Access to Information Programme Foundation

A.S.A.
Agency for Socioeconomic Analyses

Public Registers Situation

(Survey Research Report)

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Contents

Introduction

This study was conducted as part of the Access to Information Program (AIP) Project *Where and how to exercise our right to information*, funded by the Open Society Foundation - Sofia.

The present paper examines the state of the public registers in Bulgaria, offering the perspective of the institutions as providers, and of the citizens as seekers of the information channeled through these registers. It is an attempt to depict the structure of the information most frequently sought and provided, the state of the public registers, and the quality of information services institutions render to the public.

The study was conducted through face to face interviews with citizens and institutions from all district towns of Bulgaria. The interviews with the citizens were held outside/inside the lobbies of the buildings, accommodating the respective registers. The only types of respondents were citizens making requests from the relevant institutions.

For the operational purposes of the study, the term 'record' was assumed to mean: „*A record is written or verbal information, which a citizen seeks from the registers of the court or the municipality. For example, payment of a tax, registration of a company, registration of a business, appearance in court, motor vehicle registration, etc., does not constitute a record. Yet the receipt of a transcript or the making a verbal inquiry on the amount and type of taxes one owes, on the permit issuing or registration process, on court rulings, on ownership issues, on current company status or civil status, etc., is considered a record*".

The interview process was monitored by local AIP coordinators. The number of citizens interviewed at the various institutions is given in Table 1:

Table 1: Interviews held with citizens

Institution	Number of citizens interviewed outside the institution
Tax office	60
Technical office	70
Office on civil services to the population (OCSP)	90
Land committee	52
Other municipal offices	5
District court	204
Notary office (Entry Records Office)	73
Other court offices	19
Sofia city court	20
Total no. of respondents	**593**

The target group of institutional respondents was comprised of file-keepers and department managers (or administrative secretaries, in the case of the courts), and the feedback of the employees representing one and the same institution was incorporated into a single questionnaire. That is why the interview reflects the

global opinion of the institution, rather than that of its individual employees. This approach was adopted because the questions were aimed at highlighting the institutional practices, and not the employees' assessment of the latter.

A total of 204 institutions were visited countrywide, and a total of 184 interviews were held with institutions.

Table 2: Interviews held with institutions

Institutions	Number of offices visited	Number of interviews held
Sofia city court (the civil cases file-keeping department and the companies department)	1	1
Regional courts (the civil cases file-keeping department and the companies department)	26	26
District courts (Sofia - 1; the rest of the country- 26)	27	26
Notary offices (Sofia 1; the rest of the country - 26)	27	23
Tax offices (Sofia - 5; the rest of the country 26)	31	20
Municipal OCSPs (Sofia - 5; the rest of the country 26)	31	30
Municipal technical offices (Sofia 5; the rest of the country 26)	31	31
Municipal land committees (Sofia - 4; the rest of the country - 26)	30	27
Total	**204**	**184**

Refusals were registered in the remaining 20 cases. The tax offices based their refusals on an instruction of the General Tax Directorate, prohibiting the provision of any information whatsoever *due to forthcoming changes in its structure*. In one of the cases, the tax office manager seized an inquiry form that had already been filled out. Initially refused, two interviews with district courts in the country were afterwards held, following a telephone conversation with the Agency for Socio-economic Analysis (ASA). In some cases the employees of the target institutions demanded that the AIP's representative letter and questionnaires be registered with their file-keeping department, yet no interview ensued. In others the employees gave a blunt refusal to disclose any information whatsoever. All in all, less than 10% of the visited institutions refused an interview.

Most refusals were based on a shortage of time. In some cases the file-keepers or their managers assessed the time they needed to respond to the questions concerning the number of records they issue at 1-2 weeks, which is in itself indicative of the state the registers are in. In this sense the score of the interviews held and refused is not so much indicative of the employees' reluctance to co-operate, as much as it discloses their incapacity to respond to questions concerning the records they provide. In most cases, and especially in larger district towns and Sofia, the file-keepers were not capable of giving an accurate weekly estimate of the records they provide to the public by volume and type. In some isolated cases, such as that of the chief architect of Oborishte municipality in Sofia, this procedure took little time, as this official keeps a record of all applications filed by citizens, denoting also the office they are addressed to and their outcome. The interview data in this official's case were taken from his *personal* notes.

The information thus gathered is representative for the entire country, as the study covered all Bulgarian regional centers. The relative high homogeneity of the results yielded by similar-size municipalities confirms the external validity of the data. The structure of the records the institutions issue is more of an indicative nature. The precise volume of the records sought and issued is hard to measure, because the institutions lack systematized information and the public inquiries are highly heterogeneous. Also, the citizens themselves often have difficulty classifying their requests under one category or another. Nevertheless, the data bear a high internal validity, attested by the fact that both the citizens and the institutions point to the same types of records as being most frequently sought and provided.

The statistical measures most commonly applied throughout the analyses were 'percentage', 'mean arithmetic value' and 'median'. The percentage reveals the number of citizen inquiries of a particular institution, or the share that responded to a question in a particular way. For most cases the percentage exceeded 100%, since more than one inquiry was made or more than one answer was given. The median is an average value, above and below which are an equal number of cases in a distribution of values, such as records, visits, etc. This mean value corresponds to the 50%-th percentile and is appropriate to apply to distributions marked by a great diversity (standard deviation) of values. The median, unlike the arithmetic mean value, *neutralizes* the effect of the high and low value extremes. These statistical measures are applicable to all questions asked as a whole and in separate, based on the size of the municipality, age and education level of the citizens, and also on all institutions surveyed.

The study preparations and results analyses were conducted jointly by AIP and ASA. The report is developed by Dotcho Mihailov (A.S.A. , Manager) in cooperation with AIP experts Alexander Kashumov, lawyer, Gergana Jouleva, Konstantin Palikarsky, Lidia Celova, lawyer, Fany Davidova, Michail Milchev. The fieldwork was handled by local ASA interviewers with oversight from the AIP's local coordinators. The translation of this report is made by Dessislava Boyadjieva.

I. Demand and Supply of Records

This section of the report addresses the volume of the demand and supply of records in the visited institutions. The data gleaned from citizen interviews were run against those submitted by the institutions. These comparisons served an informative purpose but did not allow for any particular interpretations to be made. Yet explanations were sought every time a sizable discrepancy occurred between the *citizens'* data and those of the *institutions*.

I.1. Records Issued by the Municipal/Tax Office

At the municipal administration, the OCSP is the one, which citizens make requests most frequently of - 32.5%, followed by the technical office - 25.6%, the tax office - 23.5%, and the land committee 19.9%. This frequency is nearly identical across the country, with Sofia as the one exception. There, requests are more frequent of the technical office - 37.5%, and the tax office - 31.3%, than of the OCSP - 28.1%.

Table 3: From which institution did you request the issuance of a record?

Percentage of municipal offices visited	Total	Rousse; Bourgas; Plovdiv; Varna	Smaller town	<=37 years old	38-50 years old	>=51 years old	<= high school degree	>= academic degree
Tax office	23.5	30.3	21.2	25.9	29.8	16.5	23.1	25.0
Technical office	25.6	36.4	22.2	21.0	33.0	23.7	18.5	39.0
OCSP	32.5	24.2	34.4	43.2	29.8	22.7	35.3	25.0
Land committee	19.9	9.1	23.6	8.6	13.8	36.1	22.0	17.0
Other	2.2	0	2.8	1.2	3.2	2.1	2.3	2.0

Records from the OCSP - the most frequently visited municipal office are more often requested by young people. The technical and tax offices are primarily visited by middle aged people, 38-50 years old. The visits to the tax office by middle aged people are understandable, as they constitute the largest age group of taxpayers.

Records Issued by the Tax Office

Citizens

The most frequent inquiries of the tax office are in connection to *real estate tax appraisals* - 23.3%, *business activity/permits* - 18.3%, and real estate tax liability - 16.7%. It is possible that the respondents may have misclassified some of their answers concerning the diverse taxes on real estate. That is why greater significance is attached to the summarized data on records concerning liabilities related to real estate in one way or another. As a whole, more than half of the records produced by the tax office - 53.3%, are about this type of information. Sofia tops this trend, probably due to its high level of property leasing and real estate transactions. Inquiries about real estate are more frequently made by elderly people - 73.3% for over 50 years of age, while inquiries about business activity and permits are usually made by individuals 37 years of age and younger - 28.6%.

Institutions

Across the country tax offices issue about 400-500 records a week. An intriguing circumstance is that the tax office managers report fewer records than the file-keepers, which have direct contact with the visitors. It seems that the institutions are not clearly aware of the actual volume of services they provide, and the difficulties the employees have in assessing their own workload bear proof to this assumption. What is more critical though, is that the absence of internal institutional information makes it hard for the offices to project their costs and place concrete demands on their senior administrators.

Nevertheless, the data the tax offices give about the records they most frequently issue, are generally congruent to those given in the citizens' interviews. The total average records concerning real estate-related liabilities is reported at 242 a week (160 records in the median), or about 48% of the entire volume of records produced (the citizens seek such information in 53% of the cases).

Both sources of information illustrate that nearly half of the records tax offices produce are related to real estate liabilities in one way or another. Based on the offices' feedback we can get a clearer view of how real estate-related records are structured. Records about real estate tax appraisals come first with 70.5 records a week, followed by records about real estate tax (in mean value) with 64.7 records a week. However, the demand for such information varies greatly from one municipality to another, and overall, it carries a relatively low value in the median - 30 records a week.

Table 4. Records issued by the tax office

Mean number based on the employees	Median
Real estate tax appraisals	50
Real estate tax for individuals	30
Registered owner of real estate	50
Change in real estate ownership	30

Fifty-five percent of the respondents identify the records about real estate tax as the fastest tax offices produce - in less than 15 min.

It is important to note that records on real estate tax appraisal, which are among those most frequently requested according to the individuals on both sides of the desk, take the longest time to produce between one day and one week.

Attention should be paid to the records the municipality generates in connection to business permits and licenses. According to the present study these records are relatively few - 30 per week (median), but quite time-consuming, as municipal file-keepers add. However, this study is focused on single-time records and not on the time needed to obtain a permit. A study made by the Institute for Market Economy (IME)/ASA reveals that the process of obtaining a permit/license to start a business takes about 7-8 weeks. This time is split among visits to obtain permission and certificates from 20 institutions (the municipality, the State Veterinary and Sanitary Control, the Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology, the Fire Department, the

National Electric Company, a number of outpatient clinics, the National Social Security Institute, various ministries, etc.).

The license/permit issuing process empowers the municipality to accept applications for starting a business, examine the documents enclosed, make field inspections and issue licenses/permits. The applicants provide the requisite documents themselves and bear all costs for the coordination and administration necessary to obtain the issuance of the certificate they demand. So instead of acting as coordinator, the municipality assumes a controlling role.

For the above reasons the tax offices should consider shortening the permits and licenses issuing process, as the burden is borne by the applicants.

Records Issued by the OCSP

Citizens
The requests most frequently made from the OCSP concern the civil status of individuals certificate - 43,3%, and the heirs certificate - 28,9%. The most infrequent requests are about authentication of signatures on documents - 2.2%, and about the child adoption certificate - 2.2%.

Whereas requests related to verifying the civil status of individuals are more frequent in the larger towns - 62.5%, requests for heirs certificates are more frequent in smaller towns - 30,1%. Curiously, people with an academic degree show a greater concern about issues of inheritance - 41.7%, than those with lower education - 24.2%.

Understandably, young people pay relatively frequent visits to the OCSP to make requests for marriage documents - 14.3%. Again, it is predominantly young people that make requests about name identity certificates.

Institutions
OCSP respondents report that they issue an average of 500-600 records a week, a number which fluctuates greatly from one municipality to the other. The mean number of records in the median is 377 per week.

This information confirms that the most frequent records involve the certification of the civil status of individuals, such as birth, death, marital status - 100 records per week in the median, and the heirs certificate - 100 records per week in the median. The most infrequent records are about the child adoption certificate, and that coincides with the citizen interview results - 2 records in the median.

One of the most frequent requests is about the civil status certificate, and the employees deem that the respective records are the most quickly issued in 36% of the offices. This procedure

usually takes less than 15 min. However, the employees believe that records about the heirs certificate, which are the next most frequently requested, take longest to issue. The time needed for this certificate coincides with the longest time it takes a tax office to generate a record - from one day to one week in 56,7 % of the offices.

Citizens and employees give different responses regarding the number of records generated for the certification of Bulgarian citizenship. Citizens rank them third, and file-keepers rank them second before last among all other types of records they generate. Another discrepancy exists between the employees' and citizens' feedback on the number of requests made to authenticate signatures on documents. Employees claim this is a frequent request, while the data from the citizens suggests the opposite.

Such discrepancies usually arise from terminological disparities. For example, the employees report that they generate a lot of *other* records outside the list enclosed in Table 3 (total 'other' - 107 records per week). This is usually information on Bulgarian identity documents and ID cards, which citizens place under the 'Bulgarian citizenship certificate' category. Similarly, citizens place the records they request in respect of certificates for kinship or the registration of death/birth acts, under the 'certificate for the civil status of individuals' category, and not under 'other'.

This terminological inconsistency presents more than just a technical barrier to the understanding of the information collected. It comes to show how often citizens and employees speak a different language about what seem to be plain and unambiguous types of records and information.

Table 5. Most frequent records produced by the OCSP

OCSP	Per cent based on citizens[1]	Median Mean number based on employees
Certification of the civil status of individuals (birth, death, marital status)	43.3%	100 records
Heirs certificate	28.9%	100 records
Authenticating signatures on documents	2.2%	30 records
Marriage documents	8.9%	15 records
Certification of the identity of names	7.8%	12.5 records
Bulgarian citizenship certificate	10.0%	10 records
Child adoption certificate	2.2%	2 records

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[1] The comparisons of the data gleaned from the citizens and institutions are in different measurements. In the citizen data the frequency of the requests was measured through the percentage of particular requests, while the institutions reported the number of records they produced. To transform a mean value into a relative share (%) would not be appropriate, as it would not match the format of the information collected. That is why the comparisons were only made to indicate the rank (place) any given record occupies in the structure of the citizen and institutional data, respectively.

Other	2.2%	107.5 records

Records Issued by the Technical Office

<u>Citizens</u>

The most frequent requests from the municipal technical office are related to the issuance of a real estate sketch (40% of all visitors to the technical office), the certification of facts and circumstances concerning the territorial and urban plan - 24.3%, and the set of documents required to undertake construction - 22.9%. Fewer requests are made about the housing district building plan - 14.3%.

It is usually the more elderly visitors who inquire about the issuance of sketches and about the territorial and urban plan (TUP), while inquiries about the documents needed to undertake construction are made by younger people. Understandably, requests for construction are fewer in the smaller towns.

Sofia stands out with the high share of *other records* (33.0%), which are most frequently about registration of a business.

<u>Institutions</u>

According to the municipal file-keepers, the technical offices issue about 250 records on a weekly median average, whereas their managers report 150 records in the median.

Contrary to the citizens, the technical office employees claim that the most frequent records they issue have to do with the cadastre (the Bulgarian use of the term 'cadastre' includes technical data on the real estate properties in a given town, together with the real estate register, featuring the names of the real estate owners translator's note) - 58 records per week, and the records most infrequently sought concern TUP - 20 records. Most probably this is just another case of terminological disparity, stemming from the citizens' wrong identification of the records they request about the cadastre with records about the TUP (boundaries, number of floors, neighbors, legality).

The confusion of the TUP with the cadastre and requests are frequent about both topics - must surely hinder the issuance of records.

The data on the two next most frequently requested records– about a sketch and about construction - seem comparable, which is a hint of consistency between the meaning the citizens and employees attach to these terms.

Table 6. Most frequent records issued by the technical office

Technical office	Percentage based on citizens	Median Mean number based on employees
The cadastre	20.0%	58 records
Issuance of a real estate sketch	40.0%	50 records
Documents needed for construction	22.9%	45 records
The housing district building plan	24.3%	40 records
Certification of TUP-related facts and circumstances (boundaries, number of floors, neighbors, legality)	14.3%	20 records
Other	10.0%	34 records

The technical office employees and the citizens are unanimous that the records about the sketch of a real estate and the requisite documents for construction take shortest to produce: less than 3 hours. The record it takes the technical office the longest to produce is the certification of TUP-related facts and circumstances one week to one month.

Records Issued by the Land Committee

Citizens

The most frequent visits of citizens to the land committee - 23.1%, are for decisions issued by the latter. Twenty-one point two percent citizens inquire about transactions and farmland ownership, and 19.2 % about the land division plan. The most infrequent requests are about the preparation of a coordinate register for a section of the urban boundary -1.9%, and about land invested in the state farm co-ops back in the 1940s - 1.9%. Requests for changes introduced to the real estate register - 3.8%, and about land, given away under Clause #4, are relatively few.

There is a clear demographic dependence only in respect of requests about transactions with and ownership of farmland (transactions, partitioning, and mortgages). Such requests are habitually made by individuals above 50 years of age. A curious fact is that land committee decisions are usually inquired about by either elderly or young people, and much less by middle-aged people.

Institutions

Interviews with file-keepers working at the land committees reveal that the record most frequently requested, that is, the social assistance certificate, is in the 'other' category - 60 records per week, median. This record probably coincides with the one given about land committee decisions, as it proves that the citizens do not receive any land income and are entitled to social assistance.

A similar terminological disparity exists also in respect of the notion '*status of the correspondence relevant to the inquiries*', as a result of the citizens' confusing the specific item of information they seek (e.g. a committee decision), with an inquiry into the progress of the search for that item of information. This would not have been as important, were the citizens able to

quickly check into the progress of their inquiries over the telephone, at a designated information desk, etc.

Table 7. Records most frequently issued by the land committee

Land Committee	Percentage based on citizens	Median Mean number based on employees
Social assistance certificates	-	60 records
The status of the correspondence relevant to the inquiries (what happened to the inquiry)	5.8%	50 records
Land committee decisions	23.1%	45 records
The land division plan	19.2%	45 records
Transactions in and ownership of farmland (transactions, partitioning, mortgages)	21.2%	30 records
Introduction of changes to the real estate register	3.8%	30 records
Drawing of a sketch or graphical map	9.6%	17,5 records
Drawing of a division design or an act of findings	9.6%	20 records
The lands given away under Clause #4- (deadline for the users to apply for acquisition of ownership rights)	3.8%	15 records
The lands invested in the state farm co-ops in the 1940s	1.9%	15 records
Surveying, marking and coordinating the boundaries of a property	7.7%	10 records
Transfer of title to property	9.6%	10 records
Issuance of a court ruling transcript (i.e. a written record about information contained in the register)	9.6%	10 records
Preparation of a coordinate register for a section of the town boundary	1.9%	3 records
Other	5.8	25 records

The other most frequent records the land committee reports to be generating coincide as a whole with the citizens' feedback. These are records on the land division plan - 45 records per week in the median, and information on transactions in and ownership of farmland - 45 records.

It takes land committees less than 15 minutes to produce the record about transactions in and ownership of farmland, which is true for 70,4% of the committees. This record is also one of the most frequently requested and issued. Land committees take the longest time to produce the record for surveying, marking and coordinating the boundaries of real estate - one day to one week. Interest towards this type of record remains relatively lower.

I.2 Records Issued by the Courts

Records Issued by the District Court

In the district courts the most frequent inquiries are about the status of court cases - 35.8%, transcripts of court rulings 18.1%, and issuance of a no-criminal record certificate - 16.7%. The remaining types of requests are less frequent, the last position being occupied by those concerning the appointment of expert witnesses.

The most frequent requests are in the larger towns, where the court cases are more numerous. Other requests also typical for larger towns are about summnons - 19.2%, and about information contained in the archives - 15.4%.

A lot of the records smaller district courts produce deal with administrative issues, such as payment of court fees - 9.5%, issuance of a no-criminal record certificate - 13.9%, etc. This is understandable, provided we assume that smaller towns have fewer court cases. Yet the resources of the system within smaller towns remain under-utilized. The prospect of requesting for the status of a case from another town could not materialize before the system becomes fully automated. Smaller district court resources remain under-utilized also in respect of the transcripts of court rulings, for which the demand in smaller towns is twice as little as in the larger.

People with an academic degree inquire more frequently about the status of court cases and about transcripts of court rulings, whereas people of a lower education ask more about how much a record costs and where to pay the fee.

Table 8. Records most frequently issued by the district court

District court	Percentage based on citizens	Median Mean number based on employees
The status of court cases (have they been filed, when, what phase are they in)	35.8%	70 records
The court alphabetical registers	3.9%	60 records
Transcripts of court rulings	18.1%	50 records
Summons	9.3%	50 records
Payment of court fees	9.3%	30 records
What the fees are (how much, where, what type, what are they for)	3.9%	30 records
Checks in the archives	6.4%	25 records
Appointed expert witnesses	3.4%	20 records
Issuance of a no-criminal record certificate	16.7%	-
Other	6.4%	30 records

District courts produce a weekly median average of 365 records. Just like the managers of the municipal offices, the administrative secretaries of the courts maintain that their employees produce considerably fewer records, about 200 per week at the district courts.

As a whole, the most frequent requests from the district courts coincide with the way file-keepers rank the records they produce. These are chiefly records concerning the status of court cases, or 20% of all records produced by the district courts. The discrepancies observed here are once again based on terminological differences, as was the case of the two types of data for the municipal institutions. The records concerning the courts' alphabetical registers are typical in this respect: some citizens do not know that the information they require needs to be looked up in the alphabetical registers, while the file-keepers are more interested to know where to search, rather than what the citizen has asked.

The most frequent citizen request that concerning the status of a court case is also the fastest one district courts produce a record for. It takes less than 15 minutes on the average in 84,6% of the cases. Records involving archive checks take longest from one day to one week, in 46,2% of the cases.

Records Issued by the Notary Office

The most frequent records the notary offices produce are about transcripts of notarial deeds - 24,7%, encumbrances - 20,5%, and ownership rights - 17,8 %.

Transcripts of notarial deeds are chiefly issued in the larger towns - 33,3%, to people above 51 years of age - 40,0 %, and usually with a high school diploma - 32,5%. Records about encumbrances are the second most frequent, and are issued most often to citizens of larger towns. Yet unlike the preceding case, the records on encumbrances are chiefly issued to young people - 36,8% with a university diploma - 30,3%, perhaps because young people buy, whereas older people sell more often. Anyway, older and less educated people are more highly exposed to risk in real estate transactions and require greater attention on behalf of the notary office employees.

The most infrequent requests are about construction company cases - 1.4%. This means one of two things: either such cases are not kept by most and especially by the small notaries, or the citizens are ignorant of their opportunity to obtain fast and effective information. Whatever the case, the public needs to be made aware of this service.

Table 9. Records most frequent issued by the notary office

Notary office	Percentage based on citizens	Median Mean number based on employees
What fees are owed (how much, where, what, due for what)	12.3%	57.5 records
Payment of notarial fees	6.8%	50 records
Reference to the notary office's alphabetical registers	2.7%	32.5 records
Encumbrances	20.5%	30 records
Bookings made	13.7%	30 records
Checks in the archives	9.6%	30 records
Ownership rights	17.8%	28 records

Transcripts of notarial deeds	24.7%	20 records
Other	8.2%	12.5 records
Housing construction co-ops	5.5%	10 records
Construction company cases	1.4%	10 records

The data submitted by the employees of the notary office and those reflecting the citizens' requests are largely incongruent. The file-keepers of the notary offices rank the fees (how much, where, what, due for what) as the most frequently inquired about 57 records per week (median), followed by the payment of notarial fees - 50 records. Thus, according to the file-keepers, the records they most frequently produce are about fees (size, type, etc.), whereas the citizens claim they inquire about transcripts and encumbrances. If this is another case of terminological discrepancy, it most probably stems from the fact that the citizens do not interpret their requests about fees as inherent *records*. They use 'record' to denote the information they would receive subject to paying the fees. This discrepancy is important inasmuch as its elimination could render the notarial services much more efficient. If information on the institution's pricing and payment policies were made available at points of public access, the public would stop inquiring about them. This is obviously impossible, as the most frequent records file-keepers produce are about prices and payment.

Another terminological disparity involves the records produced through reference to the alphabetical registers. File-keepers claim such records are produced much more frequently than do the citizens. As already mentioned above, this fact is indicative of the extent to which file-keepers and citizens think in different categories the first think about *how records are generated*, and the second about *what purpose they serve.* Citizens think of their *real estate* while file-keepers think of their *files*. That would not constitute a problem, were citizens and file-keepers content with each other.

There are no inconsistencies in terms of the content, as both citizens and file-keepers believe that the records most frequently produced involve encumbrances, ownership rights and transcripts of notarial acts.

Most file-keepers at the notary offices are incapable of identifying the record it takes the least time to produce from among those most frequently requested, and therefore say it is the *verbal record*. We can hardly argue that it takes less to produce a *verbal* than a *written record,* although most file-keepers report that the latter takes less than 15 min. on the average. The second-fastest record, produced through reference to the alphabetical registers, reflects once again the manner of *how a record is generated,* as opposed to *what it is necessary for.* As became evident, this distinction does not mean anything to the users of the records.

The employees report that records on encumbrances and transcripts of notarial acts, which are most frequently requested, take longest to produce- one day to one week in 47.8% of the offices.

Sofia City Court and Regional Courts

Citizens

The data below have been extracted from 20 citizen interviews, held outside the Sofia city court. For practical reasons such interviews were only held outside the district courts in the rest of the country. The information about the regional courts across the country was gathered only from file-keepers working in these courts.

In the Sofia city court the two most frequently visited places are the general file-keeping department - 55%, and the companies department - 25%.

The number of interviews held does not allow us to draw any representative conclusions about the structure of the Sofia city court records, but we assume that it closely resembles that of the district courts in the rest of the country. There, as in Sofia, the records most frequently produced are about the status of court cases - 45%, and transcripts of court rulings - 30%. Inquiries of the general file-keeping department are usually made by people of a more advanced age, whereas the companies department is more frequented by visitors below 37 years of age - 42.9%. The file-keepers working at the regional courts' companies department report that a weekly average of 90 records is produced countrywide for a certificate on the current status of companies.

Table 10. Average number of records, issued by the regional and the district courts

Regional and district courts	Regional court General file-keeping department (Median)	District court (Median)
The status of court cases (has a case been filed, when, what phase is it in)	90 records	70 records
What are the fees (how much, what, what are they paid for)	50 records	30 records
Reference to the court alphabetical registers	50 records	60 records
Summons	50 records	50 records
Transcripts of court rulings	40 records	50 records
Payment of court fees	35 records	30 records
References to the archives	30 records	25 records
Other	30 records	30 records
Appointment of expert witnesses	20 records	20 records

Institutions

As a whole, the data provided by the employees of the regional courts' general file-keeping departments across the country match those of the file-keepers at the district courts, and those contained in the citizen interviews. In both institutions the most frequent records are about the status of court cases, and the most infrequent ones about the appointment of expert witnesses and about checks in the archives. Regional courts handle considerably more inquiries about the diverse records they produce and about their relevant pricing and payment policy. This circumstance, as was commented in reference to the notary offices above, is more indicative of the way the institution shandle their administrative tasks, than of any specifics in terms of content. The regional courts and the notary offices offer less publicity on their services pricing and payment policy than do the district courts.

Records on court case status, which are in high demand among the citizens, take regional courts the longest to produce, as they do the district courts.

II. State of the Institutions

II.1. Automation

Employees report that 26.8% of the offices produce their records manually, 23% of them have computers but lack specialized software, and 49.2% have computers and specialized software. Thus, although nearly 73% of the offices are automated, onethird of them cannot generate automated records due to lack of specialized software.

The OCSP's and the land committees are the most highly automated. The courts are in a pitiful situation, with merely 14.8% of the district and 18.5% of the regional courts having computers with specialized software.

Table 11. How automated are your administrative operations?

Percentage of institutions	Total	Tax office	Technical office	OCSP	Land committee	District court	Notary office	Regional court
Not automated (no computers)	26.8	20.0	24.1	12.9	7.4	55.6	13.6	51.9
Computers available, but no specialized software	23.0	30.0	20.7	12.9	25.9	25.9	22.7	25.9
Computers and specialized software available	49.2	50.0	55.2	74.2	66.7	14.8	63.6	18.5
No reply	1.1	0	0	0	0	3.7	0	3.7

Visitors report that an average of 35.0% records are generated automatically. Reports from younger and more educated people about the use of computers are more frequent, but nevertheless the records generated automatically remain under 41%.

If both sources of information are reliable, then nearly 70% of the offices do not make thorough use of their computers, with or without the presence of specialized software (49.2% according to data provided by the institutions).

The citizens and the institutions are unanimous that the courts produce fewer automated records - 23.15%, than do the municipal offices - 35%.

Table 12: Were computers applied in the generation of your records?

Percentage of citizens	Tax office	Technical office	OCSP	Land committee	District court	Notary office
Yes	51.7	15.7	38.9	36.5	15.2	46.6
No	35.0	55.7	34.4	40.4	60.8	32.9
I did not see	10.0	27.1	24.4	19.2	16.7	19.2
No reply	3.3	1.4	2.2	3.8	7.4	1.4

Provisional as it is, the comparison of the two sources of information gives a rough idea of how often institutions use computers to generate records. This practice seems most infrequent at the technical offices, of which nearly 76% have computers, yet a mere 15.7% of the citizens saw

them used for the generation of records (20.1% relative share). The notaries use their computers quite extensively, as 46.6% of their records are computer-generated at an 86.4% level of automation (54% relative share).

The fact that the offices under-utilize their computers can be seen from their own reports: although 73% of the offices are automated, 51.4% of them update their data manually, and only 4.4% of them use a modem connection, and 5% an email correspondence to that end.

Table 13: How do you do your data updates?

Percentage of institutions having replied with a 'yes'	Total	Tax office	Technical office	OCSP	Land committee	District court	Notary office	Regional court
Manually	51.4	40.0	62.1	64.5	44.4	48.1	40.9	51.9
Through floppy discs	48.0	60.0	48.3	67.7	81.5	14.8	40.9	18.5
E-mail	5.5	5.0	6.9	6.5	0	7.4	9.1	3.7
Modem	4.4	20.0	0	9.7	0	3.7	0	0
Another means	10.4	10.0	6.9	16.1	7.4	3.7	18.2	11.1

Technical office employees report that 62.1% of the offices update their data manually, as one of a number of ways, despite the availability of computers at 76% of the offices. These statistics may be explained by the fact that technical offices need graphic software, which is hardly true for the OCSPs, of which 87% have computers and yet 64.5% of them still resort to updating their information manually, as one of a number of ways.

Poor technical parameters may be one reason accounting for the ineffective use of the existing computer equipment. Forty-five point seven percent of the computerized offices (73%), have a LAN, and only 7.3% have external modem connections. Land committees make very poor use of their computers as few as 4.2% of them have LANs and none of the offices visited have an external connection.

Table 14. Does your office have …?

Valid percent of institutions „yes"	Total	Tax office	Technical office	OCSP	Land committee	District court	Notary office	Regional court
LAN	45.7	66.7	50.0	66.7	4.2	54.5	42.1	45.5
External connections	7.3	6.7	15.0	11.5	0	9.1	5.6	0

It is not known whether the existing computer equipment can be integrated into LANs or support external connections at all. Offices in the town of Silistra report that their computers are obsolete. The enormous bulk of archival information is yet another objective hindrance to the optimal use of the existing computers, as its keying-in requires resources the offices can hardly allocate. Poorly skilled staff is a subjective hindrance many of the offices complain about.

On the whole, the complete automation of the offices is still a distant objective. The reasons for this are both of an institutional and a technical nature.

II.2. Public Awareness About Records and Time Spent to Obtain Them

Service quality is a category that is equally important and difficult to measure. A possible approach is to examine the real-life situations people face when they visit the desks at the respective institutions.

The data listed below address issues of service quality through questions about the *publicity of the records, the time they take, the number of visits,* and other indicators that measure the service quality offered by the institutions.

Public Awareness About the Institutions

The publicity this study examines is related to the extent to which citizens know which office or institution they could address to obtain the information they seek. Hence, the focus is on the knowledge about the *functions* of the offices and not on their *popularity.*

The citizens have a general knowledge of the records the individual institutions provide: 72.6% of the respondents know the right place to go to for the information they seek *in advance.* The best informed are the respondents from Sofia - 75%, and those with an academic degree - 75.0%.

Young people show a slightly lower *knowledge* about the municipal offices: 65.4% of the respondents under 38 years of age know the right municipal office to request their record from, as opposed to 78.4% of the older respondents. The situation in the courts is exactly the opposite: the young, and especially middle-aged people - 81.7%, are better informed on where to request a record than their elderly counterparts - 71.1%.

Table 15. Did you know in advance where within this institution you needed to go, so as to obtain the record you were seeking?

Percentage of citizens having requested records of the institutions:	Tax office	Technic al office	OCSP	Land committe e	District court	Notary office
Yes	61.7	81.4	65.6	84.6	77.0	74.0
No	36.7	18.6	34.4	15.4	21.6	21.9
No reply	1.7	0	0	0	1.5	4.1

The records generated by the land committees - 84.6%, the technical offices - 81.4%, and the notary offices - 74.0%, require less publicizing. The various offices report that the records produced by the tax offices and the OCSPs have the lowest publicity, despite the fact that they are among the most frequently sought.

Tax offices, more than any of the other institutions, need to make public both the information they gather and produce.

Time Spent

1. Time spent on single-time visits

The time the citizens spend is of special importance, all the more because they seek the records they need during their working day. Moreover, some records are only obtainable on a particular day of the week or between fixed hours, which means that every visit a working person pays to obtain a record for his/her individual needs, inflicts losses on his/her company or state organization. To avoid generating such losses, the working individuals could consider getting unpaid leave, as some of the interviewed file-keepers suggested

On a country average, a single-time visit to the municipal offices for a record takes half an hour (not including the travelling time; 24.84 minutes on the average; 15 minutes, median). Visits to the courts take a relatively shorter time 23 minutes, or 15 minutes (median value).

Single-time visits to the municipal offices and courts take an equally greater amount of time in the larger towns. The time spent is quite homogeneous by age and education, meaning that one could save some time based on the stamina of their youth or the expertise of their education. The determining factor is obviously the way the institutions handle their operations, which are either too numerous or poorly organized in the larger district towns.

Single-time records requested of the technical offices take the longest time for staff to produce among all institutions in this study - 27.2 minutes, followed by the land committee - 26.8 minutes, and the tax office - 24.9 minutes.

Overall, the average single expenditure of time half an hour - seems agreeable. Yet it should be pointed out once again that does not include the time spent in travel to and from the institution.

However, even though they take a relatively short time, single-time visits for a record cannot be accomplished in one and the same room. To make their request, citizens *need to knock on* an average of two doors (1.7 mean value). Tax offices, notably those situated in large towns, present the greatest difficulties in this respect.

2. Number of Visits

The seemingly agreeable time needed for single-time visits starts provoking adverse interpretations once we compare it to the number of visits paid for one and the same record. One of the interviewed file-keepers reported that *most citizens know who to turn to, but need to go through multiple doors, due to the existing system.*

The number of citizens having paid a minimum of two visits to the municipality and the court for one and the same record is 36.8% and 44%, respectively. The more educated people more often paid multiple visits both to the municipality and the court.

Most frequently, multiple visits for one and the same record are paid to the technical offices - 48.6%, then to the land committees - 48.1%, and the district courts. Repeated visits for a record are least paid to the tax offices, yet they take quite long each time they are paid.

Table 16. Have you been here before for one and the same record?

Percentage of citizens, having requested records of the institutions:	Tax office	Technical office	OCSP	Land committee	District court	Notary office
Yes	31.7	48.6	25.6	48.1	46.6	37.0
No	68.3	47.1	74.4	51.9	52.5	63.0
No reply	0	4.3	0	0	1.0	0

This feedback helps find out *how many visits it takes to obtain a record*. The citizens report that it takes about three visits to the municipality and about two to the court to obtain a record (there is a great diversity of responses on this issue, the mean arithmetic values being considerably higher than the mean median value).

The more advanced the age of the respondents, the higher the number of visits it takes them to obtain a record. Accordingly, people aged 51 years and higher pay the most frequent visits more than three. This implies that the citizens could limit the high number of visits they pay for a record, but not the time spent on a single visit.

On the whole, the data indicate that obtaining a record requires an average of 2-3 visits, each roughly half an hour long. The time spent on single-time visits is relatively high for the tax offices, whereas the courts and the technical offices require a greater number of visits.

II.3. Service Quality

<u>The citizens' perspective</u>

Other studies have shown that service quality in Bulgaria is not a serious incentive to the making of a purchase. At the same time the efforts certain chain stores make to train their staff are faced with substantial difficulties, despite the financial rewards they offer for a better quality of service.

Thus, we hardly need to dwell on the issue of how low the quality of services related to the issuance of records is. The challenge here is to determine the extent to which the institutional employees perceive themselves as *individuals, working in the service sector,* and their visitors - as *customers*.

A first glimpse at the situation from the citizens' perspective does not leave as negative an impression as expected: nearly half of the municipal and court employees greet their visitors or at least return their greeting. When delivering the records, 25%-30% of the file-keepers even smile. However, the employees chat *with each other* in nearly 30% of the citizen visits; 15% of the visitors to the court report that the employee has gone out for break; 19.5% of the visitors to the municipality are convinced *they would get a better service if they were able to pay the employee personally*. These opinions prevail among the visitors to the municipalities in the large towns - 39.4%. This idea of potential corruption is most strongly voiced by the visitors to the notary-, technical, and tax offices.

Table 17. Do you think you would have received a better or a swifter service if you were able to tip the employee:

Percentage of citizens, having requested records of the institutions:	Tax office	Technical office	OCSP	Land committee	District court	Notary office
Yes	23.3	28.6	12.2	15.4	19.1	28.8
No	58.3	50.0	63.3	65.4	62.7	49.3
No reply	18.3	21.4	24.4	19.2	18.1	21.9

More critical at this point is that individuals of a different age and education have a different perception of services. Younger people and people with an academic degree are considerably more critical towards services. It is the behavioral aspect of the services rather than their potential for corruption that annoys these respondents.

Forty-four percent of the young visitors to the municipalities report that the *employees chat with each other*, compared to 23.7% of the people above 50 years of age. Also, older visitors report more frequently that the employee *smiles*, when issuing the record. Assuming the employees offer the same treatment to people of various ages, then the discrepancies in the data could be ascribed to differences in the criteria and notions of what quality service involves.

The above indicates that customer service is a two-way process, in which the low criteria for *a quality service* ultimately make the citizens' expectations a reality.

The Institutions' Perspective

What are the institutions' own stories about this process? A key to their understanding is provided by one of the interviewed employees, which reports that *changes are mandated directly by Sofia. If they (in Sofia) deem that something calls for a change, they will change it accordingly.*

Most file-keepers - 60.7%, believe that citizens are unaware as to *how, where and from whom to request records.* Taken in isolation this figure is meaningless. Yet it acquires meaning once we run it against the way citizens assess themselves - 72.6% maintain that *they know where to seek their records*. The way the employees judge the competency of the citizens reinforces the differences these two groups have in their perceptions. The employees of the notary offices and the tax offices have the lowest expectations regarding the citizens' competency.

The expectations of the employees that the citizens do not know where to seek the records they need is naturally combined with their understanding that the citizens do not know exactly what they want, either. According to the file-keepers, the thing the citizens need most of all is *to be specific* to get faster and better service.

Table 18. What is the most important thing citizens ought to know to receive faster and better services? (An open question)

Percentage of responses[2] of file-keepers, grouped by categories	Tax office	Technical office	OCSP	Land committee	District court	Notary office	Regional court
Be specific	80.0	72.4	83.9	88.9	74.1	81.8	85.2
Bring along relevant documents	30.0	44.8	45.2	14.8	29.6	22.7	25.9
Use a lawyer's services	0	0	0	0	7.4	9.1	7.4
Have knowledge of legal matters	10.0	10.3	3.2	18.5	0	0	11.1
Have mutual respect	5.0	0	16.1	3.7	3.7	4.5	3.7

The employees could hardly work normally if the citizens were not specific in their inquiries. Especially if they did not know their *uniform civic number*, *their company's or father's name*, as one employee adds.

Yet more often than not the term *specific* involves the understanding that the *citizens should keep track of the latest updates to the legislation, be familiar with the tax legislation*, etc. These are expectations one has of partners, not *customers*. Another employee points out the fact that *for some of their inquiries the citizens take the alphabetical registers and look for the relevant information themselves*, as an advantage of her district court. Citizens are expected to participate efficiently and competently in a task that is not theirs. What is more, this mindset is shared by the municipal offices' department managers and by the administrative secretaries of the courts.

These attitudes are deeply rooted and could hardly alter in the foreseeable future. The citizens' interviews disclose a near to positive assessment of the services they receive, bearing witness of their low *consumer* criteria and quality service requirements. If there is no demand for service quality, administrative measures could hardly foster it. That is why file-keepers will naturally perceive their visitors as individuals *who should assist them in their work, but who unfortunately are quite incompetent*.

II.4. Proposals of the Institutions

Taking these attitudes as they are, what are the practical steps to improving the services? The institutional employees propose:

Table 19. What should be done to improve the information services rendered to the public? (open question)

Percentage of responses of file-keepers, grouped by categories	Total	Tax office	Technical office	OCSP	Land committee	District court	Notary office	Regional court
Institutional changes	22.4	25.0	27.6	22.6	18.5	18.5	13.6	29.6
Forms, manuals	4.4	20.0	6.9	3.2	0	3.7	0	0
Computers and software	75.4	65.0	86.2	77.4	63.0	81.5	72.7	77.8
Media coverage	6.6	30.0	3.4	9.7	7.4	0	0	0
A new information board	4.9	10.0	6.9	6.5	0	7.4	0	3.7
Specific obligations of the citizens	8.7	15.0	3.4	9.7	14.8	3.7	9.1	7.4

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[2] The question, provided in table 18 is open-ended, with no options for answers. So, free answers are grouped in the listed categories. The percentages provided stand for the number of file-keepers whose particular suggestion is corresponding to a particular category. The sum of percentages is above 100% because file-keepers have made more than one suggestion.

Changes in respect of the personnel	18.6	25.0	27.6	22.6	3.7	22.2	13.6	14.8
Specific obligations of the institution	9.8	15.0	20.7	9.7	3.7	3.7	9.1	7.4

The employees vest their greatest expectations in computers, in full agreement with their understanding that decisions on problems are made by Sofia, *not by their offices*.

The courts have the most urgent need of computers and this is quite understandable. Based on their feedback, their level of automation is truly low. Municipal offices, as was demonstrated earlier, need software and modem connections. Therefore the need of a comprehensive, uniform and operational information service is indisputable, but we should not ignore the data suggesting that the existing computer equipment is used beneath its capacity for institutional, personal or technical reasons.

<u>What Automation do the Institutions Require?</u>

- Tax office:
⇒ A modem connection to: the local tax offices, the regional tax office, and through them with the respective national tax authorities
⇒ Computer link with 'external' sources the court, the companies department of the regional court, the Ministry of Finance
⇒ Computer link with the court register, the Customs and the traffic police
- OCSP
⇒ Modem connection with the national OCSP
⇒ Additional software products
⇒ Link to the national „Population" database
- Technical office:
⇒ Prepare digital models and databases of the cadastral, building, and regulation plans
⇒ Technical possibility to digitize sketches, data on the water and sewerage infrastructure and everything else that would speed up the issuance of records
⇒ A computer system linked to external institutions court, land committee, notary office and others
⇒ Municipal inter-office network
⇒ Digitizing the archive of the TUP
- Land committee
⇒ LAN
⇒ Computer link to the TUP office by districts
⇒ Customizing the computer for operation within the city limits
⇒ Possibility to retrieve records based on the number under which a property is registered, as opposed to the name of the owner
⇒ Establishing a computer connection with the Ministry of Agriculture and the municipalities

⇒ A network linking the land committee, the technical office, the State Properties (District administration), the Ministry of Agriculture, the Sofia municipality, the Sofia district court and the notary office

- District court

⇒ LAN, connecting the file-keeping department, the civil and criminal cases, and the bookings office (which registers all transactions resulting in disposal of real estate, such as sale, partitioning, donation, barter, all encumbrances on real estate, and any claims the citizens want to file translator's note)

⇒ A computer system of a local and national scope

⇒ Automation of file-keeping procedures

- Notary office

⇒ LAN connecting the central notary office with the notaries

⇒ LAN within the court

⇒ Link to the OCSP

⇒ Link to a tax office *to exchange information on transactions resulting in disposal of real estate and their declaration*

⇒ Putting into computer programs of the entire body of data for the current and previous years

⇒ Keeping registers by property and not by name of the owner

- Regional court

⇒ Local and inter-institutional network: court, Ministry of Interior, Prosecution, National Investigation Office

⇒ Establishing a connection between the computer system of the city, and the regional and national court alphabetical register

⇒ Links to the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance

⇒ Customized software for „File-keeping for Corporations" and „File-keeping for the Courts"

The truth is that although computer equipment could relieve the work of the file-keepers, render customer service easier in an indirect way. That is why, from the public perspective, more valuable are those institutional changes and innovations, which although rarely pointed out by the employees themselves, help the citizens directly.

Proposals to this effect are voiced in the following citations:

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

- *Create an information service to direct the citizens to the respective departments of the local tax offices - Rousse*

- *Open an information desk - Blagoevgrad*

FORMS and MANUALS

- *In a time of campaign, issue brochures focusing on the particular type of legislation, and on the deadlines and obligations it sets - Plovdiv*

- *Issue special brochures informing the public on its rights and obligations connected to the pending entry into force of the Tax Procedures Code - Silistra*

MEDIA COVERAGE

- *Notify the public through the media about deadlines set by and changes made to the tax legislation - Bourgas*

- *Publish more numerous commentaries in the press and broadcasting media on tax requirements and laws - Smolyan*

- *Dedicate TV time on explanations about the new passports and tax registration. We don't resolve property issues (disputes about ownership). We abide by certain laws - Kyustendil*

A NEW INFORMATION BOARD

- *Install electronic info boards in the tax offices - Plovdiv*

- *Prepare boards, directories containing specimens of documents, application forms, and declarations - Blagoevgrad*

CHANGES IN RESPECT OF THE STAFF

- *Increase staff numbers; specify individual duties; improve working conditions; adjust salaries to normal - Bourgas*

- *Improve working conditions in the department - Sofia, 'Studentska' municipality*

- *Competent employees - Shumen*

- *Staff quality need of new and trained staff, appropriate software, new investment - Haskovo*

SPECIFIC OBLIGATIONS OF THE INSITUTION

- *Elaborate more efficient tax laws that would facilitate, not encumber the work - Pleven*

II.5. The Most Essential Information Citizens Should Know According to the Institutions

Below is a list of the key information file-keepers working at the various offices believe that the citizens should know, in order to quickly obtain the records they seek:

Tax office
- Know the standard public registry number of the individual or precise registration of the company and its scope of activity
- Carry a passport or ownership documents, provided the record is about property
- Keep track of the deadlines for filing a declaration for the various types of taxes, and for paying the tax

OCSP
- Know the year of the event (birth, marriage, death)
- Know the institution that issued the original document, rather than seek information based on the address registration of the person, *e.g.: a birth certificate may have been issued by an office of a municipality the individual is not currently residing in.*
- Bring documents on the civil status: *e.g.:1. An ID card 2. A birth certificate, if the person was born in another place 3. A marriage certificate, if the marriage was held in a different place 4. A death certificate 5. A court ruling on divorce, name change, child adoption 6. A presidential decree awarding or withdrawing Bulgarian citizenship*
- If an individual seeks information on the status of a correspondence, they need to know the reference number of the correspondence or the name of the person that filed the application and what it is about
- Keep the reference number of the application
- Maintain a personal filing system

Technical office
- Know the reference number of the application assigned to it on its submission (locally known as 'incoming reference number' - translator's note)
- Indicate accurately in the application the name of the person filing it, their address, telephone, heirs, etc.
- Bring an ownership document and all of the sketches of the real estate, issued over the years
- Know what the requisite documents are and have them ready in advance, *e.g. documents on ownership, on the neighbor's consent, partitioning protocols*

Land committee

- Know what role the municipal office on agriculture and the land committee play
- Know the reference number, the claimant, and the owner, indicated in the documents constituting the correspondence
- Owners with a right to have their ownership restored or testators should know: the incoming reference number of the application; the reference number of the correspondence; the *zemlishte* (used in Bulgarian urban planning as a collective term for all of the land, forests and lakes that fall within the boundaries of a town or village translator's note), which the application concerns, and the time frame within which they could react to an announcement in the Official Journal on the preparation of the stages for making land division plans
- Know the exact name of the testator
- The heirs should coordinate their actions on any given issue in advance
- Whenever a sale is involved, the applicants should bring a valid sketch of the property, the papers indicating the *zemlishte* it is in, the number under which it features in the cadastre or at least the owner's three names (Bulgarian practices require that the documents individuals fill out should feature their first, father's and family name - translator's note)
- Every document a citizen encloses to a correspondence should be registered at the file-keeping department under an incoming reference number, which the citizen should keep if he/she has to refer to it
- Bring along identity documents
- Keep and bring along when making a request for a record, any documents they have received from the land committee

District court
- Know the case number and which panel of judges has been appointed to hear the case
- Know which judge has been appointed to report on the case
- Know the name of the claimant in a civil rights case
- For private cases: know the name of the judge appointed to report on the case, and the plaintiff's name; for criminal cases know who the accused person is
- Know the date for which the case has been scheduled, so as to be able to go straight to the attorney's room
- Know the progress of the case
- Know the year in which the case was lodged
- Know when the last session took place
- Know which court the case was filed with (which town)
- For a citizen to be serviced, he/she should be a party to the case, and file an application
- Know the date of the summons
- Bring along the writs of summons and notices on case rulings. For every service the citizens should fill out an application or certificate
- Give an accurate address registration so as to avoid recording at the file-keeping department of incorrect data

<u>Notary office</u>

- Know the number, volume, and type of document which is being sought
- Know the three names and standard public registry number of the individual/ name of the legal person, when making an inquiry about them or when inquiring about them particularly as parties to a transaction
- Know the location of the property
- Know if the property is urban or rural
- Know which point in time the record addresses (the exact or approximate year)
- Know the date and year in which the document was verified/ year in which the transaction was performed
- Know the type of transaction
- When requesting a particular record, certificate or transcript, enclose the originals and copies of the documents about which the record is made.

<u>Regional court</u>

- Know whether the case is civil, administrative or criminal. What is the case about; who are the claimant and complainant
- Know the number of the case/the number of the company case and the year in which the company was registered);
- Know if and when a date has been designated for the case; what stage is it in
- Know which panel of judges has been appointed to hear the case
- Know the exact name of the company
- Know which court the case was filed with
- Know who the parties to the case are
- Bring the documents relevant to the case, based on which the individuals were summoned to appear in court
- Bring their summons

II.6. Best Practices

Not all surveyed offices gave only a negative feedback. Here are some positive practices the employees shared with us:

Citations:
- _Tax office: Everything necessary has been done. We have very good working conditions. We have a customer information desk in the reception. The process is automated. Our staff is qualified. A specially designated board offers information to the citizens - Razgrad_
- _OCSP: An information service center was created, providing comprehensive information about the OCSP services - Blagoevgrad_

- _Technical office:_ *We have created a system, called SATO, which offers a detailed account of the administrative and technical services we provide, and identifies the documents we require and the deadlines for their submission. It is up to the citizens to make efficient use of this system Blagoevgrad; A new arrangement foresees relocating a part of the office to the ground floor to facilitate citizen access, as the citizens do not always need direct contact with the relevant employees. We will prepare a nomenclature of the services so that citizens know what we offer Pazardjik*

- _Land committee:_ *Citizens don't need to know anything in advance, they simply make their request and get the record or service they need. Nothing special is needed - Shumen; I have no recommendations, as the land committee is a well-organized structure. We accept citizens at any time, even outside visiting hours Sofia, Ovcha kupel municipality; the Silistra land committee is serviced by Imko - 3 and receives its instructions from the General Planning and Development Directorate at the Ministry of Agriculture. Nevertheless, a specialized software needs to be installed - Silistra*

- _District court:_ *A room should be allocated to citizens to enable them to read case files and documents a proposal made by Gabrovo*

- _Regional court:_ *We have a special program that facilitates our work - Smolyan*

Summary

1. Records

- OCSP
⇒ The OCSP is the most frequently visited municipal office
⇒ The records most frequently requested of the OCSP concern the civil status of individuals and the heirs certificate
⇒ Requests for the heirs certificate are the most frequent and the slowest to produce a record for, the employees report.

- Tax office
⇒ Half of the records produced are about real estate liabilities.
⇒ Requests for tax appraisal of real estate are among the most frequent and the slowest to produce a record for.

- Technical office
⇒ The most frequent requests are about the issuance of a sketch for real estate
⇒ The citizens confuse the records about the TUP with those about the cadastre
⇒ TUP-related records are frequently sought and slow to produce
⇒ Requests in connection to sketches are frequent, and the records are quickly produced

- Land committee
⇒ Land committee decisions are most frequently inquired about, probably as a way to attest low financial status before the social assistance authorities
⇒ The quickest and often requested record the land committees produce involves information about transactions in and ownership of farmland

- District court
⇒ The most frequent requests involve the status of court cases
⇒ The records smaller district centers issue are more frequently of an administrative nature
⇒ Requests for case status, which are the most frequently made, are also those to which district courts respond the fastest.

- Notary office
⇒ File-keepers and citizens are unanimous that the records most frequently sought are about encumbrances, ownership rights and transcripts of notarial acts.
⇒ Records about information contained in the dossiers of construction companies are rare, yet take little time to produce, a fact that discloses the need to publicize them

⇒ File-keepers issue records on the fees and their payment, which could mean that the citizens have no way of learning this on their own

⇒ Requests for encumbrances and transcripts of notarial acts are the most frequently requested and the slowest to produce, the employees report.

- Regional court

⇒ The most frequently issued records that the general file-keeping department of the regional courts produces coincide with those of the district courts

⇒ The records most frequently produced by these institutions are about the status of cases, while the most infrequent records are about the appointment of court witnesses and checks in the archives.

- The file-keepers a different number of the records they issue than their immediate management. This suggests a lack of internal information, without which the institutions could hardly budget their expenses and place proper demands before their superior administrators.

- Citizens and employees speak in a different language. The existing terminological disparities suggest that the citizens talk about what they need, while the employees' concern is where to look for the requested information.

2. State of the Institutions

Automation

⇒ Nearly 73% of the offices are automated, yet the lack of specialized software renders about 1/3 of them incapable of producing automated records

⇒ The OCSPs and the land committees are the most highly automated

⇒ The existing data speak of ineffective computer equipment use owing to institutional, personal and technical reasons.

Public recognition and time expended

⇒ On the whole the citizens know what records the individual institutions produce

⇒ The records of the land committees, technical and notary offices do not need a lot of publicity

⇒ The least public recognition exists for the records of the tax offices and OCSPs from among the studied institutions. This fact is highly significant, as requests from these institutions are among the most frequent

⇒ A record takes an average of 2-3 visits to obtain, each lasting about half an hour

⇒ The time spent on single time visits is relatively big in the tax offices, whereas the courts and the technical offices require a greater number of visits.

Service quality

$\Rightarrow$ Service provision is a two-way process in which the *citizens' low expectations about quality service* are a poor incentive to the file-keepers to strive to attain quality

$\Rightarrow$ The notarial- and tax office employees have the lowest expectations in regard of their customers' competence

$\Rightarrow$ The clerks expect the citizens to render them competent assistance. The understanding that the citizens are their *customers* is missing.

Proposals of the file-keepers

$\Rightarrow$ Computer equipment and software: upgrade the equipment, procure professional software, establish local and national electronic connections

$\Rightarrow$ Make institutional changes: create an information office, separate the functions within the file-keeping departments

$\Rightarrow$ Make changes in respect of the staff: give proper payment and training to staff

$\Rightarrow$ Keep the public informed with media support, newsletters and directories

$\Rightarrow$ Install information boards on the premises of the institutions