

SOLVIT: continued success in 2005 but more Member State support now needed

The SOLVIT network, set up by the European Commission and EU Member States to help citizens and businesses get misapplications of EU law corrected, dealt with 465 cases in 2005. This is an increase of 61% on 2004 levels and shows that more and more citizens and businesses are availing of the fast and informal alternative approach to problem-solving that SOLVIT offers. SOLVIT continues to resolve around four out of every five cases it handles. However, Member States need to make more resources available to deal with the growing case load and ensure the continued success of SOLVIT, says the European Commission's annual SOLVIT performance report.

Internal Market and Services Commissioner Charlie McCreevy said: "SOLVIT continues to go from strength to strength. More and more citizens and businesses are getting quick and hassle-free help on enforcing their rights in the EU single market, without having to go through expensive and complicated legal procedures. But Member States must recognise that they now need to invest more in their national SOLVIT centres so that these encouraging trends can continue."

SOLVIT has been up and running since July 2002 and has handled more than 1,000 cases submitted by citizens and businesses confronted with problems caused by incorrect application of EU rules by national, regional or local authorities. SOLVIT delivers practical results on average within ten weeks, which is significantly faster than the formal procedures that can easily take a year or longer and do not necessarily produce a pragmatic solution for the complainant.

The report points to the need for Member States to review the staffing situation of their SOLVIT centres. Faced with a growing demand for the services of SOLVIT, several SOLVIT centres are understaffed and for some of them this is starting to affect the speed of case-handling. Moreover, some SOLVIT centres do not have the resources to engage in awareness-raising activities, making it very difficult for citizens and businesses to approach SOLVIT in certain Member States.

Among the highlights of the performance of SOLVIT in 2005 are the efforts made by numerous SOLVIT centres to pursue more structural changes beyond the resolution of individual cases. The agreed rules only require SOLVIT Centres to solve problems resulting from incorrect application of EU rules due to bad administrative practice. Problems that are caused by incorrect transposition of EU rules or lack of transposition in national law are in principle not within the remit of SOLVIT because they cannot be solved within ten weeks. Nevertheless, an increasing number of SOLVIT Centres is willing to pursue such cases until national law is changed to comply with EU rules.

This development shows that SOLVIT is not only a powerful instrument to deliver fast and pragmatic solutions to citizens and business, but also helps to bring about an administrative culture change by making national administrations more active in pursuing the necessary legal changes to ensure that citizens and businesses can effectively exercise their rights in Europe.

Facts and figures

- The overall case flow of the SOLVIT network has increased by 61% from 289 cases in 2004 to 465 in 2005. This covers only those cases which were accepted as suitable for treatment by SOLVIT, and not the many more problems and queries which are outside its scope.
- The average resolution rate for SOLVIT cases in 2005 was 77 %. One quarter of all SOLVIT Centres resolved more than 80% of cases submitted to them.
- Of all resolved cases, 63% are resolved within the deadline of ten weeks. Four SOLVIT Centres take on average fewer than 60 days to examine, handle and close cases.

Of all SOLVIT cases:

- 71% of SOLVIT cases were submitted by citizens. Half of all problems they encountered were in the areas of social security and recognition of professional qualifications.
- 29% of SOLVIT cases were submitted by businesses. Their main problem areas are market access for products and the provision of services and establishment.

More figures and analysis are in the full report on the development and performance of the SOLVIT network in 2005, on SOLVIT's central web site at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/solvit>

SOLVIT is part of a "cascade" of services designed to help citizens make the most of their single market rights, which includes the Your Europe web portal (<http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope>) and the Citizens Signpost Service (<http://ec.europa.eu/citizensrights/signpost>) which provides tailor-made practical advice.