate user group.

A. Synergy with respect to content

One idea is that, given the increasing importance of South-South-Trade, exporters in developing countries could well benefit from information on markets in their own region, as supplied in the Market Access Database. The idea evolved in the context of the presentation of the Market Access Strategy\textsuperscript{64} by the EU Trade Commissioner in April 2007. In principle, this would certainly make sense. The reason, however, that exporters from abroad cannot currently make use of this information is that access to some sections of the MADB is restricted to users from within Europe. This restriction is due to the copyright of the contractors supplying two of the MADBs core sections, the "Applied Tariffs Database" and the "Exporter's Guide to Import Formalities".

Unless the current provisions for these service contracts are changed, which would imply an incremental increase in costs, opening up this service to exporters from outside Europe will not be possible.

Another idea would be to offer the core services jointly, to benefit both user groups and share the costs. One such service could take the form of a newsletter on trade-related news, featuring international trade negotiations, regional trade agreements etc. Given the wealth of news services that are available for free on the internet, such a news service would probably have to be capable of being customised to users from different regions or sectors if it is to be of interest to a large audience.

Another option would be to offer a joint calendar of trade fairs and exhibitions worldwide, as currently provided by the Export Helpdesk alone. If well done, this would certainly constitute an added value to both portals, as major trade fairs are highly relevant both for domestic and foreign entrepreneurs. Again, the service would not be unique, as freely accessible and very professional tools do currently exist, but it would have the advantage of being "just around

\textsuperscript{64} European Commission: Global Europe – A stronger partnership to deliver market access for European exporters. COM(2007) 183.
the corner” for users consulting any of the other sections. The same would apply to the joint provision of a links service, e.g. in the manner of a customisable directory.

B. Synergy with respect to administration

As has been shown in the backend review (see chapter 3.16), management of service contracts accounts for about 55% of one full-time position. In addition, it also requires expertise in contract law, so that sharing competences in this field of operation would arguably be an efficient solution for both MADB and Helpdesk. Similarly, cooperation may be beneficial with a view to quality management and standardisation of administrative processes.

With regard to promotional activity, cooperation could also be advantageous where communication competence can be shared or jointly developed. Joint presentation of both services would be of interest for events such as trade fairs or congresses, where both portals’ user groups are likely to be present.

C. Synergy on an international level

Finally, cooperation could be meaningful in the context of endeavours to establish a “Single window” trade portal at the European Union or international level. At its core, the concept of a "Single Window" centres around the harmonisation and standardisation of commercial and official information and information/communication technologies related to international trade. Because of its far-reaching implications for customs procedures, it is mainly customs organisations and customs authorities who have taken the lead in furthering existing initiatives. Nevertheless, UNECE is also pursuing the development of such a portal as a tool for trade facilitation and the reduction of non-tariff trade barriers. As the MADB and Export Helpdesk represent electronic information systems that collate relevant information, their potential role in such a larger system could be explored with DG Taxation and Customs Union.
4 Recommendations

Key recommendations

1. Strategic development

- Set down the mission and mandate of the Export Helpdesk, to make overall goals operational. Clarifying its main target group will further help define the scope of contents and services and set priorities for the strategic development of the service.

- Set up a mid-term strategy and budget meeting for the mandate to ensure sustainability. This should reflect the provisions made for the mission and the increased human resources needed to maintain the service.

- Promote the Export Helpdesk as a service explicitly for developing countries, to become a flagship of the EU Commission’s openness in international trade.

- Concentrate on core competences so as to develop a clear profile, and to become the point of reference for complementary online services. By aiming at information management rather than information supply, the Helpdesk could become a unique, effective “first-stop-shop” rather than a “one-stop-shop”.

- Involve other Directorate Generals in the Helpdesk’s Steering Committee to gain valuable support and input, benefiting the quality and promotion of the service.

2. Development of the online service

- Complement the Helpdesk by providing information on trade in services, which has become of increasing importance over the past decade. The issue has been raised by users on several occasions, and the majority of comparable online services also cover trade in services.

- Improve user-friendliness regarding the use of the web-site and its database tools, but also regarding the use of the information obtained, especially regarding the identification of product codes and use of the database tools.

- Provide an outlook on forthcoming changes in taxes, tariff preferences, and product-specific requirements to meet users’ needs for timely information for their strategic planning.
3. Development of promotion and awareness raising

- **Bundle resources for promotion and awareness raising** by setting priorities for a certain period of time on a certain region or target group. This would allow sustainable cooperation partnerships to become established and the development of customised promotional strategies.

- **Create a network of multipliers who can actively promote the Helpdesk in the context of capacity building and trade-related events**; continuous promotion appears to increase usage of the portal more sustainably than larger one-off presentations.

4. Administration and quality management

- **Adopt a collaborative, results-based management approach**, which allows for the definition of realistic and measurable objectives that should agreed upon by the steering committee and relevant stakeholders, in line with, or linked to, the policy framework as stipulated in the Commission communication COM(2002) 513.

- **Develop a set of adequate qualitative and, where possible, quantitative indicators** to make the Helpdesk’s impact and development measurable and communicable. In second instance, such a monitoring system could also be used to improve communications with networking and promotion partners, including more regular reporting from the countries about the presentations given and usage of promotional material and the Export Helpdesk.
4.1 Strategic development

- **Set down the mission of the Export Helpdesk.** In the three and a half years since it was first launched, the Export Helpdesk has been extended considerably. Services like the marketplace have been added, and the introduction of further contents, such as information on fair trade standards, is envisaged.

As of now, however, the mandate of the Export Helpdesk has apparently never been officially laid down to an extent that would set out its role in the wider context of EU trade policy and development cooperation. As the main instrument of implementation for the (1996) Market Access Strategy, the Market Access Database is embedded in this fashion. Although no comparable communication by the Commission exists for the Export Helpdesk it should be recognised and made visible as tying in with previous efforts such as the GSP and the ‘Everything but Arms’ Initiative.

Over and above that, such a mandate would translate the Export Helpdesk’s overall objectives into operational goals. It is important to clarify its main target group; would-be exporters can be expected to require more assistance and overall user-friendliness than a professional intermediary. This should then help define the Helpdesk’s scope of content and services, and set priorities for further development. From a managerial and a strategic point of view, it is necessary to set up a long-term development strategy, to allocate the resources needed in the long run, and to make the impact of the service more communicable.

- **Set up a mid-term strategy and budget meeting for the mandate to ensure sustainability.** Starting from this official mandate, a mid-term strategy could cover the period up to the end of 2008, setting priorities for both the development of the service and its promotion, including a detailed budget.

In its provisions concerning human resources, the budget should reflect the increased work load due to the increase in individual queries through the contact service as well as the necessary awareness-raising activities. Further suggestions for the development of the service and for promotion are set out below.

- **Promote the Export Helpdesk as a service explicitly for developing countries, to become a flagship of the EU Commission’s openness in international trade.** This aspect of promotion relates to the political aspects and the wider context of trade and development. In the context of ongoing international trade negotiations and the justified public debates about persistent disparities and protectionism in international trade, the Export Helpdesk should be promoted as a flagship of the EU Commission’s commitment to support developing countries in exporting to the European market, in line with the overall policy established by the GSP and the ‘Everything but Arms’ Initiative.
• Communicate strengths and successes internally to ensure support, resources and interest within EU Commission. The current Export Helpdesk Team is highly dynamic, and its successful establishment of the service as it exists today testifies to that. In order to place the achievements made so far on a firm footing, they should be communicated within the DG Trade and other relevant DGs, thus enhancing general awareness of the service and inter-institutional cooperation (beyond "Contact" section queries).

This could be done by convening relevant DGs or EC Commission services/programmes on a yearly basis to present recent developments and discuss feedback and suggestions. This would not only benefit the promotion but also the further development of the service.

• Concentrate on core competencies in order to develop a clear profile. The Export Helpdesk is considered a very valuable service by a large majority of its users, including experts. It is, however, not yet as widely known as its services deserve, furthermore, it is not the only resource available on the internet. An abundance of international and also national portals in developing countries offer services that are to a varying extent comparable to those of the Export Helpdesk. Usage of the Export Helpdesk, thus not only depends on general awareness, but also on a comparative superiority over similar services.

We suggest pursuing a strategy of excellence and concentration on its core competencies. Create a unique profile as the one service offering a systematic, comprehensive and user-friendly compilation of relevant information within the EU and member state administrations, and highlight its credibility as being a service provided by the EU Commission. Information from external sources should be effectively brokered. It could become a website that is referred to by other sites which offer the strategic and marketing-related support that is beyond the scope of the Helpdesk. The target should be information management rather than information supply – to become a “first-stop-shop” rather than a “one-stop-shop”.

The recommendation to effect this type of concentration was put forward several times by experts who work frequently with the Export Helpdesk or who have been familiar with it for a longer period of time.

• Involve other Directorate Generals in the Helpdesk’s Steering Committee to gain valuable support and input. As a tool for trade-facilitation, the Helpdesk requires expertise across a range of issues. While other Directorate Generals are involved with regard to specific services, the development of the service has so far been performed in DG Trade. We recommend the involvement of staff members from relevant Directorate Generals (e.g. EuropeAid, DG Health and Consumer Protection, DG Enterprise and Industry) in the Helpdesk’s Steering Committee on a permanent basis. This would draw in further sector competence and thorough knowledge of target groups’ needs.
To obtain feedback from Helpdesk users, experts from relevant private sector organisations and business support organisations could be involved either on an ad-hoc basis or periodically.

4.2 Development of the online service

- **Complement the Helpdesk by providing information on trade in services.** Trade in services has become increasingly important over the past decade, both for developed and developing economies. A number of strong arguments suggest that the Export Helpdesk should expand itself to cover trade in services as well: (1) As a service provided by the EU Commission, it is hard to justify why an increasing portion of world trade is left out without any further explanation or restriction being indicated on the website itself; (2) most portals of comparable thematic and regional scope do cover services as well (e.g. CBI, ITC/Intracen, WTPF/World Trade Point); (3) Several users and experts requested that trade in services trade be included.

- **Learn from users about the impact and potentials of the Helpdesk.** The people who are best qualified to judge the Helpdesk’s impact and potentials are those who use it. Like other portals, the Helpdesk could seek their feedback on a regular basis in the form of single-question surveys, rapid votes, or mails sent to the distribution lists. This could help assess users’ priorities regarding services, get their opinion on certain issues, and establish a kind of communication. As users may not always be able to explain the problems they face, presentations could be used to conduct real-life queries, yielding insights as to whether and where exporters encounter difficulties when investigating how to export.

  In order to obtain a fair assessment of the profile of Helpdesk users, where they come from and how they use the service, it is strongly recommended that monitoring of usage be intensified to the extent currently performed by the MADB.

- **Improve navigation and searchability throughout the site** so as to facilitate orientation on the website. This can be achieved by (1) establishing a keyword search function, (2) offering a sitemap, (3) indicating the navigation path at the top of the page (so-called ‘breadcrumbs’), and (4) referring to related information in other sections.

- **Change the layout of the website so that it scales to different screen resolutions, thus** ensuring barrier-free access and better presentation.

- **Improve user-friendliness regarding the use of the website and its database tools, but also regarding the use of the information obtained.** This would mean (1) integrating the Explanatory Notes on the Harmonized System so as to make selecting the product code easier; (2) integrating the explanations of the User Guide into the sections; (3) establishing a glossary of trade and customs terminology; (4) presenting model queries illustrating the use of each section and of the information retrieved there.
• **Provide an outlook on forthcoming changes in taxes, tariff preferences, and product-specific requirements** in the form of (1) a news alert or newsletter; (2) a news section on the website; and/or (3) a textbox or similar within the “Requirements and Taxes”, “Import Tariffs” and “Rules of Origin” sections. This would provide significant added value as it would meet users’ needs for timely information for strategic planning decisions.

• **Offer an introductory section on “How to import to the EU”**. This could build on related information currently placed under “Requirements and Taxes” and should offer advice on import and customs issues in the European Single Market, product policies and standards, and the spheres of competence of the relevant Directorate Generals as well as links to their websites.

**Requirements and Taxes**

• **Highlight the importance of standards for successful marketing in EU markets** and give an overview all major voluntary (i.e. technical, social, environmental) standards, including key references.

• **Use the sector competence of other Directorate Generals** (e.g. DG Enterprise and Industry, DG Health and Consumer Protection) to identify relevant information that should then be included with a view to completeness of the Helpdesk. Such information would include for example, regulations on product components and product-specific packaging.

**Import Tariffs**

• **Give explanations of the terms and abbreviations used** on the page (e.g. "supplementary unit import", "airworthiness tariff suspension").

**Customs Documents**

• **Consider merging the “Customs Documents” and “Rules of Origin” sections**, as they represent a thematic whole. Separating them makes it more difficult to understand their relationship, whilst combining them under the heading of “preferential trade arrangements” would make the heading less ambiguous and simplify the structure of the website.

• **Provide a full picture of the documentation needed for customs clearance**. Information on other (non-preferential) documentation is essential, and the section heading currently suggests that this is given.

**Rules of Origin**

• **Consider consolidating this section with “Customs Documents”** as outlined above.
- **Provide full information on rules of origin**, including non-preferential origin. These can be highly relevant with regard to import restrictions, and as with “Customs Documents”, the section heading suggests that comprehensive information is provided.

**Trade Statistics**

- **Aim to provide up-to-date statistics**: aggregating them on a half-yearly or quarterly basis would also allow for a more detailed analysis of market trends.

- **Consider offering references to market analyses.**

**Marketplace**

- **Reconsider the form in which the Helpdesk answers the need for market contacts.** In the absence of a verification process, it constitutes a risk to the credibility of the Helpdesk and DG Trade. Being one of the most visited sections is not a success in itself; to scale up impact however, which currently seems to be low, more resources would be needed. Several experts questioned whether this kind of service should be provided by a portal of the European Commission.

In order to significantly scale up the quality and impact of the “Marketplace” section, the following amendments would be necessary:

- **Expand the registration form** to include more details, part of which should be mandatory.

- **Establish a verification procedure** to reduce risk to the reputation of the web-site, and ultimately to DG Trade. Ensuring the reliability of entries is a crucial quality of online marketplaces. If this cannot be attained, a disclaimer should be placed more prominently on the website to raise awareness of the issue.

- **Actively promote the marketplace so as to raise awareness and increase the number of advertisements.** Several users observed that there are very few entries, especially on the demand side. Its current size is insufficient to achieve impacts of scale, and ultimately frustrates users.

**Links**

- **Extend the “Links” section** to complement the Helpdesk on issues and services that it does not cover, and to offer brief explanations on the resources referred to in order to inform users of the kind of reference provided.
Events

- **Reconsider the form in which the Helpdesk provides information on trade-related events.** A comprehensive events calendar is often provided as an online service in its own right, as state-of-the-art services show. Given that this kind of information is not among the original competences of the European Commission, the resources needed to make the Helpdesk’s event list competitive with such services would seem rather high.

If the “Events” section is to be maintained, two options would seem feasible:

- **Reduce the scope of the events calendar to events in Europe** and aim at excellent coverage and accuracy. Enlarge the time horizon to several years in advance, and enhance search functionalities.

- **Offer the events calendar as a joint service of the Export Helpdesk together with the Market Access Database** in order to pool resources. A complete and accurate calendar of events worldwide would be of benefit to users of both portals.

### 4.3 Development of promotion and awareness raising

- **Bundle resources for promotion and awareness raising.** It would be useful to set priorities for a certain period of time that focus on a certain region or target group. This would allow sustainable cooperation partnerships to become established, and facilitate the development of a promotional strategy customised to the region or user group. For organisational reasons, it is also advisable to attribute the organisational part of promotion to one staff member.

- **Consider setting up an internal monitoring system** to improve communication with networking and promotion partners, to increase accountability and ensure better, more regular, reporting from individual countries regarding use of the promotion material and the Export Helpdesk.

- **Make more use of the internet as a medium of promotion.** Systematic linking from relevant websites and increased browser visibility (see website accessibility) is cost-efficient and likely to be very effective.

- **Create a network of multipliers who can actively promote the Helpdesk in the context of capacity building and trade-related events.** Continuous promotion appears
to increase usage of the portal more sustainably than larger one-off presentations. This suggests a need for cooperation with relevant programmes and institutions, such as (1) EU delegations; (2) relevant programmes of the EU Commission in trade promotion or development co-operation; and (3) trade organisations with a worldwide network of offices (e.g. EuroChambres). Inviting other DGs to the Steering Committee (see above) may help establish contact with relevant programmes of the EU Commission.

- **Integrate the Export Helpdesk into capacity-building programmes** offered by relevant organisations (EU and external). Users would thus be made familiar with handling and contents of the Helpdesk in the context of a general introduction to export business.

### 4.4 Administration and Quality management

- **Adopt a collaborative, results-based management approach**, which allows for the definition of realistic and measurable objectives that should agreed upon by the steering committee and relevant stakeholders, in line with, or linked to, the policy framework as stipulated in the Commission communication COM(2002) 513.

- **Develop a set of adequate qualitative and, where possible, quantitative indicators** to make the Helpdesk’s impact and development measurable and communicable. In second instance, such a monitoring system could also be used to improve communications with networking and promotion partners, including more regular reporting from the countries about the presentations given and usage of promotional material and the Export Helpdesk.

- **Anticipate the resources required to match the continued uptake of the service which is to be expected**. Assuming that the Helpdesk team remains responsible for all the functions involved in the operation and running of the Helpdesk and the forecasted user demand takes up, the service can only be sustained at the current level by adding additional financial and human resources. This could be in the form of further internal staff members, or of outsourcing the management of further services, such as the “Marketplace” and the mailbox. This question should be examined not only with a view to cost-effectiveness, however. Outsourcing e.g. the mailbox service would involve a loss of valuable information about user needs and their expectations. If it were outsourced, the momentum which comes from close contact with the target group might be lost.
Annexes

Annex I: Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE
Related to a contract to carry out an evaluation of the Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries

1. INTRODUCTION OR MISSION STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE (DG TRADE):

Under the direction of the relevant Commissioner Mandelson, DG Trade is in charge of conducting the Union's commercial policy in accordance with the objectives set out in Article 133 of the Treaty.

Trade policy plays a key role in the European Union's relations with the rest of the world and the EU is one of the most important players in international trade, accounting for a fifth of all world trade. The EU's common trade policy enables its 25 members to speak with one voice on the international stage. This policy covers all the main aspects of trade in goods and services (tariff and non-tariff barriers, trade defence, particularly in cases of dumping and subsidies, export loans as well as key aspects of intellectual property, investment and competition, bilateral agreements, participation in the multilateral World Trade Organisation). Trade liberalisation is at the heart of the common trade policy, and it has developed into setting up and implementing multilateral trade rules. The EU is indeed committed to harnessing globalisation so as to address citizens' concerns regarding environment, health, social welfare and cultural diversity. The EU also strives to include developing countries more fully into the world trade system so that all countries may share its potential benefits. Better trade rules and stronger multilateral institutions can help contribute to these aims.

See also: http://europa.eu.int/comm/trade/whatwedo/work/index_en.htm

2. OBJECTIVES
In February 2004, the Market Access Unit of DG TRADE launched the Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries (EH). It is a free online service that offers exporters from developing countries practical assistance in taking better advantage of the existing and future market access opportunities offered by the EU. The objectives of the current project, which is tendered by DG Trade, are:

a) To evaluate the results and overall impact of the Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries, taking into account both internal and external sources of evidence;

b) To assess the extent to which the information provided by the Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries is reliable, complete, and useful, the service is user-friendly, and its availability is well-known amongst its target users;

c) To consider whether changes are desirable or necessary, and if so, to make practical suggestions about how such changes might be implemented.

3. THE PROJECT FOCUS OR CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

3.1 Description

Introduction

The Export Helpdesk for Developing Countries (EH) plays an important role in giving an operational character to the development dimension of EU trade policy. Since its launch, the EH website has operated in two major phases:

- phase 1: launch of core services - extended from one (English) to four (English, French, Portuguese and Spanish) languages - with information available from internal Commission sources;

- phase 2: extension of the data to EU and Member States' import requirements and internal taxes. This data is obtained from external sources (public tender for the period 2004-2006). A separate call for tenders regarding these services for the phase 2 is foreseen to cover the 2007-2009 period.

Service offering

The Export Helpdesk for exporters, importers, trade associations and governments, provides the following information online in the four languages mentioned above:

- EU and Member-States’ import requirements as well as internal taxes applicable to products (information available only in English);
- EU preferential import regimes benefiting developing countries;
- Trade data for the EU and its individual Member-States;
- A market place where exporters in developing countries can establish contacts with importers from the EU;
- Links to other authorities and international organisations involved in practical trade operations and trade promotion;
- The possibility to lodge detailed information requests about real-life situations encountered by exporters.

**Free of charge**

The service provided is totally free of charge, and this includes searching the on-line databases, posting offers for products on the market place or using the contact section.

**User-friendly**

The objective of this service is to assist developing country exporters. User-friendliness is a key aim. To this end, a comprehensive user guide has been developed by the EH team and posted on the website since the end of 2005.

**Dealing with requests for information**

An EH Team has been created within DG Trade. A network has also been organised with other Directorates General (DGs SANCO, ENTR, TAXUD, AGRI, ENV, FISH, etc.) not only to answer questions received by the Contact section, but also to prepare and review the content of the data displayed online.

**Usage of the EH**

The EH team analyses statistics on the usage of the service on a monthly basis. Confirmation of the importance of this service for developing country exporters is provided by impressive statistics: from its launch to December 2004 it received an average of nearly 1,500 hits (requests for pages, including successful queries) per day. This usage has increased twofold to an average of well over 3,500 hits per day in 2005. In addition, 140-160 questions are received monthly by the contact section. An average of 100-120 offers, bids and requests are published per month in the market place section.
Promotional efforts

An initial diagnosis made by the EH Team relating to the usage of this service seems to suggest that one of the main reasons explaining the low level of hits from some regions (e.g. Africa) is the limited access to informatics/networks. The EH has accordingly designed a promotional strategy for 2005-2006 to ensure that exporters from LDCs are duly informed and able to take advantage of this online service. It includes presentations, workshops, a new brochure in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish to facilitate the comprehension of the EH’s content and other promotional material such as posters, pens etc. The EH is also promoted in close collaboration with European Commission Delegations in developing countries.

3.2 Motives for the evaluation

After two years of operation, DG Trade wishes to obtain an independent assessment of the results achieved to date from the financial and human resources committed to the EH. The findings will be used to guide further developments in the context of an ongoing process to enhance the service and expand its usage. Furthermore, general rules of the Commission require the Directorates General to submit their main policy tools to regular evaluation.

4. WORK TO BE CARRIED OUT / SERVICES TO BE RENDERED

4.1. Evaluation topics and questions

The work to be carried out consists of a detailed study which addresses the objectives set out in point 2 above. Drawing on internal or external, direct or indirect sources of evidence, whether in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese, the evaluator will have to answer the following questions:

a) Reliability

- Is the information provided by the EH accurate, verifiable and up to date? What steps does DG Trade take to ensure that the information it provides is reliable?

b) Completeness

- What kind of information is missing, or could be added to the existing data? How are users compensating for insufficient or incomplete information? Do they use other on-line information services? If so, which ones?

c) Usefulness
Is the information in the EH useful to developing country exporters, and meeting their needs? Which sections of the EH are most useful to exporters and importers, and why? Which sections are least useful, and why?

Have the target users, and their informational needs, been sufficiently clearly identified?

Are the services provided by the mailbox useful?

What is the impact of the marketplace section? Are the risks of inappropriate usage of this facility managed appropriately? What proportion of the offers, bids and requests posted each month is converted (typically) into new business for those who place these advertisements? What further steps should DG Trade consider in order to increase site traffic, and the matching of buyers and sellers?

d) User-friendliness

Is the service provided sufficiently understandable and accessible to developing country users, in terms of content and format? Is the website intuitive and easy to use? What recommendations or suggestions can be made to improve these aspects?

e) Awareness and familiarity

How do users find, or learn about, the EH? How far has DG Trade succeeded in raising awareness of the EH in developing countries? What further steps could be taken to increase familiarity with the service? To which websites could the EH be linked, in order to raise awareness, and widen its use? What other channels or tools could be envisaged to broaden its reach? What is the level of awareness of the EH amongst target users in the EU?

f) Administration of the service

What is the most effective way of measuring usage of the EH? Are the financial and human resources allocated to the EH, and the existing administrative procedures, commensurate with its objectives, and adequate for its development, maintenance and day-to-day operation? Does the service represent good value for money, both on a section-by-section basis, and overall?

The evaluation study should also consider whether any changes, in connection with any one or all of the topics mentioned above, are necessary or desirable; and if so, should include recommendations and practical suggestions about the implementation of such changes.

4.2. Method for data collection and analysis

The tenderers will propose a method in their offer. However, considering the limited budget and short time frame, the tenderers should limit the evaluation to: review of existing contractual requirements and provisions; individual and/or group interviews; questionnaires
or internet surveys; stakeholder and needs analysis; and comparison with other similar information services. Tenderers should note that the EH website is multilingual; and documents for gathering evidence by means of interviews or surveys, together with replies received, will need to be drafted and/or interpreted in the other 3 languages of the service (French, Spanish and Portuguese). The evaluation study must be written in English thus excellent drafting in English will be required. Furthermore, tenderers might need to translate and interpret material from English into French, Spanish and Portuguese, and vice-versa. The costs of these translations must be included in the overall budget (under honoraria).

It is unlikely that travel outside Brussels will be required, as we expect most of the interviewees to be available in Brussels, and survey participants to be contacted via the internet.

4.3. Information available

In addition to the EH website, available at the following address:

http://export-help.cec.eu.int/

the following websites may provide additional information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/trade/index_en.htm (DG Trade website)

http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/taxation_customs/index_en.htm (DG Taxation and Customs Union)


http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=1090,30070682,1090_33076576&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL (Eurostat)

http://fd.comext.eurostat.cec.eu.int/xtweb/ (Comext database)

http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm (DG Health and Consumer Protection)


http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/sanco/vets/info/data/listes/table0.html (DG Health and Consumer Protection – list of approved establishments)
4.4. Steering committee

A committee has been set up composed of representatives from DG Trade, including a representative from the Information Technology Unit and a representative of the evaluation function. The committee also includes representatives of other Commission services, namely one representative of DG Health and Consumer Protection and one representative from DG Taxation and Customs Union.

The role of the committee is:

- to facilitate the evaluator’s access to the information needed to perform the work;
- to support the evaluation work, particularly in respect of issues and aspects that pertain to method;
- to take part in assessing the quality of the evaluation at the proper juncture;
- to assist in defining the questions for the evaluation

4.5. Reports and other requirements

The project must deliver the following three reports: an inception report, an interim report and a final report. All reports must be written in English.

The inception report should consist of an account of how the evaluators intend to achieve the project objectives; including for example the research method to be used, the sources of evidence expected to be employed, the names of persons to be interviewed, copies of survey tools and questionnaires etc. Questionnaires (in the four languages) and interview plans should be presented in advance to the Commission for approval. The inception report should be due after two months of the start date of the project.

The interim report, due five months after the start of the project, should consist of a descriptive overview of the service and tentative recommendations. A number of the evaluation topics and specific evaluation questions, among those mentioned in point 4.1 above, will need to be addressed. More specifically, all or part of the questions concerning the issues on the following aspects of the EH service will need to be answered: reliability, completeness, usefulness and user-friendliness. However, the specific requirements relating
to form and presentation that apply to the final report will not need to be implemented fully for the purposes of the interim report.

The final report due at the end of the project should be submitted in a form suitable for publication that:

- includes an executive summary;
- addresses the objectives of the evaluation, and the specific evaluation questions;
- satisfies the performance standards and quality assessment criteria described in §4.6.1 and Annex 5; and
- makes practical and relevant recommendations about how the service provided by the EH can be optimised.

The report must demonstrate the link to the aims of the study and to the specific evaluation questions. It should have structure and signposting that usefully guide the reader through the commentary. Key messages should be highlighted and (where necessary) summarised.

In particular, the report must provide a clear and comprehensive descriptive account of the EH, of the context in which it operates and of its interaction with other instruments or with other policies. The descriptive account must be written in a style that is readily accessible to “lay” readers, and that enables them to understand the evaluative judgements that follow.

The report should provide accessible information for intended target audiences (namely the Commission services and all the different stakeholders), and clearly demonstrate the evaluators’ understanding that the final report is addressed to different audiences with potentially different needs and interests.

Apart from the mentioned reports, the production of a briefing document (i.e., a summary report) of no more than 2 pages should be envisaged. This should summarise, in very succinct form: the subject and scope of the evaluation; the purpose of the evaluation; the main findings and recommendations; the sources of evidence and the evidence-gathering methods employed; limitations in the design or the execution of the evaluation in meeting the study aims and objectives; and suggestions (where relevant) of issues or aspects for further investigation. This report should be delivered together with the final report.

The following should also be envisaged:

- meetings with the steering committee (as a minimum, a kick-off meeting, and a meeting at presentation of each of the interim and final reports);
- an audit trail of the evaluators’ fieldwork, consisting of (at least) a diary showing those consulted, when, where, how, and by whom. Questionnaires and interview plans should be presented in advance to the Commission for approval. Copies of these documents are to be included as an annex to the final report.
4.6. **Performance Standards and quality assessment of the final report**

4.6.1 **Evaluation standards**

The contractor will be expected to perform the work in a way that ensures that the applicable Evaluation Standards of the European Commission are complied with:

- The substance of the evaluation reports shall be relevant, based on rigorous analysis, meet the quality criteria laid down below and comply with the deadlines.
- The evaluation report shall describe the purpose of the evaluation and its context and also the objectives, questions, procedures, results and reasoned conclusions of the evaluation, so as to make available the essential information in an easily understandable form.
- The report shall describe the information sources in enough detail to allow the correctness of the information to be assessed. The data collected or selected shall be adapted to the methods used and be sufficiently reliable for the expected use.
- The prospects and reasoning on which interpretation of the results is based shall be described and explained. The results should follow on logically and be substantiated by data analysis and interpretations based on carefully presented explanatory hypotheses.
- The final evaluation report shall present the results and conclusions of the evaluator and the tenor thereof shall not be amended without his/her agreement.
- The conclusions and any recommendations shall be rigorous and not distorted by personal or partisan considerations. The recommendations shall be comprehensible, useful, applicable and detailed enough to be brought into effect.

4.6.2 **Quality assessment criteria**

The quality of the report, for this specific evaluation, will be assessed by making use of the summary table presented in Annex 5.

5. **TIMING**

65 Extract from the Communication for the Commission from the President and Mrs Schreyer: Evaluation Standards and Good practice.

The duration of the project is eight months. Under exceptional circumstances, the period of execution of the tasks may be extended up to maximum 3 months. This extension will have to be requested and accepted in writing at least one month before the end date of the contract.
Thank you very much for taking this survey! Your opinion is highly appreciated, and will help us improve the services of the Export Helpdesk.
Kindly fill in the following questionnaire and send it back to us within 3 weeks of reception.
All data will be treated strictly confidentially, and will be used for the purpose of the evaluation only.

**Introduction**

How did you first learn about the Export Helpdesk? *Tick all that apply.*

- [ ] Internet search
- [ ] Intermediary organisations
- [ ] Presentations and events
- [ ] Publications, newsletters
- [ ] Personal contacts
- [ ] Other, please specify: ____________

How frequently do you use the Export Helpdesk?

Please select one...

Which sections did you consult so far? *Tick all that apply.*

- [ ] Requirements and Taxes
- [ ] Import Tariffs
- [ ] Customs Documents
- [ ] Rules of Origin
- [ ] Trade Statistics
- [ ] Marketplace
- [ ] Links
Events
Contact Form
User Guide

User Profile

What type of organisation/ company do you work for?

Please select one...
If “Other”, please specify

What product range does your organisation/ your company operate in? *Tick all that apply.*

- Live Animals, Animal Products
- Vegetable Products
- Animal/ Vegetable Fats, Oils, Waxes
- Prepared Foodstuffs; Beverages...
- Mineral products
- Chemicals and Allied Industries
- Plastics, Rubbers
- Raw Hides, Skins, Leather, Furs
- Wood and Wood Charcoal, Cork...
- Wood Pulp, Paper, Paperboard
- Textiles and Textile Articles
- Footwear, Headgear, Umbrellas...
- Stone, Plaster, Cement, Ceramic...
- Pearls, Precious Stones, Imitations...
- Base Metals
- Machinery and Mechanical, Electrical...
- Vehicles, Aircraft, Transportation Equipment
- Optical, Photographic, Measuring...
- Miscellaneous Manufactured Articles
- Works of Art, Antiques...
- Services, Consultancy
Other, please specify:

What country is your organisation/ company located in? Please choose the appropriate country code from the list at the end of the questionnaire.

**Usage and contents of the Export Helpdesk**

Do you find the website easy and intuitive to use?

Please select one...

For which purpose(s) do you use the Export Helpdesk information and services? Tick all that apply.

- [ ] To facilitate export of my company’s products
- [ ] To facilitate import of partner companies’ products
- [ ] To conduct export-related (or other) trainings
- [ ] To supply third parties with information services
- [ ] Other, please specify:

Which are the three most important sections to you? Tick three.

- [ ] Requirements and Taxes
- [ ] Import Tariffs
- [ ] Customs Documents
- [ ] Rules of Origin
- [ ] Trade Statistics
- [ ] Marketplace
- [ ] Links
- [ ] Events
- [ ] Contact Form
Do you miss any kind of information you would have expected?

Please select one... If “yes” the following:

Which other sources of information do you use for access to EU market? Tick all that apply.

- Other online information services, please specify:
- Intermediary organisations
- Journals, newspapers, TV
- Exhibitions, fairs
- Professional/Personal network
- Other, please specify:

On which areas would you expect to find additional information? Tick all that apply.

- Export marketing planning
- Standards and regulations
- Product information
- Market information
- First market contacts
- Technology-related information
- Other, please specify:

When you plan for export, which kinds of information are most difficult to obtain? Tick three.

- Export marketing planning
- Trends in buying behaviour
- Trade and distribution system
Please evaluate the services/ functions of the Helpdesk overall.

Please select one...

**Individual sections of the Helpdesk**

Note: Please answer only on sections you have used. Thank you!

Did you find answers to your questions/ queries?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Requirements and Taxes</td>
<td>Please select one...</td>
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<td>b) Import Tariffs</td>
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<td>c) Customs Documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) Rules of origin</td>
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<td>e) Trade statistics</td>
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<td>f) Marketplace</td>
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<td>g) Links</td>
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<tr>
<td>h) User Guide</td>
<td>Please select one...</td>
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<tr>
<td>i) Events</td>
<td>Please select one...</td>
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</table>

Was the information correct?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Requirements and Taxes</td>
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<td>b) Import Tariffs</td>
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<td>c) Customs Documents</td>
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<td>h) Events</td>
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Was the information up-to-date?

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<th>Section</th>
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<tr>
<td>h) Events</td>
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</table>

Was the information easy to access?

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<tbody>
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<td>a) Requirements and Taxes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
f) Marketplace Please select one...
g) Links Please select one...
h) User Guide Please select one...
i) Events Please select one...

Was the information easy to understand?

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<td>Please select one...</td>
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<tr>
<td>i) Events</td>
<td>Please select one...</td>
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</table>

Did the information provided here help you with your undertaking?

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<tr>
<td>g) Links</td>
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</table>
Please evaluate the content of the sections.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>i) Events</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Specific services**

Note: Please answer only on sections you have used; for the rest, you can simply skip the respective questions. Thank you!

**Marketplace**

Did you post an offer and/ or demand for your company so far?

Please select one...

Do you consider the information on offers and/ or requests sufficiently comprehensive?
Please select one... If “no”, please specify what is missing:

Did you experience that indications in offers and/ or requests were incorrect?

Please select one... If “yes”, please give a short account:

Did the information result in any trade-relations and/ or concrete deals?

Please select one... If “yes”, please specify:

**Links**

Were the links in this section useful for your query?

Please select one...

Did you expect any categories of links actually missing?

Please select one... If “yes”, please specify:

Did you expect any specific links actually missing?

Please select one... If “yes”, please specify:

**User Guide**

Does the user guide make use of the Helpdesk easier?

Please select one... If “No”, please specify::
Would any further kind of assistance be useful?

Please select one... If "yes" please specify:

**Contact form**

1. If you have submitted an individual request using the contact form, within which period of time did you receive the answer?

Please select one...

2. Was the answer helpful?

Please select one...

**User-friendliness**

Is the website layout clear and easy to overview with regard to...

... Navigation bar Please select one...

... Menu structure Please select one...

... Fonts Please select one...

... Font size Please select one...

... Colours Please select one...

Is the wording easy to understand?

Please select one...

Are the names of sections and functions self-explaining?
Please select one...

Would you need further advice how to use the information you obtained?

☐ No
☐ Yes, concerning:
  ☐ documents I need to supply
  ☐ relevant authorities/bodies
  ☐ how to proceed with the information
  ☐ other, please specify:
☐ Not able to assess

Do you have any further comments? Please add your comment.

Thank you very much for your contribution!
Annex III: Guide for Expert Interviews

A. Interviewee information

Name:
Company/Institution:
Country:
Position:
Role and responsibility within the sections of the Helpdesk
Regularly searching information for exporters to the EU?
□ Yes □ No
Origin of companies that you mainly deal with:
□ EU / USA / Australia
□ Asia
□ Africa
□ Latin America

B. Introductory assessment of Helpdesk usage

How did you get to know the Helpdesk and when?

How often do you use the Helpdesk?

C. Benchmarking of the Helpdesk

Do you think that the Helpdesk is a useful source of information for
• exporters from DC,
• intermediary organisations (Chambers of Commerce, industry associations, consultants, trainers etc.),
• importers from the EU?

What are its particular strengths and weaknesses, in your view? Which sections are most valuable? If so, please specify.
Do you know of business cases where information obtained from the Helpdesk has been beneficial for the exporter?

Which other online information portals for export promotion do you know?

Which similar webportals/ sources of information do you use most to find information which is also provided by the different sections of the Export Helpdesk?

Requirements and Taxes
Import Tariffs
Customs Document
Rules of Origin
Trade Statistics
Market Place
Links
Export Helpdesk Calendar: List of Commercial Events
Contact (i.e. individual answer services)

Which sections of the Helpdesk listed above are superior or inferior to other sources, in your opinion?

D. Content of the Helpdesk

D.1 Specific sections

Does the market place need improvement, and if so, which?

Does the links section cover all relevant types of web resources? Are there any further links you would see as important to be included?

Does the user guide serve as a comprehensive and understandable introduction to usage of the Helpdesk? Would further guidance be advisable?
The **events** section allows the user to search for events by month, country, and sector. Is the query structure adequate for requests from exporters in DC, including e.g. the timespan, sector and country choices?

To your experience, is the list of **events** comprehensive? Are any major events missing? Did you ever send individual requests to the Helpdesk using the **contact form**? If yes, did you receive an adequate response?

If yes, how long did you have to wait for the answer?

**D.2 Helpdesk in general**

Are the different sections of the Helpdesk well chosen and designed? If not, what could be improved?

Is the information provided by the Helpdesk according to your experience Correct/ accurate? Up-to-date? Complete? Useful?

Understandable to all user groups (e.g. with regard to Helpdesk didactics, presentation and wording) ?

**E. Accessibility of the Helpdesk**

Did you ever see links leading to the Export Helpdesk at relevant local/ regional or international exporter or trade-related websites? If yes, please give examples.

Is the Helpdesk well-known among its target group, to your experience? If not, how could promotion be enhanced most effectively?

Do you know of any cases where accessing the Helpdesk was a problem? (Examples might be browser compatibility, speed of the internet)
F. Outlook Helpdesk

Below please find a suggested pattern of areas that are relevant to enterprises planning to export. They are meant as a point of departure when considering the following questions; you may indicate other issues at liberty.

- Export marketing planning
- Standards and regulations
- Overview of recent or future changes of regulations, taxes, …
- Product information
- Market information
- First market contacts
- Technology-related information
- Other, please specify: __________

What kinds of information / services do enterprises need most when exporting to EU markets?

Which of these kinds of information are now sufficiently provided by the Helpdesk?

If important information is missing, how could it be incorporated (e.g. through enlargement of the section, links, pointers to literature/ market reviews) ?

For which of the above areas (or others) would you expect the Export Helpdesk to supply additional information and services, if any?

From your viewpoint, do exporters need further advice how to use the information provided by the Helpdesk (e.g. regarding forms needed, contacts to address to meet product-related regulation or to pass the customs)?

Do you think that the Helpdesk needs to be translated into any other languages?

Do you want to name other experts or companies whom we should contact for evaluation of the Helpdesk?
## Annex IV: List of Experts Interviewed/ Interview Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AidCo ACP Programmes</td>
<td>Claudio Salinas</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>02/02/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL Invest III</td>
<td>Maurizio Queirazza</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>04/19/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicatio</td>
<td>Thorsten Trede</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/16/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austrian Federal Economic Chamber</td>
<td>Christoph Huter</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>04/17/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austrian Federal Economic Chamber</td>
<td>Bruno Freytag</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>03/05/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFAI (German Business Portal)</td>
<td>Nadine Blume</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/20/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFAI</td>
<td>Marion Walzer-Rippel</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/19/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>BHK International Trade Promotion and Management Consulting</td>
<td>Dirk Adler</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/21/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHK International Trade Promotion and Management Consulting</td>
<td>Nikolas Kraus</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/22/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board of External Trade</td>
<td>H.D. Lumambo</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>05/23/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>Ariane van Beuzekom</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>04/25/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chamber of Commerce, Izmir</td>
<td>Selma Ozcan</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>12/15/2006</td>
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<td>Chamber of Commerce, Rotterdam</td>
<td>Ruud van dem Dool</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>03/06/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chambre of Foreign Trade, Germany</td>
<td>Dirk Axtmann</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>04/05/2007</td>
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<td>Chinaforum Bayern</td>
<td>Stefan Geiger</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/22/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consorzio Italasia Industrial Relations /Europe-Link Business Agency</td>
<td>Anna Bassano</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>05/21/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant for Chinese SMEs</td>
<td>Jari Grosse-Ruyken</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/20/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>DG Trade</td>
<td>Verena Vahlband</td>
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<td>Dialog</td>
<td>O.J. Krück</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/21/2007</td>
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<td>ESIPP</td>
<td>Patrick Sevaistre</td>
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<td>02/02/2007</td>
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<td>Eurochambres</td>
<td>Dirk Vanthygem</td>
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<td>Euro Info Center</td>
<td>Luc van Looveren</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Mike Robson</td>
<td>International/Italy</td>
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<td>FinnPartnership</td>
<td>Hanna-Riita Kurittu</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>05/03/2007</td>
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<td>German Chamber of Commerce abroad Colombia</td>
<td>Thomas Kneidl</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>03/07/2007</td>
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<td>German Industry Association for Optical, Medical and Mechatronical Technologies</td>
<td>Sabine Raatz</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/22/2007</td>
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<td>Global Greece International Business Projects</td>
<td>Babis Filadarin</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>05/22/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>German-Chinese Business Association</td>
<td>Tim Glaser</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/21/2007</td>
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<td>GTZ</td>
<td>Doris Günther</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/15/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTZ</td>
<td>Regine Qualmann</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/22/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellect Ltd.</td>
<td>Gaspar Peter Macha</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>05/23/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Trade Center (ITC)</td>
<td>Helen Lassen</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>05/03/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>InWent</td>
<td>Berthold Hoffmann</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>04/26/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InWent</td>
<td>Lydia Jebauer-Nischl</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>04/26/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InWent</td>
<td>Martina Burkard</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05/18/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIR (Swedish Industry Association)</td>
<td>Shisher Kumra</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>02/26/2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Tradegate Sweden</td>
<td>Peter Cederblad</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>05/16/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolinvest</td>
<td>Renaud Guillonnet</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>04/24/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Scale Industry Association</td>
<td>Peter Mphanda</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>05/23/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradecraft Exchange</td>
<td>Jackie McAdam</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>03/20/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>Ullrich Hoffman</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>05/08/2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Annex V: Table of Sample Queries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Specification</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Destination Country</th>
<th>Date of Query</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Textiles - garments</td>
<td>ladies’ blazers</td>
<td>high fashion, cotton</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>03.06.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Textiles – home decoration</td>
<td>handicraft napkins</td>
<td>from linen with 10 % silk, damask design</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>22.05.2007, 04.06.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Food - fruits</td>
<td>passion fruit</td>
<td>Fresh</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>02.06.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Food - sauces</td>
<td>hot chili sauce</td>
<td>“piri piri”, containing hot chilis, sweet peppers, garlic, lemon juice, vinegar, salt, pepper, herbs (without artificial colouring or preservatives)</td>
<td>Mosambik</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>02.06.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Natural cosmetics</td>
<td>olive oil soap</td>
<td>without artificial colouring and preservatives</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>05.06.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Motor vehicle spare parts</td>
<td>v-belts</td>
<td>Made from natural rubber</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>27.05.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chemical products</td>
<td>fertilizer</td>
<td>mixture of different ingredients: lime, urea etc</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>02.06.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Food, fruits</td>
<td>mango fruit pulp</td>
<td>chilled, delivered in plastic containers of 3.000 g weight</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>05.06.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Plants, flowers</td>
<td>cut roses</td>
<td>delivered in bundles, stalks in wet packaging, chilled</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>30.05.2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Animal feed</td>
<td>tapioca pellets</td>
<td>made from cassava roots with nutrient additives, dehydrated, ready for use</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>12.06.2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>