

Mystery Shopping Evaluation of Cross-Border E-Commerce in the EU

Conducted on behalf of the European Commission,
Health and Consumers Directorate-General

Final Report



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- *E-commerce** has the potential to reshape the European internal market for consumers with regard to price- and product-related comparisons. While *e-commerce** is steadily increasing on the national level, *cross-border e-commerce** is lagging behind. One reason for this can be seen in the problems that customers experience when shopping online from another EU member state¹.
- Based on real product searches and offers, mystery shoppers² throughout the EU measured the extent to which consumers have access to real *cross-border e-commerce** alternatives to *domestic e-commerce**, the extent to which consumers can make cross-border savings compared to domestic online purchases, and how traders provide information to consumers in accordance with basic consumer protection rules and best practices.
- From a technical point of view, *cross-border** offers are widely accessible and easy to find for consumers who are searching online for them. Mystery shoppers in 27 Member States of the European Union found 3,804 *domestic** offers and 12,890 *cross-border** offers for 100 different products by searching online. The products were strictly comparable.
- Mystery shoppers tested the online ordering process for 10,964 *cross-border** offers and for 2,609 *domestic** offers (representing respectively 81% and 19% of a total of 13,573 online offers).
- The product search cast light on the great diversity, potential, and range of offers and market players in Europe. As a result of the product search, the shoppers found offers relating to more than 4,000 different shops. 82% of shops were only available in one language.
- The ratio of *cross-border** offers to *domestic** offers differs strongly depending on where the consumer is located. Mostly only *cross-border** offers were available to consumers in Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg, and Lithuania.

¹ Expressions and technical terms followed by an asterisk (*) are defined in the glossary (see Appendix).

² Mystery shoppers/testers are also called “consumers” due to fact that this term is understandable.

Consumers in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, were able to find a much higher proportion of *domestic** offers.

- Consumers can save money on their purchases by shopping *cross-border**. Consumers in Portugal, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Denmark, Romania, Latvia, Greece, Estonia, Finland, Cyprus and Malta found *cross-border** offers that were at least 10% cheaper in more than 50% of the product searches, for technically accessible offers (all costs, including shipping, included).
- For many countries, shopping online in another country is the only possibility of finding a particular product online. Taken as a whole, consumers found *only cross-border** offers for approximately half of the products that had a price tag. This was particularly the case for consumers in Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Latvia, Ireland, Belgium, Estonia, Portugal, Finland, Slovenia, Romania and Greece.
- However, for a majority of *cross-border** offers, consumers would not have been able to place an order. 61% of all *cross-border** offers would have failed mainly because traders refused to serve the consumer's country.
- Consumers were less often able to register on the website for *cross-border** offers than for *domestic** offers, because their respective country could not be selected in the registration form.
- Shipment to the consumer's home address was possible for 98% of *domestic** offers, but only for 48% of *cross-border** offers. 44% of *cross-border** offers indicated additional costs for shipment abroad as a separate price element. The average cost of shipping for *domestic** offers was €8 whereas it was €16 for *cross-border** offers. Free delivery was more often indicated for *domestic** offers than for *cross-border** offers. The delivery time indicated for *domestic** offers was on average four days, compared to seven days for *cross-border** offers.
- Compared to domestic offers, most payment options are less readily available for *cross-border** offers, with the notable exception of credit card payments and of *PayPal and similar systems**. However, when credit card payment was tested, for about 60% of the offers, the shop refused the consumer's credit

card. In a fifth of *cross-border** offers, consumers found restrictions regarding the payment options or the transaction, for example age restrictions or geographical restrictions related to the address of the cardholder.

- *Redirection** to another shop during the product search occurred infrequently (4% of all the offers). During the ordering process, shops redirected consumers to another website in 2% of all the offers.
- Shops offered the possibility to convert currencies for only 8% of all the offers. For those offers where price conversion was possible, they provided information about the exchange rate in fewer than 2% of cases.
- 86% of the offers that showed the final price of the product contained details on the various elements of the final price such as VAT, shipment costs, etc. 14% showed no further details on the final price, which makes it difficult for consumers to know what they are being charged for.
- 24% of offers advertised special offers or a reduced price in connection with the product. However, only 6% of special offers provided information on the period for which the special offer or reduced price remained valid, which may be misleading for consumers.
- Consumers found the terms and conditions on the online shop for 93% of offers. For a high percentage of *cross-border** offers, the terms and conditions were provided in the consumer's language, but not always. In 87% of all the offers, the consumers found information on the protection and handling of personal data. Nearly all the online shops presented information on their identity.
- For more than one-third of all offers, online shops offered a *commercial guarantee**. For 42% of offers, shops offered no commercial guarantee. For another 23% of offers, the information provided was unclear and consumers couldn't tell whether it referred to a commercial guarantee or not.
- It is important that traders make clear that the *consumer's legal rights** are not affected by the *commercial guarantee** since the latter may sometimes not offer the same advantages that the consumer would otherwise enjoy under the statutory guarantee period. In the offers where a *commercial guarantee** was

indicated, 35% clearly stated that the *commercial guarantee** would not affect the *consumer's legal rights**. 29% provided no such information. 36% provided unclear information and consumers could not tell if their legal rights would actually be affected by the *commercial guarantee** or not.

- The average guarantee period observed for commercial guarantees was 22 months. In about three-quarters of all offers, the guarantee period ranged between 12 and 36 months.
- 90% of offers provided information on the right of withdrawal. The average cooling-off period observed on the websites was equal or longer than the period defined in the national legislation. However, only in approximately two-thirds of offers did the website explain how consumers would be refunded in case they decided to return the product. 68% of the offers were subject to special conditions regarding the right of withdrawal (for example returning the article unsealed), which may limit the ability of consumers to exercise their right of withdrawal.
- For 91% of offers, consumers found information on customer support. Customer support was available in the consumer's language for 87% of *cross-border** offers whereas this was always the case for domestic offers. The communication channel most widely available to contact the online shops was email (81% of offers), followed by mail/post (62% of offers). Most shops provided 4 or 5 communication channels.
- *Pre-ticked boxes** were presented to consumers during the ordering process for 36% of all offers. They most often concerned the agreement to receive promotional information (62% of offers), followed by the acceptance of the terms and conditions (25% of offers), and predefined payment and shipment options (approximately 20% and 18% of offers respectively).

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background: cross-border e-commerce in Europe

In order to assess whether markets are functioning from a consumer perspective, the European Commission publishes an **annual Consumer Markets Scoreboard**.³ One of its basic findings is that the Internet has further stimulated the process of *cross-border** shopping. It allows access to a wider variety of products, quicker and more efficient communication, and no limitation by shopping hours or local restrictions. In short, *cross-border e-commerce** has the potential to reshape the Single European Market for consumers with regard to price- and product-related comparisons. Shopping online allows consumers to save money by comparing prices and products among thousands of retailers in the European Union.

Despite this potential, **consumers can be constrained by several factors, especially when shopping *cross-border** as opposed to shopping domestically.** For example, from 2006 to 2008, the share of all EU consumers who bought at least one item over the Internet increased from 27% to 33% while *cross-border e-commerce** remained low (it increased only from 6% to 7% over the same period).⁴ The Commission has found that many obstacles are preventing consumers from shopping *cross-border** on the Internet.⁵

Consumers from other countries may be redirected to different websites with less advantageous offers by the trader, or the trader may refuse to sell to consumers residing in other member states. **Traders may discriminate between consumers based on their delivery address, bank details, or even the address of the Internet provider.** Geographical restrictions or refusals to sell may affect consumers adversely, particularly those consumers in the smaller EU member states. Ordering from websites located in a different country from the consumer's place of residence may be met with practical and operational constraints, or with additional costs. In addition, essential **pre-contractual information may not be shown on the websites**, may be only partially translated, or may be difficult to find. Pre-contractual

³ European Commission Communication: "Monitoring consumer outcomes in the single market: the Consumer Markets Scoreboard", COM(2008) 31 final, and accompanying Staff Working Document SEC(2008) 87 final

⁴ Special Eurobarometer 298, "Consumer protection in the internal market" (2008) on behalf of the European Commission

⁵ "Commission staff working document: report on cross-border e-commerce in the EU", SEC(2009) 283 final, 5 March 2009

information may also be different because national provisions in consumer protection regulations vary significantly from one country to another.

To assess the magnitude of these problems, the European Commission commissioned YouGovPsychonomics **to test in practice the functioning of *cross-border e-commerce** in the EU**, including the scope of opportunities available to consumers, potential savings for consumers shopping *cross-border**, and the extent to which consumers can take advantage of the opportunities offered by *cross-border e-commerce** in the European Union.

As a result, the research was able to **detect country-specific differences**. For example, the study identified countries where consumers are able to take advantage of *cross-border e-commerce** and countries where consumers are less advantaged or enjoy less favourable conditions, for instance because some websites refuse to sell to certain member states or treat consumers differently based on where they are located.

2.2. Study objectives: testing cross-border e-commerce in Europe

More specifically, the study's aim was to test and to measure the following aspects of *cross-border e-commerce** in the European Union:

- The **extent of alternative *e-commerce** offers for certain products**, technically accessible to consumers shopping *cross-border**, given their language and other skills, compared with the extent of *domestic e-commerce** offers for the same products.
- The **comparative prices of the offers available *cross-border** and domestically**, all costs included, so as to permit an evaluation of the potential savings from potential *cross-border** offers.
- The extent to **which it is possible for consumers to order *cross-border**** from websites with offers that are technically accessible to them, in order to determine the extent of the geographic restrictions facing consumers.
- The **provision of pre-contractual information by traders**, during the ordering process and up to the final confirmation page, in accordance with certain basic consumer protection rules and best practices.

2.3. Study method: mystery shopping evaluation

The study method used is known as **mystery shopping***. *Mystery shopping** involves the use of mystery shoppers who are trained and briefed to observe, experience, and measure a customer service process by acting as a prospective customer. Mystery shoppers undertake a series of predetermined tasks to conduct evaluations and then report back on their experience in a comparable, consistent, and objective way. This method was chosen because it provides a real-life assessment of the market conditions facing consumers based on real market interactions.

From a practical point of view, the approach relied on a **structured online questionnaire** replicating the specific features of an online shopping experience from the point of view of the prospective consumer, keeping in mind the research objectives that the European Commission set. For example, the instructions directed the shoppers to answer specific questions on product and price information, the options and restrictions regarding payment and shipment, and the standard terms and conditions.

2.4. Study perspective and terminology: how to read this report

The **basis for the presentation of the results is the number of offers found**. The consumers' instructions were to search for and test offers found on the Internet, an offer being a commercial communication on a particular website for a particular product, indicating the characteristics and price of this product.

As a result of the study method, the results are presented mainly from the point of view of the consumer (the mystery shopper, also referred to as the consumer) and labelled accordingly. **The expression *the country of the consumer** refers to the mystery shoppers' country of residence**, which is where the consumers have their primary residence and from which they were conducting the test.

Therefore, for the consumer, a *cross-border** offer is an offer made by an online shop that is located in another EU member state. A *domestic offer** is an offer made when both the shop and the consumer are based in the same country.

In order to define the **location of the shop**, the study relies on the **top-level country domain names (*suffix**) at the end of the Internet address as the main**

indicator. For example, an online shop with an address ending in ".de" is assumed to be based in Germany. For top-level domain names that are not country-specific, such as ".com" or ".eu", the location is defined according to the country where the business is registered, information that can usually be found in the terms and conditions.

When analysing results, it is sometimes appropriate to shift the perspective to the country of the online shops, in particular when examining how websites provide pre-contractual information to the consumer. In this case, the study presents the results followed by the expression *country of shops**.

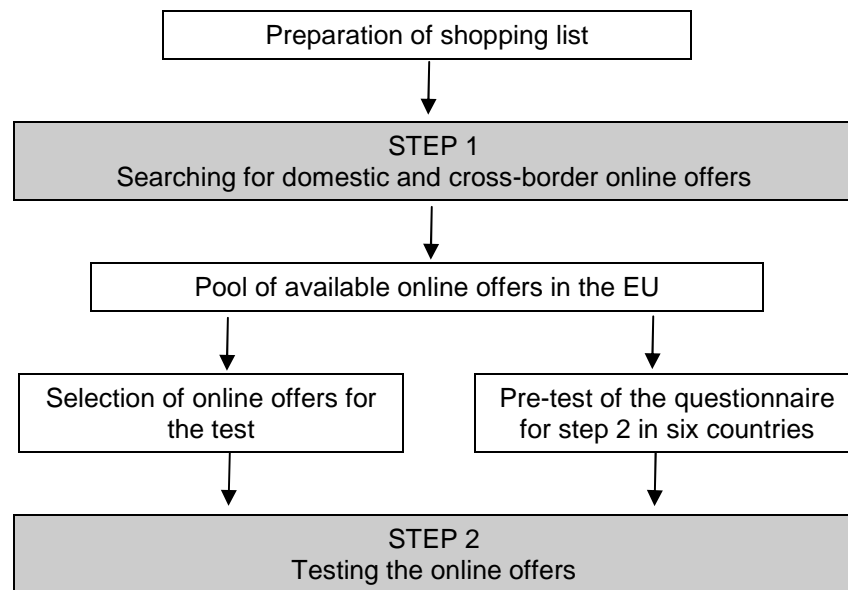
Expressions and technical terms followed by an asterisk (*) are defined in the glossary (see Appendix).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Steps of the procedure

The research **consisted of two basic steps**. The first step consisted in **collecting a pool of *domestic** and *cross-border** online offers**. In the course of the second step, **mystery shoppers tested a selection of these offers** using an online questionnaire (the different steps are summarised in Figure 1).

Figure 1: General procedure



The study started with the preparation of a **representative shopping list** in December 2008. In order to identify the prevalent conditions for consumers in the online market, it is important to gain an overview of offers within the EU *e-commerce** market. Therefore, a *shopping list** was selected, fulfilling the requirement of being both holistic and comprehensive. Products were selected to provide a **representative market overview of the *e-commerce** situation in the European Union** from the consumers' perspective. The shopping list included 100 different products representing 8 basic product categories sold online. Details of the shopping list are indicated in chapter 3.2 and in the Appendix.

A first step involved observing the number of offers in each country. Consumers in each EU member state gathered offers by searching for each of the 100 products

online, using search engines and price comparison websites. The fieldwork lasted from the end of February to the beginning of March 2009.

To ensure a smooth flow of the second phase and to test the robustness of the methodology, **a pre-test for the second phase** was conducted in March 2009 before rolling out the actual evaluation based on the sample of offers compiled in the first step. The design of the questionnaire incorporated the findings of the pre-test.

In the second step, mystery shoppers evaluated the offers using the online questionnaire. **The second step of the research took place from the end of April to the beginning of July 2009.** The mystery shoppers were instructed to go through the entire ordering process up to the final order confirmation **without placing an order at the end.** During the purchasing process, the mystery shoppers completed the online questionnaire, noting the information displayed on the websites.

In order to ensure maximum coverage within the limits of the resources available to conduct the test, a target of 5 different offers per country for each of the 100 products was set, equivalent to testing 500 offers per country. **Overall, the mystery shoppers tested 13,573 offers.**

3.2. Shopping list

The shopping list includes a representative list of products often sold online and selected through preliminary desk research of secondary data. Most enterprises consider information about sales figures confidential. **The product selection is therefore based on best-selling online product categories identified by consumer surveys.**⁶ The mystery shoppers pre-checked all the selected products in each country for availability. Only the products available in at least 60% of the 27 EU member states were taken into consideration, irrespective of whether the offers available are *domestic** or *cross-border** ones. The shopping list comprises 100 products. **For each product, the mystery shoppers were instructed to search for a specific brand and product reference, which ensured that the offers for each product are strictly comparable.**

1. Clothes, shoes, and accessories. Clothes are the second best-selling category online. According to secondary data, ladieswear is slightly more favoured than menswear. A total of 17% of online users have bought shoes online in the last 12 months (EIAA – Mediascope Europe Study, 2008). Perfumes as well as several other accessories were chosen. Over 10% of people shopping online have bought perfumes in the last 12 months. For the category “clothes, shoes, and accessories”, 22 products for children, women, and men were selected.
2. Books. Books are the best-selling products online. Over one-third of European online shoppers have bought a book online (EIAA – Mediascope Europe Study, 2008). This category covered five different products: one reference book, three

⁶ Sources:

EIAA – Mediascope Europe Study; base: 7,000, 10 European countries, 2008
http://www.eiaa.net/Ftp/casestudiesppt/EIAA_Online_Shoppers_2008_Executive_Summary.pdf
 AGOF – Berichtsband – Teil 1 internet facts 2008-II; base: 100,000 internet users, Germany, 2008
<http://www.agof.de/berichtsbande-internet-facts.605.html>
 gfu – Der Markt für Consumer Electronics. Base: turnover figures, GfK Handelspanel, Germany, 2007
<http://www.gfu.de/home/consumer/markt.xhtml>
 YouGovPsychonomics „Kundenmonitor Banken 2008“, Highlightthema: Web 2.0; base: 1,500 internet users, Germany 2008
<http://www.psychonomics.de/filemanager/download/1953>
 Bundesverband Digitale Wirtschaft (BVDW) e.V.: E-Commerce (November 2006)
www.bvdw.org
 EUROSTAT “Information society statistics”
<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>
 Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis): Was kaufen Menschen im Internet ein? (Deutschland)
<http://www.computerwissendaily.de/studien/millionen-menschen-kaufen-uber-das-internet-ein/>
 US Internet demographics by Nielsen Media Research, 2009
http://www.estorefrontguide.com/best_selling_products.htm

bestsellers in different languages, and one audio book. As the range of different product types is low within the category “book”, five products were considered adequate.

3. Household goods. It is difficult to obtain valid information on household goods sold online as this category is relatively heterogeneous in comparison with the other categories. Thirteen products that can be found in most European households were selected including five articles of toys for children, adolescents, and grown-ups, five articles of sports equipment (including a football, a bicycle, and bicycle accessories), and three articles of cutlery.
4. Films/music. CDs and DVDs are popular products bought in the online market. Nearly a quarter of European online shoppers have bought CDs or DVDs online (EIAA – Mediascope Europe Study, 2008). CDs and DVDs are still the main data carrier for music and movies. The product list contains three music CDs with pop and classical music and two DVDs with a blockbuster of the previous year as well as a popular TV series.
5. Electronic equipment. Electronic equipment is a very popular category with many different products offered, e.g. MP3 players, TV screens, digital cameras, and navigation systems. Some of these products are also products with a high business volume and are therefore products frequently purchased online (gfu – the Market for Consumer Electronics). The list includes 3 mobile telephones with different technical facilities and one landline telephone. 16% of European online shoppers have bought mobile phones online (EIAA – Mediascope Europe Study, 2008). Because of the variety of the category, 16 products were selected.
6. Computer software. Computer software includes software and games. Of the European population, 12% have already bought computer games online (gfu – the market for Consumer Electronics). For this reason, the shopping list includes a total of 7 computer games and console games as well as 3 computer software products.
7. Computer hardware. According to secondary data, computer hardware is the best-selling category online (EIAA – Mediascope Europe Study, 2008) and some very well-known companies have built successful business models on the online

sale of computers. Computer equipment, e.g. a printer and a scanner, were added to this product category. Overall, the study included 12 articles in this category.

8. Electrical household appliances. About 6% of Internet users have bought these products online in the last 12 months. Information is also accessible for do-it-yourself products. Nearly 11% have bought such products within the last year (EIAA – Mediascope Europe Study, 2008). Electrical household appliances belong to a category with many different product types, like drilling machines, mixers, and irons. Thus, 17 different products were added to the list.

The products fulfil the following criteria:

- **Coverage of the product categories sold most frequently online in the EU.**
- Products are **available in all 27 EU member states**. Therefore, mainly products of so-called global players were chosen.
- A higher number of products was chosen for categories **with a wider range of different products** (e.g. electronic goods) to cover as many different products as possible.
- A wide range of product types as well as a wide **range of global players** were chosen to access a maximum of different distribution systems.

As a result of this selection, it was possible to ensure:

- A **representative picture of real online sales** of the most popular categories sold online.
- A **detailed analysis** covering a wide range of different product types and brands.

One key finding of the product selection at this stage was that computer software and games are highly standardised products and are mostly available at *domestic** and/or *cross-border** shops. Products like clothes and household goods appear to be less readily available.

In most of the 27 countries, the vast majority of products were available. For example, in France, the UK, and Poland, over 90% of the chosen 100 products were

available at *domestic** or *cross-border** shops. In smaller countries, like Hungary and Portugal, 70% of all the products were available.

For the shopping list in detail please refer to the Appendix.

3.3. Mystery shoppers' characteristics

All the tests were conducted by **YouGovPsychonomics' mystery shoppers** in each country. These consumers (190 in total) fulfilled the following criteria:

- The mystery shoppers all had their primary place of residence in the respective country for which they conducted the tests.
- They all showed a **high online affinity**. Thus, they were younger and better educated (preferably students, but also persons with a professional background) than the average citizen.
- Besides their native language, they spoke at least one other EU language. In general, they spoke English (100%), German (28%), French (8%), and Spanish and Italian (3%).

Each tester underwent a **personal briefing** during which he or she was introduced to the testing procedure and the handling of the questionnaire.

3.4. Data assurance and quality control

Several measures were taken to assure the validity of the data and the quality of the study. Regular quality checks were conducted during the test stage. These included (1) automatic programming of the offers' criteria and (2) manual daily checks of the open text boxes and the consistency of data. Computer software automatically checked the distribution of shops and products. Quality management measures also ensured that the links tested were all from online shops located in the European Union.

In addition, a **daily quality check of the offers assured the right handling** of the questionnaire and the links. In case wrong handling was detected, the test was eliminated and the tester was informed about the mistake immediately to prevent such problems from occurring again.

During the field time, the mystery shoppers were supported by the YouGovPsychonomics' project management team. In addition, **they were**

supervised in each country. Each country had its own supervisor(s) supporting the mystery shoppers on a daily basis. The supervisors also introduced the mystery shoppers to the aim of the study, the procedure for the test, and the handling of the questionnaire during a personal briefing.

4. RESULTS OF THE MARKET OVERVIEW (STEP 1)

4.1. Description of the results of the product search

The first step of the study aimed at presenting a market overview of the online offers available in each country, with a special focus on how the offers found were distributed between *domestic** and *cross-border** offers. **In total, the consumers found 16,694 offers for the 100 different products across all 27 EU member states.** On average, they found 6–7 offers per product and country: 1–2 *domestic** offers and 5 *cross-border** offers. The consumers found 3,804 *domestic** offers and 12,890 *cross-border** offers.

The number of offers differed between the countries tested. **Denmark, Germany, Poland, and Sweden represented countries in which many different online offers were available** (more than 730 offers found). **In Cyprus, Malta, and Portugal, however, the consumers found fewer online offers than average** (fewer than 505 offers).

The number of online offers found differed according to the product categories and the country of the consumers. Table 1 presents a summary of the distribution of offers per product category.

The product search also cast light on the great diversity, potential, and range of offers and market players in Europe. **As a result of the product search, the shoppers found offers relating to more than 4,000 different shops** (n=4,182 shops). With the exception of the market leader (representing 6% of the offers in the sample), all the other shops accounted for less than 2% of the offers.

In total, 52% of the shops in the test sample were represented only once in the sample (n=2,180). This means that the consumers detected only one offer for the same shop overall. A total of 17% of shops were represented twice in the sample, which means that two offers could be found at the same online shop. Three offers could be found in fewer than 400 shops. This means that the study gives a very broad coverage of e-commerce in the EU, covering a high percentage of the online retailers.

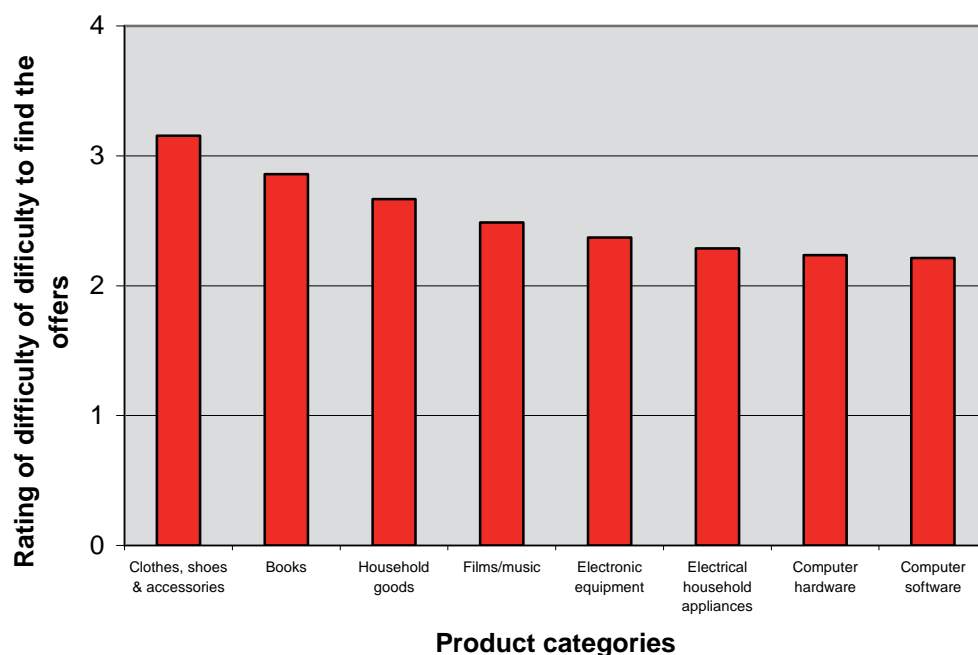
Country of the consumer	Number of offers	Number of domestic offers	Number of cross-border offers	Clothes, shoes, accessories (22 products)	Books (5 products)	Films/music (5 products)	Computer hardware (12 products)	Computer software (10 products)	Electronic equipment (16 products)	Household goods (13 products)	Electrical household appliances (17 products)
Austria	685	188	497	102	29	29	68	90	149	65	153
Belgium	636	146	490	97	25	26	62	95	134	50	147
Bulgaria	714	137	577	123	38	37	90	95	116	63	152
Cyprus	495	6	489	78	35	32	58	56	106	62	68
Czech Republic	507	143	364	81	30	37	71	57	98	67	66
Denmark	880	229	651	157	49	47	94	106	156	105	166
Estonia	548	109	439	93	20	39	56	44	135	42	119
Finland	546	110	436	92	18	25	72	54	106	59	120
France	637	192	445	95	30	45	90	97	99	77	104
Germany	753	245	508	105	37	43	89	97	138	92	152
Greece	624	152	472	96	15	23	80	89	127	63	131
Hungary	617	153	464	80	20	39	74	89	127	61	127
Ireland	608	65	543	83	32	34	80	82	114	64	119
Italy	551	162	389	83	28	34	79	68	109	61	89
Latvia	525	97	428	64	45	33	66	53	96	74	94
Lithuania	550	96	454	93	28	35	80	87	74	65	88
Luxembourg	534	52	482	67	21	35	71	81	86	62	111
Malta	420	15	405	96	30	31	47	44	50	46	76
Netherlands	705	205	500	122	16	49	87	100	149	61	121
Poland	733	189	544	121	33	43	84	98	133	78	143
Portugal	486	116	370	37	26	33	79	84	122	58	47
Romania	578	131	447	94	33	27	83	81	127	68	65
Slovakia	530	133	397	69	22	27	72	71	108	51	110
Slovenia	646	108	538	89	22	25	86	93	123	76	132
Spain	566	149	417	73	20	27	88	95	84	68	111
Sweden	894	243	651	188	49	47	94	110	151	74	181
United Kingdom	726	233	493	112	42	49	93	100	114	89	127
Total	16694	3804	12890	2590	793	951	2093	2216	3131	1801	3119

Table 1: Distribution of offers across countries/domestic–cross-border/product categories, base n=16,694 offers

4.2. Searching for and finding domestic and cross-border offers: degree of difficulty

The consumers rated how easy it was to find offers for the specific products. They used a rating scale going from 1 “very easy to find” to 4 “very hard to find”.⁷ **In general, the consumers indicated that it was rather easy to find the offers** (2.55 on average). Only consumers in Estonia, Malta, and Romania said that it was rather difficult to find the online offers (more than 3.00 on average). Clothes, shoes, and accessories (3.15 on average) and books (2.86 on average) were rather difficult to find; computer software (2.21 on average), computer hardware (2.24 on average), and electrical household appliances rather easy (2.29 on average; Figure 2).

Figure 2: Difficulty to find online offers for specific products



Note: Mean rating, base n=2,700 offers

⁷ Question: “From your point of view, were the online shops easy to find?”, ranging from 1=“very easy to find” to 4=“very hard to find”.

4.3. Redirection

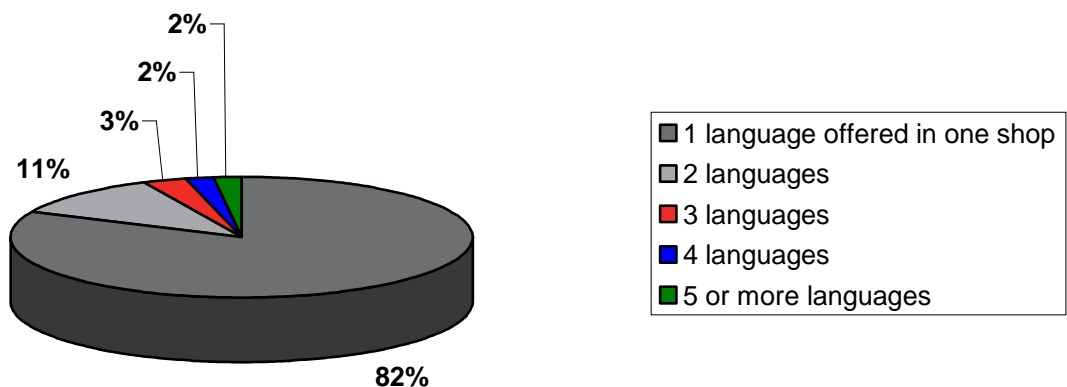
Redirection* to another shop during the product search occurred only infrequently (4% of all the offers). *Redirection** to the same shop in another country almost never took place (41 times in all the offers).

4.4. Availability of languages

Overall, in 37% of all the offers, shops offered their services in English, 34% in German, and 7% in French and Dutch. All other languages were only available in fewer than 5% of the offers found.

The number of languages the websites are available in is rather small. **82% of shops are only available in one language.** Only the bigger ones offer two languages or more. Fewer than 2% of shops offer five or more languages (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of languages in which the website is offered

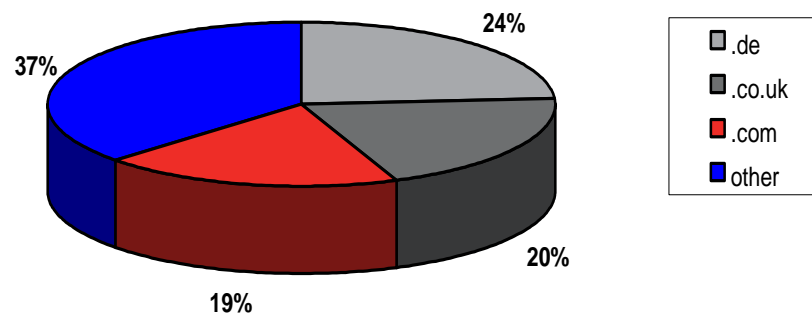


Note: Base n=4,182 shops

4.5. Shop location according to country domain name

In total, the consumers found 24% of the offers in online shops ending with .de, indicating that they were located in Germany. They found 20% of the offers in UK shops with a country domain name ending in .co.uk. In 19% of the offers, the shop name ended with .com. All other country-specific domain names accounted individually for 5% or less of the offers (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Distribution of offers across country domain suffixes



Note: Base n=16,694 offers

5. TESTING THE ORDERING PROCESS (ROLL-OUT, STEP 2)

In total, the study tested 13,573 online offers, 2,609 of which were *domestic (19% of all the offers) and 10,964 *cross-border** offers (81% of all the offers).**

For a detailed summary, please refer to the Appendix.

5.1. Possibility to place a technically accessible order

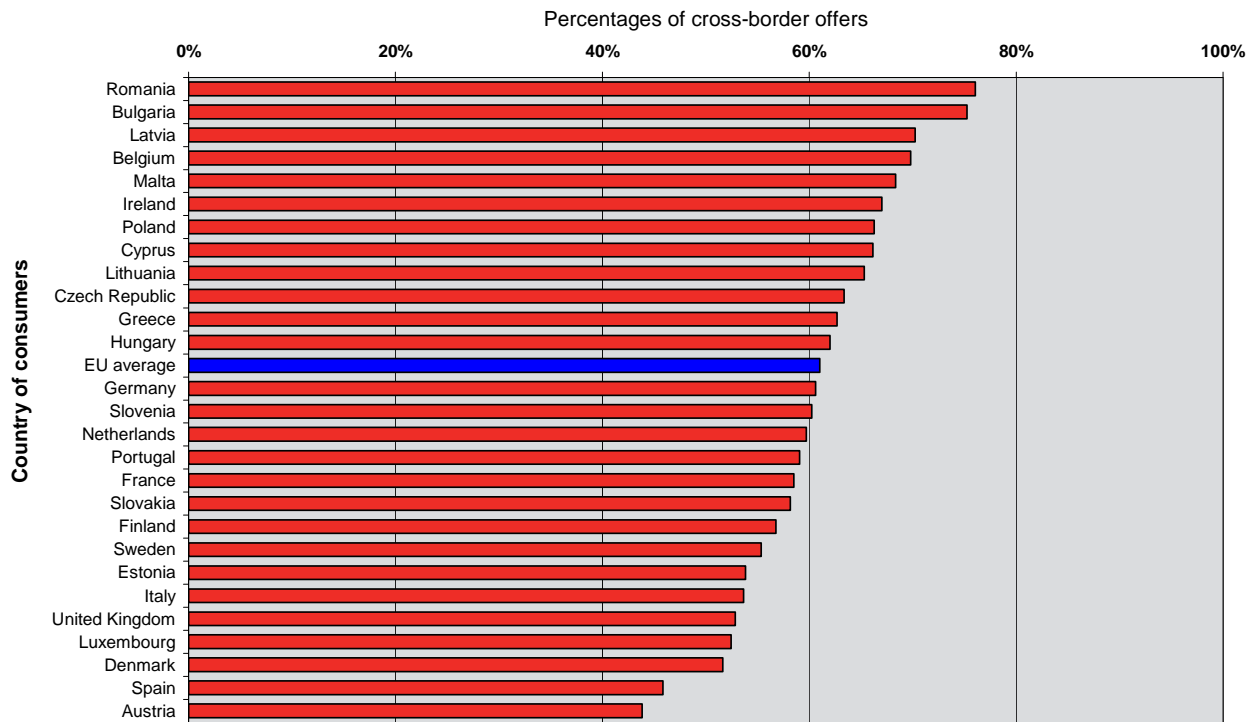
For a majority of *cross-border offers, shoppers would not have been able to place an order.** For these offers, the ordering process failed, meaning that it was impossible to conduct the complete ordering process up to the final order confirmation.⁸

On average in the EU, in only 39% of *cross-border** offers was it theoretically possible to place an order with an online shop that was not located in the same country as the consumer. **61% of *cross-border** offers would have failed either because traders refuse to serve the consumer's country or for other reasons.** Of all *cross-border** offers, 50% failed because the tester's respective country was not served; 11% failed for other reasons, e.g. a technical problem during the ordering process.

Consumers from Belgium, Bulgaria, Latvia, Malta, and Romania experienced failure more often than the EU average (for around 70% of *cross-border** offers conducted in the respective countries, as opposed to the EU average of 61%; Figure 5).

⁸ Question: "Is it possible to conduct the complete ordering process up to the final order confirmation?" Answering options: "yes", "no, the shop does not serve my country", "no, it is not clear when the order will be placed and I do not want to be charged for the product", and "no, other reason". The consumers were instructed to complete the ordering process up to the point of the final order confirmation, but without purchasing the respective product. If the consumers were not sure whether they would actually be purchasing the product by continuing the process, they were asked to select "no, it is not clear when the order will be placed and I do not want to be charged for the product". In 9% of all the offers, the shoppers chose this answering option. It is doubtful whether these orders could actually have been completed. Nevertheless, they were excluded from the following analysis.

Figure 5: Technically accessible cross-border offers for which the ordering process failed



Note: Base (country of consumers) MIN n=259 offers; MAX n=455 offers

Table 2 shows the exact percentage of offers for which the ordering process failed.

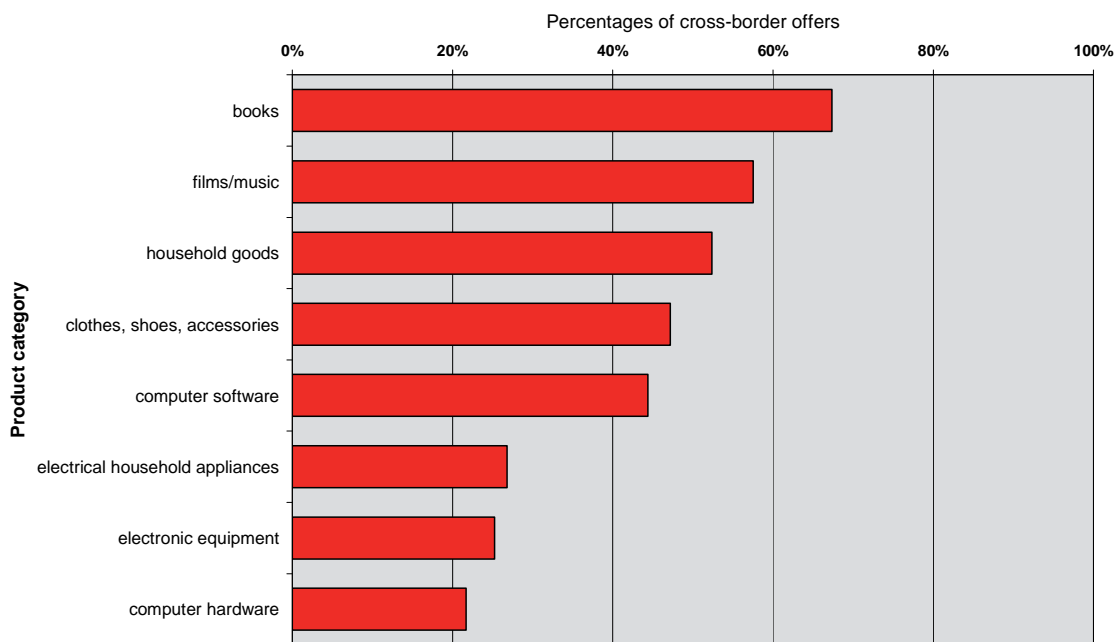
Table 2: Percentage of technically accessible offers for which the ordering process failed

Technically accessible orders	
Country of consumers	Failed
Romania	76%
Bulgaria	75%
Latvia	70%
Belgium	70%
Malta	68%
Ireland	67%
Poland	66%
Cyprus	66%
Lithuania	65%
Czech Republic	63%
Greece	63%
Hungary	62%
EU average	61%
Germany	60%

Country of consumers failed	
Slovenia	60%
Netherlands	60%
Portugal	59%
France	59%
Slovakia	58%
Finland	57%
Sweden	55%
Estonia	54%
Italy	54%
United Kingdom	53%
Luxembourg	52%
Denmark	52%
Spain	46%
Austria	44%

The possibility to place a *cross-border** offer is influenced by the product category. Consumers would be more successful purchasing books (67% compared with the 39% EU average), followed by films/music (58%), and household goods (52% of *cross-border** offers). Consumers could have purchased, for example, a classical CD in 76% of all the *cross-border** offers, one PC game in 63% of all the *cross-border** offers, and the bike helmet in 72% of all the *cross-border** offers. The possibility to place a *cross-border** order for computer hardware (22%), electronic equipment (25%), and electrical household appliances (27%) was much lower than the EU average. The washing machine (7%), the freezer (7%), and specific winter shoes (7%) were extreme examples of *cross-border** offers not working. It seems that the size and weight of products affect the ease of *cross-border** purchases (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Possibility to place a technically accessible order split by product category



Note: Base (product category) MIN n=542 offers; MAX n=2,198 offers

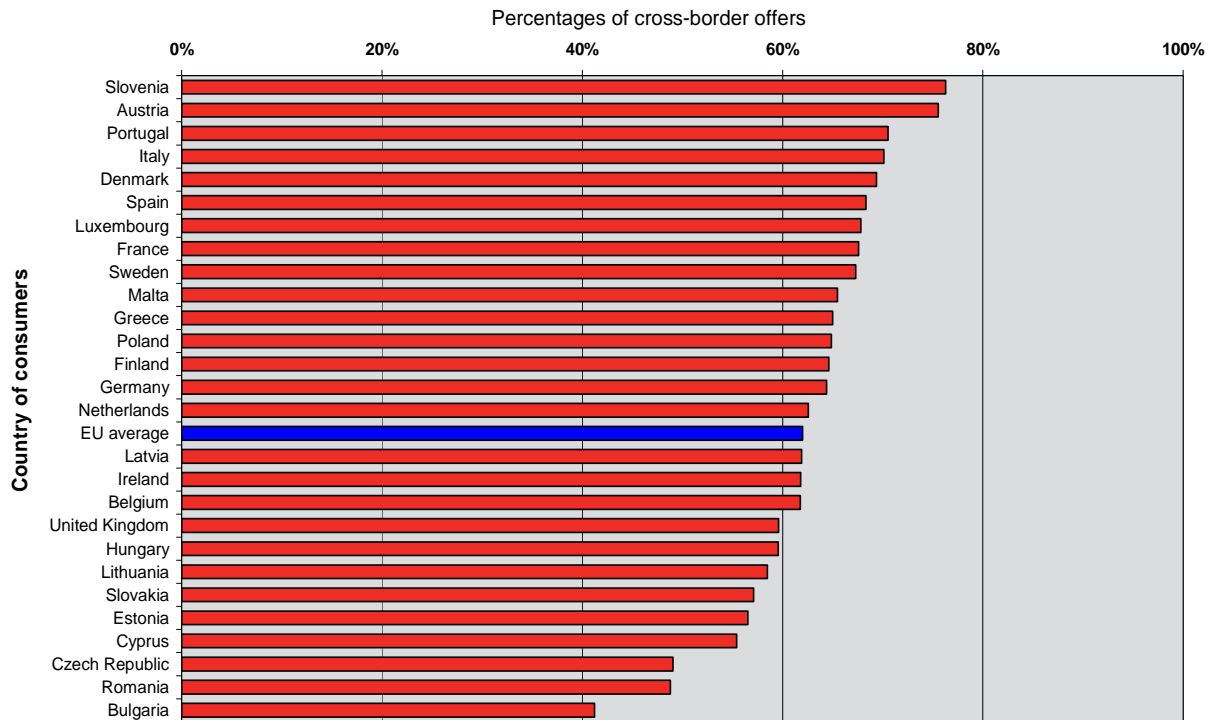
5.1.1. Reasons for refusal

During the ordering process, three critical steps had an effect on whether consumers were able to place *cross-border** orders successfully:⁹ registration, shipment, and payment.

1. Registration: **Registration in *cross-border** offers was less often successful than in *domestic** offers** (62% of *cross-border** offers versus 93% of *domestic** offers). The reasons for failed registrations differed between *domestic** and *cross-border** offers. In *domestic** offers, technical problems led to a refusal, or the fact that the user information required was too personal (e.g., provision of ID card required). In *cross-border* e-commerce**, an interruption of the registration process was mostly the case **because the respective country could not be selected in the registration form** (32% of all the *cross-border** offers). Consumers from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Romania were less often successful in registering in shops outside their home country. In these countries, the registration process in *cross-border e-commerce** was only successful in approximately 45% of all the *cross-border** offers (as opposed to 62%, the EU average; Figure 7).

⁹ For each of these steps, redirection may be a possible cause for an interruption of the ordering process. As redirection can not be handled in the same way as a failed registration, we will present the results on redirection in chapter 5.1.2 and exclude redirection from further analyses in this chapter.

Figure 7: Successful registration on the website

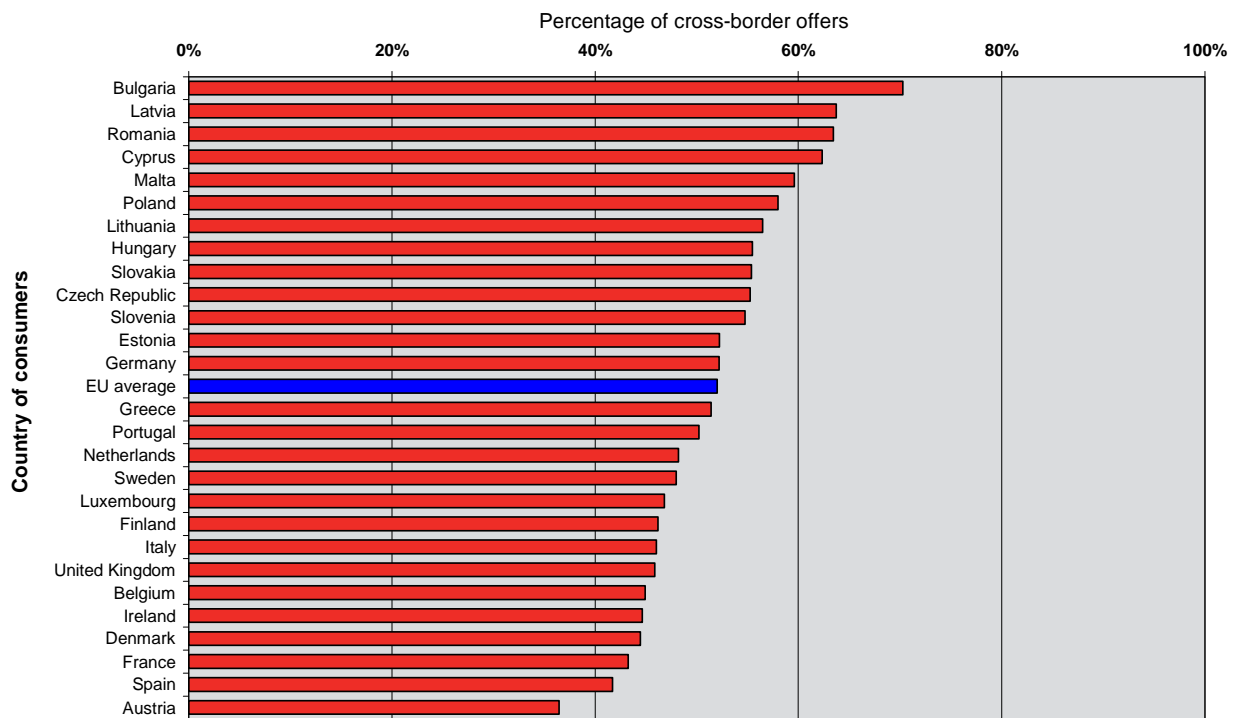


Note: Base (country of consumers) MIN n=205 offers; MAX n=415 offers

2. Cross-border shipment: There was a large gap between shipment possibilities in *domestic** and in *cross-border** offers. **Shipment to the consumer's home was possible for 98% of *domestic** offers, but only for 48% of *cross-border** offers.** This means that shipment to a country outside the country of the shop was refused in 52% of all the *cross-border** offers. **For consumers from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Latvia, and Romania, *cross-border** shipment was most often impossible. Shipment to consumers from Austria, France, and Spain was more often possible than the EU average** (Figure 8).¹⁰

¹⁰ Question: "Is shipment to your country possible?"

Figure 8: Cross-border shipment to consumer's country impossible



Note: Base (country of consumers) MIN n=279 offers; MAX n=495 offers

The choice of products affected the possibility to ship *cross-border**. Cross-border shipment was more often possible for “books” (79%), “films/music” (66%), “household goods” (60%), “clothes, shoes, and accessories” (58%), and “computer software” (54%) than for “electronic equipment” (34%), “electrical household appliances” (33%), and “computer hardware” (30%).

3. Cross-border payment: **Direct debit is more often accepted for *domestic** offers than for *cross-border** offers.** Where it was possible to test this payment option by entering bank details on the website, shops accepted payment details for 61% of *domestic** offers compared with 42% of *cross-border** offers. **In about 60% of the offers where it was possible to pay with credit card, the shop refused the consumer's credit card.** It was not possible to unravel the specific reasons for this failure. Only in 4% of the offers was the reason for refusal a clear rejection of the specific credit card.¹¹

5.1.2. *Redirection*

***Redirection** is a problem of minor importance: shops redirected consumers to another website in only 2% of all the offers** (284 offers in total).

*Redirection** occurred significantly more often in *cross-border** offers than in *domestic** ones. 82% of all the *redirections** concerned *cross-border** offers and only 18% *domestic** offers.

At first glance, a *redirection** concerning a *domestic** offer seems surprising. *Redirection** in the case of *domestic** offers was stated most often during the payment process. It turned out that redirection occurred when the payment procedure of direct debit caused consumers to be redirected to the website of the payment provider.

***Redirection** while testing *cross-border** offers occurred most often during the payment process (53%), followed by registration (28%) and shipment (19%).** Consumers from the Czech Republic and the Netherlands experienced *redirection** during *cross-border** offers more often than consumers from the other member states of the European Union.

¹¹ Question: "Does the shop accept your direct debits/bank details?" and "Does the shop accept your credit/debit card?". Two payment options were possible for the consumers: paying (1) via direct transfer of the banking details (direct debit and similar systems) or (2) by credit card. The consumers' instructions were to use direct debit in the first step and only choose a credit card as the payment option if direct debit was not an option or not accepted. In 3,738 offers, the consumers had the possibility to pay with direct debit (28% of all the offers). In 7,151 offers, paying with a credit card was possible.

5.2. Product and price information

5.2.1. *Product information*

In almost all the offers (92% on average in the EU), the consumer found information on the main characteristics of the product.¹²

Shops located in Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Spain, and Slovenia provided information on the main characteristics of the product less often (shops in these countries displayed this information for around 80% of the offers compared with 92%, the EU average). Offers found at shops located in Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania most frequently contained detailed information on the product (more than 95% of all the offers with the respective country locations compared with 92%, the EU average).

5.2.2. *Conversion possibility*

Shops offered the possibility to convert currencies for only 8% of all the offers.¹³ For those offers where price conversion was possible, they provided information about the exchange rate in fewer than 2% of cases.¹⁴

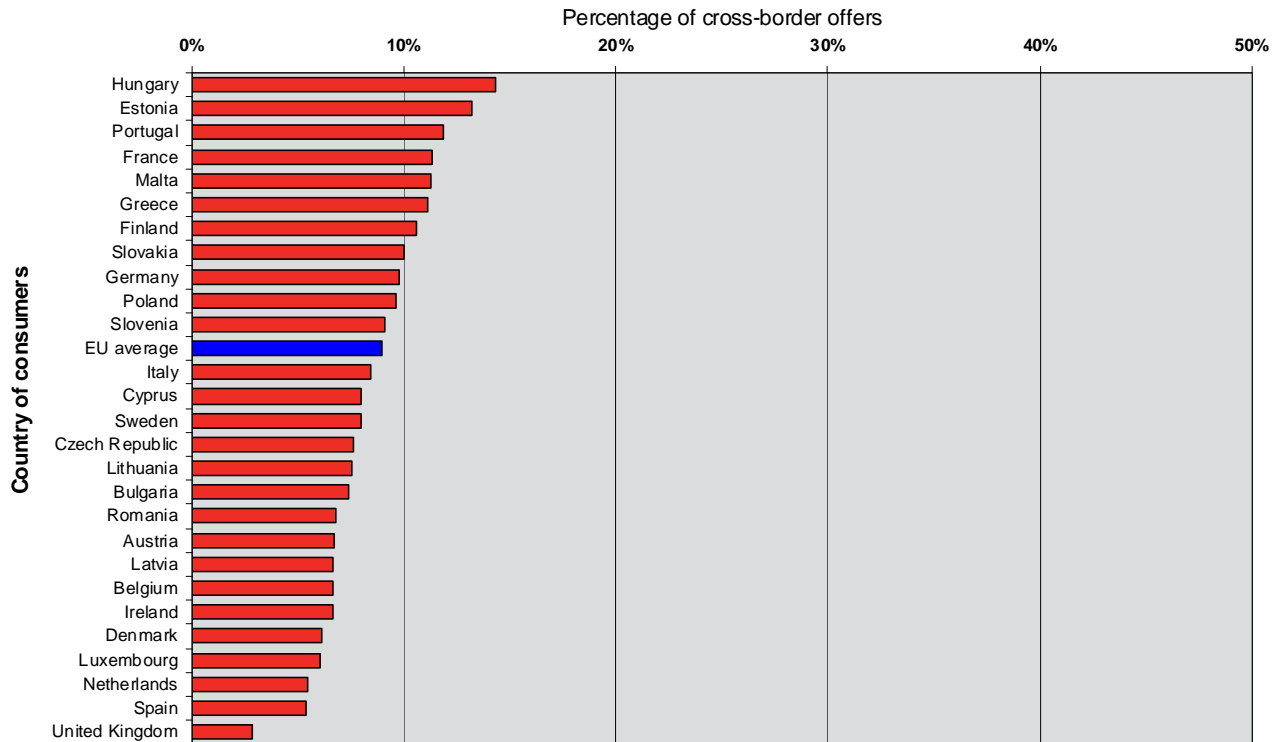
As currency conversion is more important for *cross-border** offers than for *domestic** ones, the following analyses focus on *cross-border** offers only. **Consumers from Hungary and Estonia found the possibility to convert currencies** more often than average (more than 13% of all the *cross-border** offers conducted by consumers in Hungary and Estonia as opposed to 9%, the EU average for cross-border offers). In contrast, **consumers from the United Kingdom could convert currencies in only 5% of the *cross-border** offers** (Figure 9).

¹² Question: "Is the consumer provided with information on the main characteristics of the good? (e.g. size, weight, material, characteristics, etc.)?". Answering options: yes–no

¹³ Question: "Do you have the possibility to convert currencies on the site?" Answering options: yes–no

¹⁴ Question: "Is there any information about the exchange rate?" Answering options: yes–no

Figure 9: Possibility to convert currencies on the website



Note: Base (country of consumers) MIN n=275 offers; MAX n=498 offers

5.2.3. Price elements and special offers

The consumers were asked to indicate two prices for each test: (1) the initial price, which is mentioned at the beginning of the ordering process,¹⁵ and (2) the final price before confirmation of the order.¹⁶

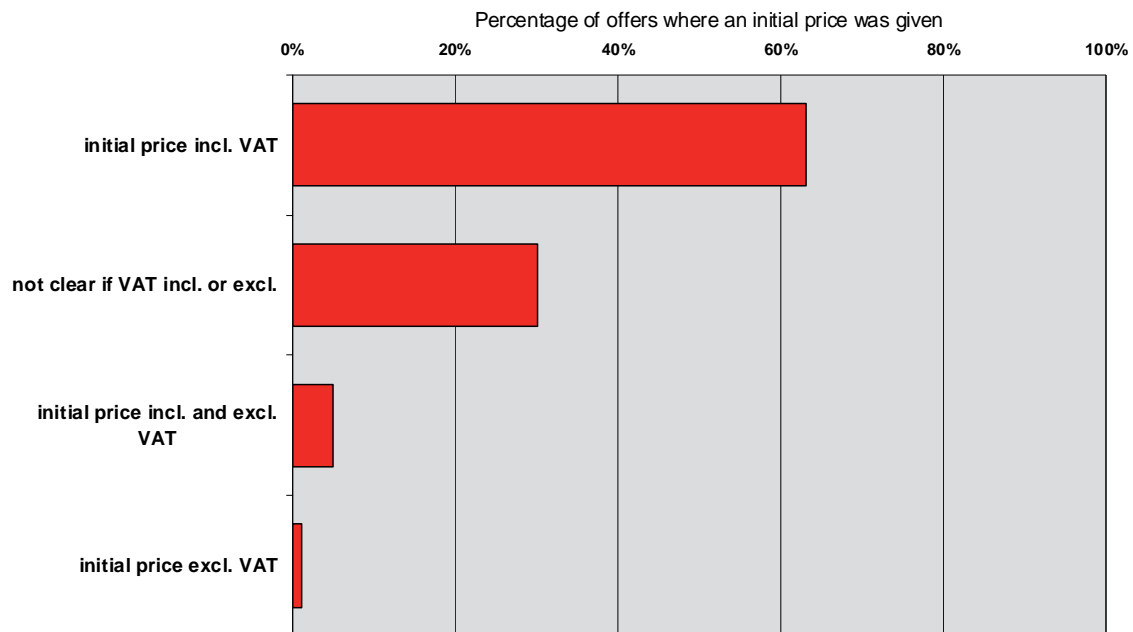
1. Initial price. In 99% of offers, the first page of the online shops provided a price for the product. Domestic* and cross-border* offers did not differ in this regard.

In 63% of the offers where such a price was given, the initial price presented included VAT. In about 30% of the offers, it was not clear whether the price included VAT or not. In 5% of the offers, online shops provided the price including VAT as well as the price exclusive of VAT. In only 1% of the offers, the online shops indicated the price excluding VAT only (Figure 10).

¹⁵ Question: "Does the page of the shop directly give a price for the product?" Answering options: yes-no

¹⁶ Question: "What is the total, final price for the product, incl. VAT, taxes, packaging costs, shipment, other taxes, etc.?" The consumers indicated the price shown and all the price elements shown separately.

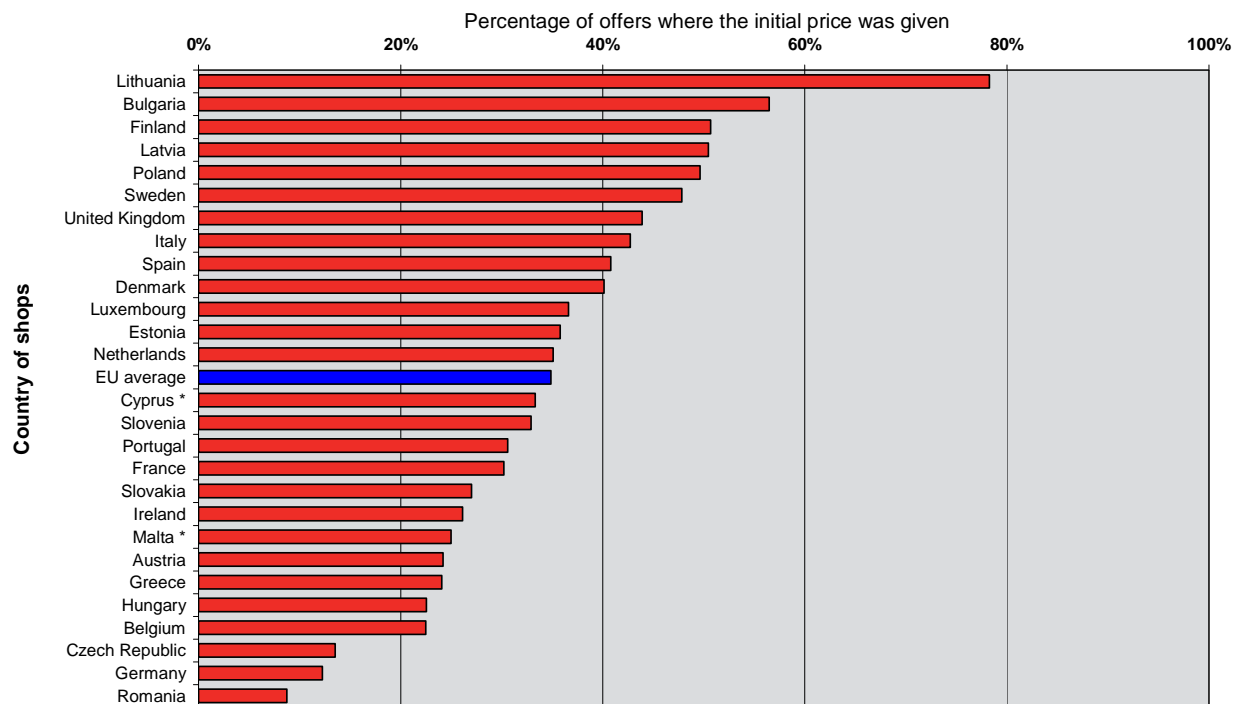
Figure 10: Presentation of the initial price (incl./excl. VAT)



Note: Base: n=13,423 offers

The fact that in about 30% of all the offers it was not clear if the initial price given excluded or included VAT makes it difficult for consumers to compare prices. This was particularly the case for offers found in shops located in Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom where more than 40% of offers were unclear (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Offers where it was not clear if the initial price included or excluded VAT



Note: Base (country of shops) MIN n=2 offers; MAX n=4,614 offers, * = country locations below sample size of n=35

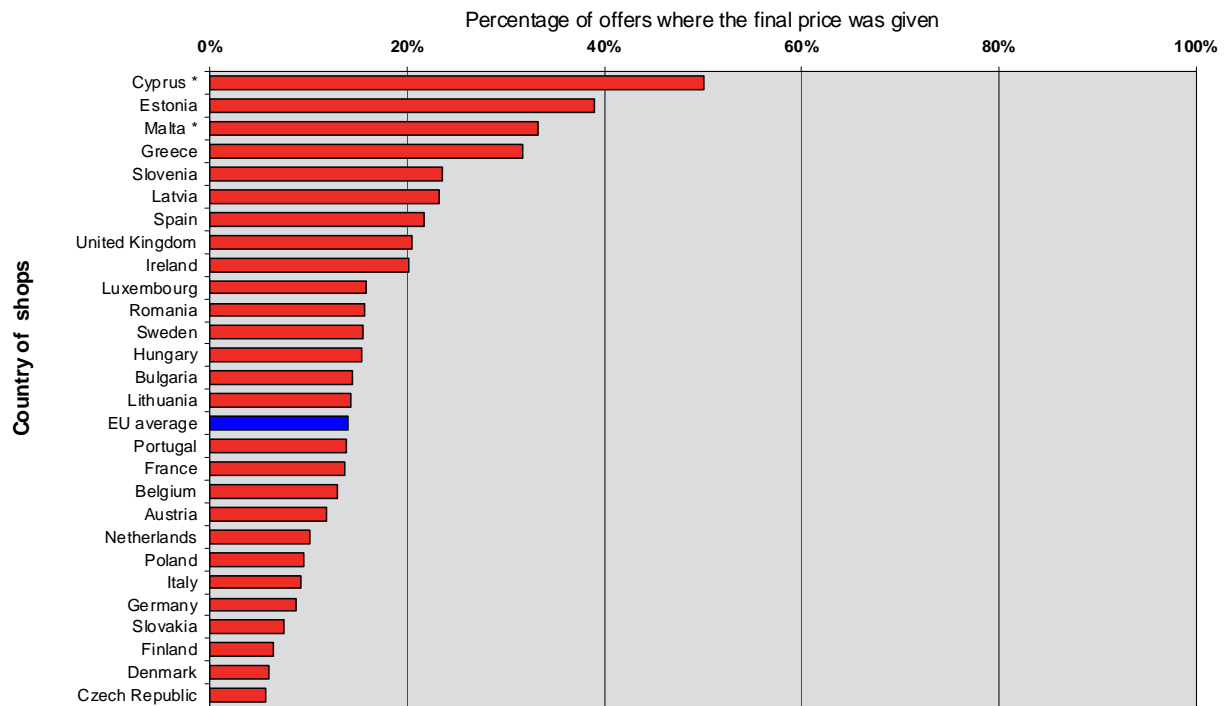
2. Final price. The final, total price of the offer was, in most cases, provided before confirming the order.

86% of the offers (which gave the final price) contained details on the various elements of the final price such as VAT, shipment costs, etc. 14% of the offers gave no further details on the price, which makes it difficult for consumers to know what they are being charged for.¹⁷

40% of offers from Estonian shops did not include information about the different price elements. This was also a problem in **Greece, Slovenia, Latvia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Ireland** (Figure 12).

¹⁷ The consumers were asked to indicate the total price and all the price elements that were specified in the offer (prices exclusive or inclusive of VAT, costs of shipment and packaging, additional costs and taxes, additional costs for shipment abroad and for using a foreign credit card). Taking into account interruptions of the ordering process due to failed registrations, no shipment to the tester's country, and failing payment details, the website indicated the total final price of the order in 8,217 offers.

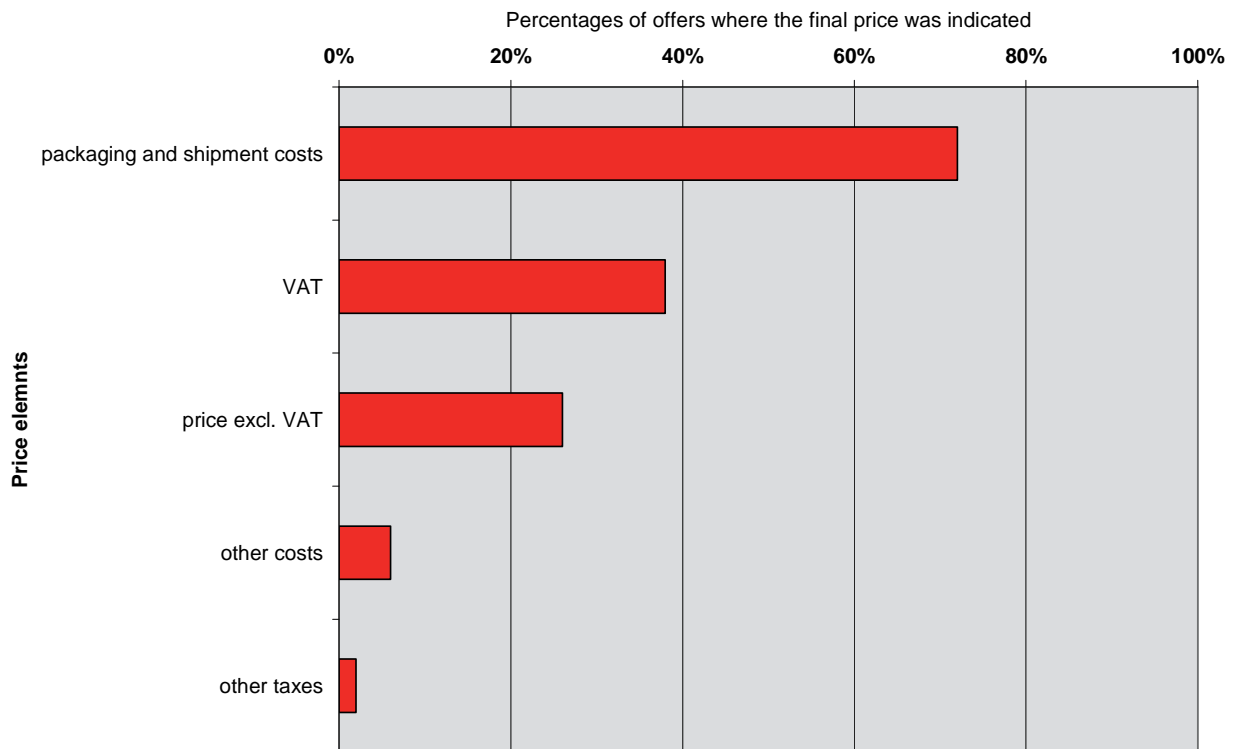
Figure 12: Offers for which online shops gave no price details for the final price



Note: Base (country of shops) MIN n=2 offers; MAX n=2,583 offers, * = country locations below sample size of n=35 offers

Final prices were analysed to show how often the various price elements were presented separately. 38% of offers indicated the VAT; 26% showed the final price excluding VAT; 72% showed the costs for packaging and shipment as extra price elements; 6% of offers showed other additional costs in connection with the purchase, such as service charges or the extension of the guarantee period. Shops presented information separately on other taxes and fees, such as fees for the recycling of electronic waste, only infrequently (for about 2% of offers, Figure 13).

Figure 13: Elements of the final price and how often they were shown separately



Note: Base (price elements) MIN n=132 offers, MAX n=5,936 offers

In total, 44% of the *cross-border offers (for which a total final price was given) indicated additional costs for shipment abroad as a separate price element; 4% of *cross-border** offers indicated separately additional costs for using a foreign credit card.**

For 24% of offers, the website advertised special offers or a reduced price in connection with the product.¹⁸ However, only 6% of special offers provided information on the period for which the special offer or reduced price remained valid.¹⁹

5.3. Saving potential of cross-border offers

The consumers recorded the final price showing all the applicable costs, taxes, and shipping rates, as indicated on the websites, for each of the 100 different products.

¹⁸ Question: "Does the website advertise special offers or a reduced price in connection with this product?" Answering options: yes–no

¹⁹ Question: "Does the website show any information on the period for which the special offer or reduced price remains valid?" Answering options: yes–no

As the **products differed broadly in value and product category, the prices were not comparable. A descriptive analysis was therefore chosen to represent the saving potential of *cross-border** offers across the European Union.**

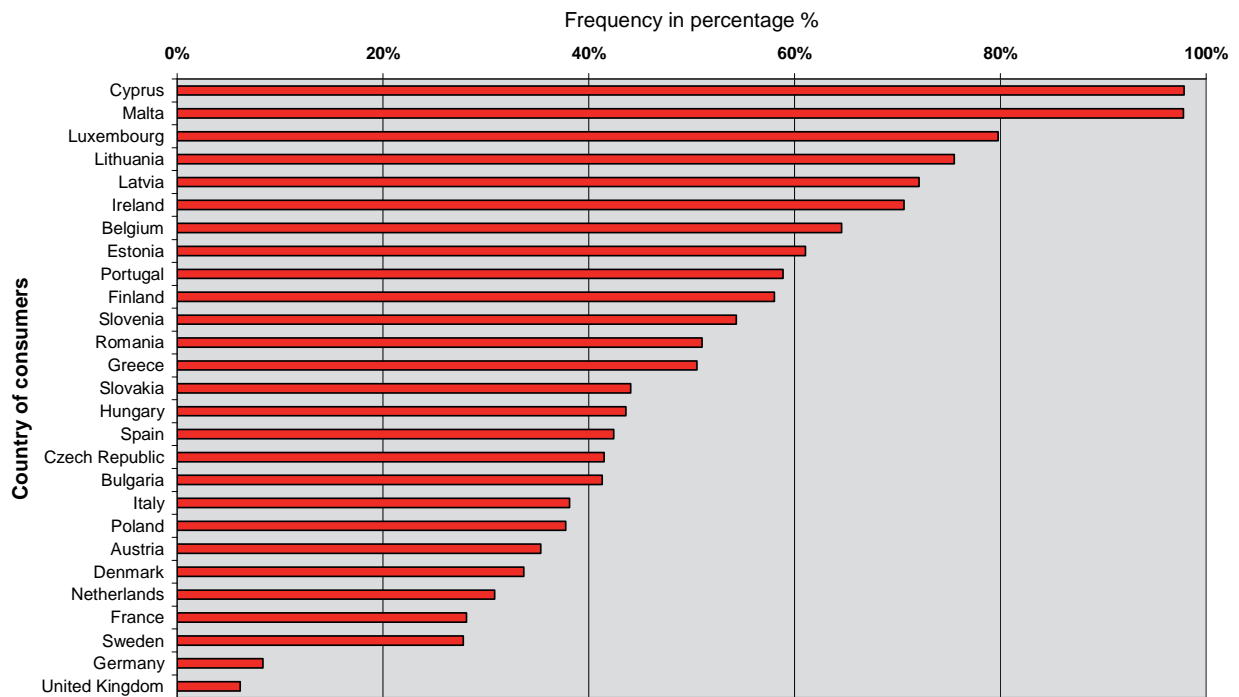
It is important to add that these savings represent actual savings only in case shops deliver the product in the end. As shown in the previous chapters, orders often fail at some point during the ordering process. Depending on how websites handle the transaction, this may even become apparent after the website showed a final price for the product, because payment details were refused or simply because of poor website technical design. Furthermore, as no actual purchases were made, it is impossible to know whether orders that could have been placed successfully would have been delivered.

In order to describe the analyses, let's assume the example of a hypothetical Belgian consumer named Anna. Anna set out to buy all 100 products from the shopping list:

1. Anna searched for up to 5 offers for each product and found a range of domestic* and cross-border* offers for each. However, after completing the search, Anna realised that a majority of products were not available online in her country. **For more than 60% of her product searches, Anna found offers from cross-border* shops only and none from Belgian online shops.** This was true in varying degrees for consumers from other countries. For consumers from Cyprus, Malta, Luxembourg and Lithuania, for 75% to 97% of all the product searches, only cross-border* offers were available. For these product searches, consumers were not able to find offers for products that they could purchase online in their own country, meaning that cross-border* offers were the only alternative. For consumers in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, a much higher number of product searches were available for domestic offers (Figure 14). **Overall, about half of the product searches were for cross-border* offers only.**²⁰

²⁰ The basis for the following analysis is the product search, instead of individual offers. In total across all countries, the consumers tested 13,527 offers that are the result of 2,700 different product searches: up to 5 offers per product (f=100) and country (f=27). Product searches were selected only if at least one price was indicated. Across all countries, 2,554 out of 2,700 product searches (n=8,217 offers) produced at least one final price. Prices included all costs applicable to the consumer's country. The prices of about half of these product searches were for *cross-border** offers only (1,269 product searches).

Figure 14: Number of product searches for which consumers only found cross-border offers
(final price)



Note: Base (country of consumers) MIN n=91 to MAX n=99 product searches per country, in total n=2,554 product searches

Table 3 shows the exact percentages split by the country of consumers:

Table 3: Number of product searches where only cross-border offers were found

Country of consumers	only cross-border offers found
Cyprus	98%
Malta	98%
Luxembourg	80%
Lithuania	76%
Latvia	72%
Ireland	71%
Belgium	65%
Estonia	61%
Portugal	59%
Finland	58%
Slovenia	54%
Romania	51%
Greece	51%
Slovakia	44%

Country of consumers	only cross-border offers found
Hungary	44%
Spain	42%
Czech Republic	41%
Bulgaria	41%
Italy	38%
Poland	38%
Austria	35%
Denmark	34%
Netherlands	31%
France	28%
Sweden	28%
Germany	8%
United Kingdom	6%

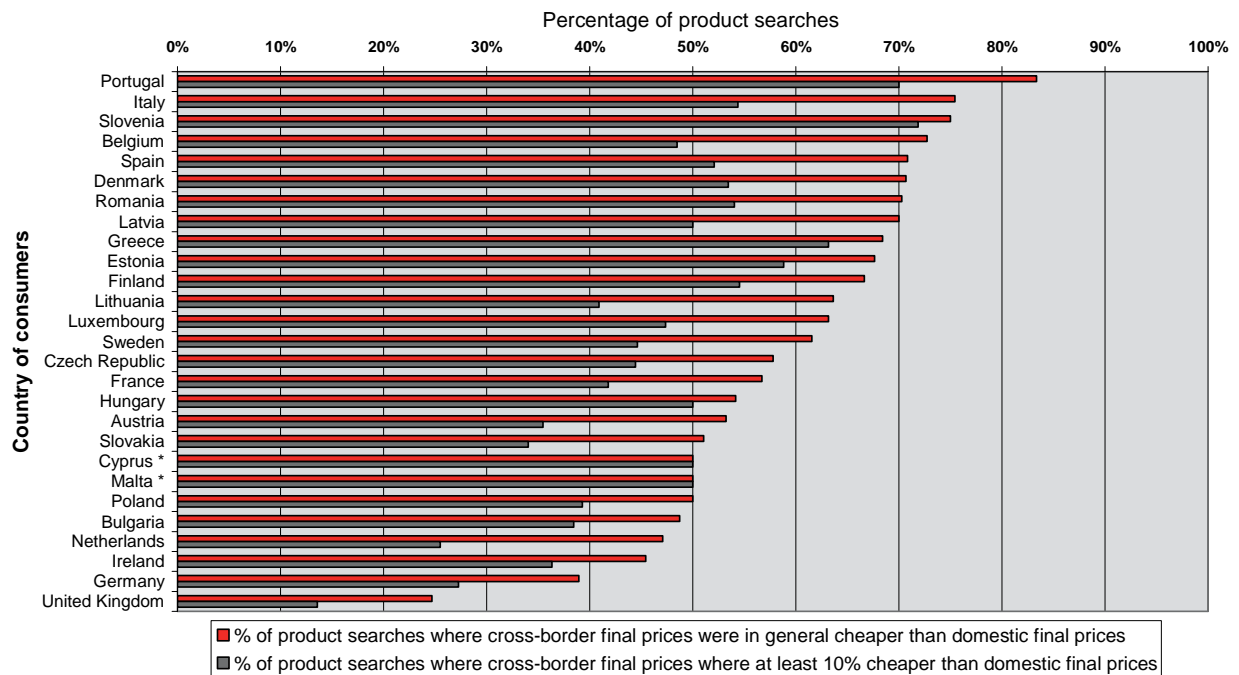
2. Turning her attention to the product searches where a comparison was possible (the other 40% of product searches in Belgium), Anna compared the cheapest *domestic** and the cheapest *cross-border** offer.²¹ **For close to three-quarters of these product searches, Anna found a cross-border* offer available to her country that was cheaper than the best domestic offer in Belgium.**²² Consumers in Portugal, Italy, and Slovenia found a *cross-border** offer that was cheaper than the best *domestic** offer in more than 75% of all the valid product searches (Figure 15).
3. But Anna was also concerned that *cross-border** shopping might involve a higher risk than purchasing the products from a *domestic** online shop. She decided that it is worthwhile to take the risk only if *cross-border** offers were at least 10% cheaper than the best *domestic** offer.²³ **In little less than 50% of product searches, Anna found a cross-border* offer that was at least 10% cheaper than the best domestic offer in Belgium.** Consumers in Portugal, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Denmark, Romania, Latvia, Greece, Estonia, Finland, Cyprus and Malta found *cross-border** offers that were at least 10% cheaper in more than 50% of the product searches. Consumers from Germany found *cross-border** offers that were at least 10% cheaper in less than one-third of all product searches (Figure 15).

²¹ This step involved selecting product searches that gave a price for at least one *cross-border** and one *domestic** offer. In total across all countries, this was the case for 1,125 product searches.

²² The ratio of valid *cross-border** offers compared with *domestic** offers differed strongly between the countries of the consumers. Results are expressed in percentage of valid product searches.

²³ Across all countries, the analysis was replicated assuming that a 10% discount would represent the trade-off for an average online shopper between the higher perceived risk of the transaction and the saving opportunity.

Figure 15: Saving potential of technically accessible cross-border offers



Note: Base (country of consumers) MIN n=2 to MAX n=81 product searches; * = country of tester below sample size of n=5; in total n=1,125 product searches

Table 4 shows the exact percentages split by country of tester:

Table 4: Percentage of product searches where the best cross-border offer was general cheaper or at least 10% cheaper than the domestic offers

Country of consumers	Generally cheaper	At least 10% cheaper
Portugal	83%	70%
Italy	75%	54%
Slovenia	75%	72%
Belgium	73%	48%
Spain	71%	52%
Denmark	71%	53%
Romania	70%	54%
Latvia	70%	50%
Greece	68%	63%
Estonia	68%	59%
Finland	67%	55%
Lithuania	64%	41%
Luxembourg	63%	47%
Sweden	62%	45%

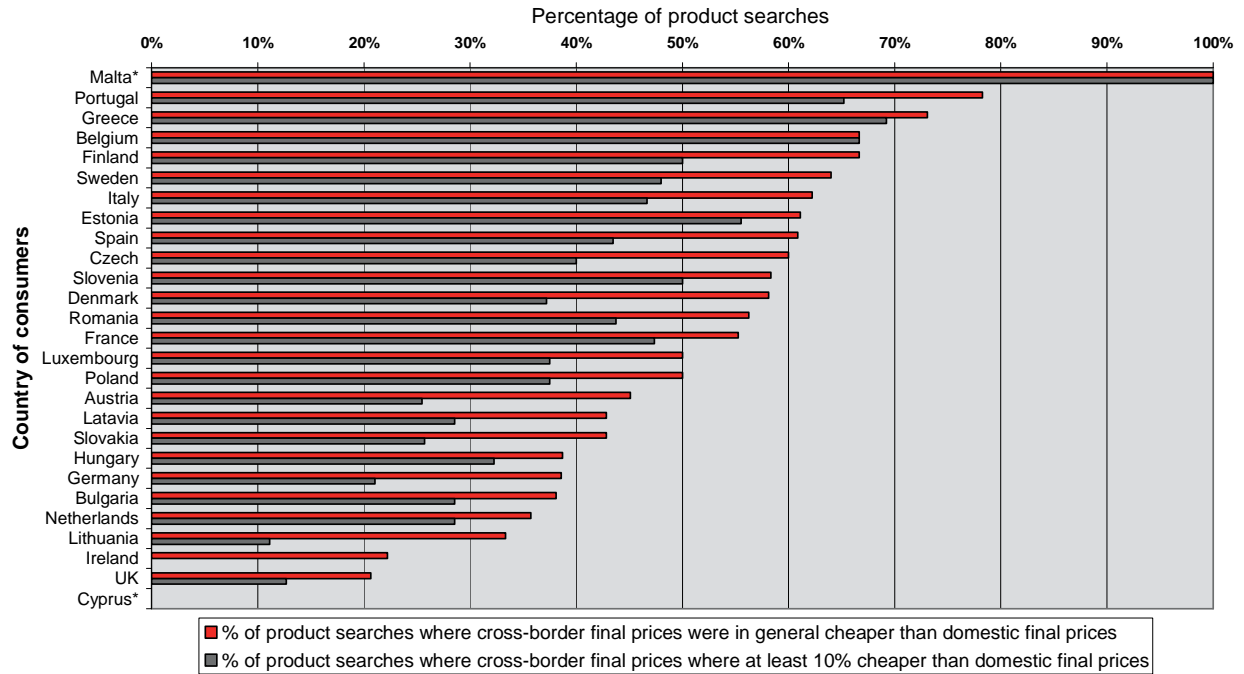
Country of consumers	Generally cheaper	At least 10% cheaper
Czech Republic	58%	44%
France	57%	42%
Hungary	54%	50%
Austria	53%	35%
Slovakia	51%	34%
Cyprus *	50%	50%
Malta *	50%	50%
Poland	50%	39%
Bulgaria	49%	38%
Netherlands	47%	25%
Ireland	45%	36%
Germany	39%	27%
United Kingdom	25%	14%

When websites showed a final price for the goods, this did not always guarantee that the transaction would have been successful. As mentioned above, orders often fail at some point during the ordering process, which is not always immediately apparent to the consumer. In Figure 16 and Table 5, the same analysis was carried out excluding all the offers for which the ordering process failed.²⁴

While results are generally in line with the previous analysis, this presents a slightly more conservative measure of the potential savings of cross-border e-commerce. According to this analysis, consumers in Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Malta and Portugal found *cross-border** offers that were at least 10% cheaper in more than 50% of the product searches. Consumers in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden found *cross-border** offers that were at least 10% cheaper in more than 40% of the product searches.

²⁴ Product searches were selected only if at least one final price was indicated and the ordering process would have been successful. Across all countries, 2,229 out of 2,700 product searches (n=5,367 offers) produced at least one final price. Prices included all costs applicable to the consumer's country. The prices of about half of these product searches were for *cross-border** offers only (1,169 product searches). In total across all countries, 698 product searches gave a price for at least one *cross-border** and one *domestic** offer. Results are expressed in percentage of valid product searches. Across all countries, the analysis was replicated assuming that a 10% discount would represent the trade-off for an average online shopper between the higher perceived risk of the transaction and the saving opportunity.

Figure 16: Saving potential of technically accessible cross-border offers that would have been successful



Note: Base (country of consumers) MIN n=1 to MAX n=63 product searches; * = country of consumers below sample size of n=5; in total n=698 product searches

Table 5: Percentage of product searches where the best cross-border offer was general cheaper or at least 10% cheaper than the domestic offers (excluding orders that failed)

Country of consumers	Generally cheaper	At least 10% cheaper
Malta*	100%	100%
Portugal	78%	65%
Greece	73%	69%
Belgium	67%	67%
Finland	67%	50%
Sweden	64%	48%
Italy	62%	47%
Estonia	61%	56%
Spain	61%	43%
Czech Republic	60%	40%
Slovenia	58%	50%
Denmark	58%	37%
Romania	56%	44%
France	55%	47%

Country of consumers	Generally cheaper	At least 10% cheaper
Luxembourg	50%	38%
Poland	50%	38%
Austria	45%	25%
Latvia	43%	29%
Slovakia	43%	26%
Hungary	39%	32%
Germany	39%	21%
Bulgaria	38%	29%
Netherlands	36%	29%
Lithuania	33%	11%
Ireland	22%	0%
United Kingdom	21%	13%
Cyprus*	0%	0%

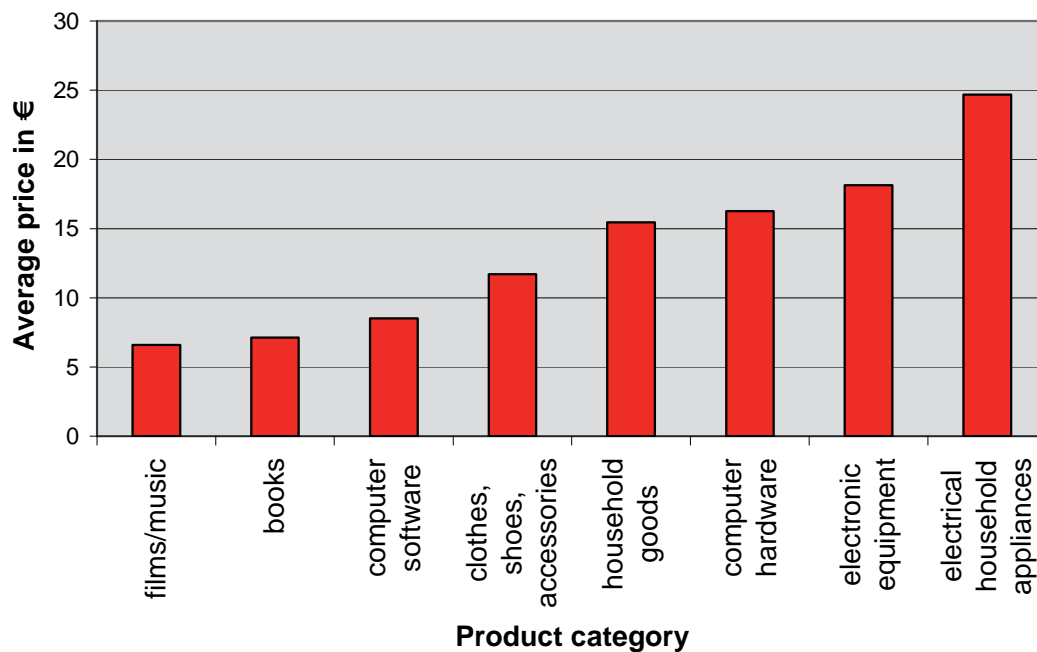
Note: In Malta and Cyprus product searches below size n=5

5.4. Packaging and shipment costs

Not surprisingly, shipment and packaging costs were lower for *domestic** than for *cross-border** offers. The average cost for *domestic** offers was €8 whereas it was €16 for *cross-border** offers. The **ranges of shipment and packaging costs were also broader for *cross-border** offers.**²⁵

Shipment and packaging costs **were influenced by the product category.** Shipment and packaging costs were **highest for electrical household appliances** (€25 would have been charged on average). Relatively **low costs would have been charged for films/music, books, and computer software** (on average €9; Figure 17).

Figure 17: Shipment and packaging costs in €



Note: Base (product category) MIN n=404 offers; MAX n=1,174 offers

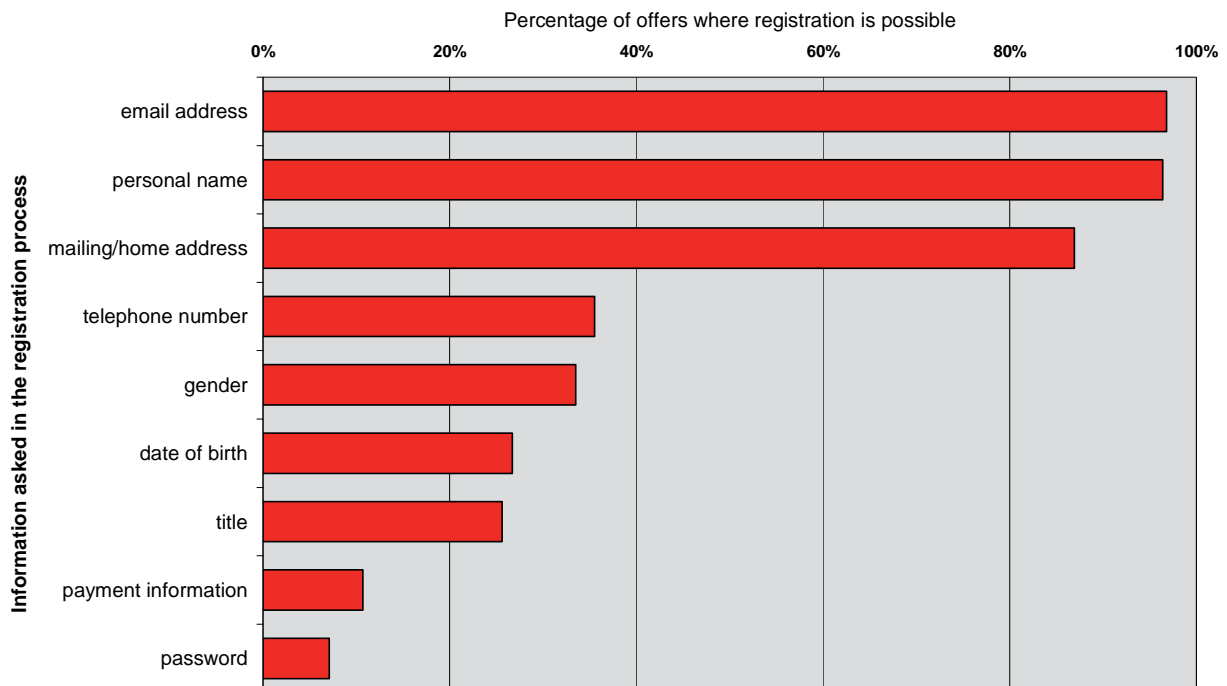
²⁵ The standard deviation for cross-border offers (SD=16.64) were higher than for domestic offers (SD=9.16).

5.5. Personal information requested during the ordering process

For 82% of offers, the websites offered the possibility to register on the shop website by creating an account and providing personal information.²⁶

In most offers, **the websites asked the consumers to indicate their email address (97% of all the offers), personal name (96%), and mailing/home address (87%).** In one-third of the offers, the consumers had to specify their gender (34%), and in about one-quarter of the offers, the consumers needed to indicate their date of birth (27% of all the offers) and title (26%). At this stage, shops requested payment information in only 11% of offers. Some of the shops requested additional data; i.e., telephone number (36% of the offers), a password, or a security question for the individual secured account (7% of the offers, see Figure 18).

Figure 18: Personal information requested during the registration process



Note: Base n=13,573 offers. Multiple answers possible.

²⁶ Question: "Do you have the possibility to register/create an account on the shop website to proceed with the ordering process?" Answering options: yes–no and "Which details did you have to indicate (obligatory) for registration?" "personal name", "mailing/home address (e.g. country, postal code etc.)", "email address", "payment information (bank details etc.)", "date of birth", "gender", "title", "one of the above", "other...".

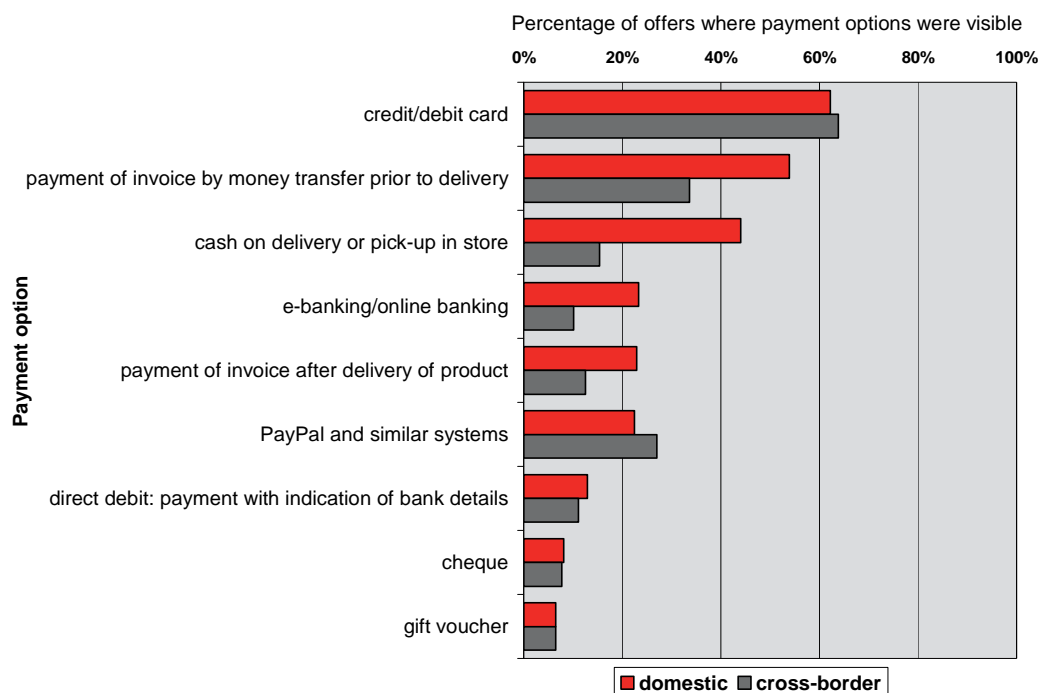
Consumers received a confirmation e-mail after their registration in 40% of all offers.²⁷

5.6. Payment options

Credit/debit card was the payment option most often provided compared with other payment options such as *money transfer**, *PayPal**, *cash on delivery or pick-up in stores**, etc.²⁸

Compared to domestic offers, most payment options are less readily available for *cross-border offers, with the notable exception of credit card payments and of *PayPal and similar systems**. Payment by *money transfer**, *cash on delivery or pick-up in stores**, and *e-banking/online banking** was more often proposed for *domestic** offers (Figure 19).**

Figure 19: Frequencies of payment options offered



Note: Base: domestic n=2,609 offers; cross-border n=10,964 offers. Multiple answers possible.

²⁷ Question: "Please check your email account for a confirmation email for your registration". Answering options: "yes, I got a confirmation mail for my registration", and "no, I did not get a confirmation mail for my registration".

²⁸ Question: "Which payment options are offered?" "payment of invoice by money transfer prior to delivery", "payment of invoice after delivery of product", "direct debit: payment with indication of bank details", "e-banking/online banking", "cash on delivery or pick-up in store", "credit/debit card", "cheque", "PayPal and similar systems", "gift voucher", "other...".

The availability of various payment systems **reflects very diverse national business practices and consumer preferences**. The conditions facing consumers differed widely in this regard. The main differences from the consumer point of view are presented below and in Table 6.

- Credit/debit card: British, Finnish, French, Italian, and Slovenian consumers were offered the option of paying with “credit/debit card” in three-quarters of all the offers. Bulgarian, Czech, and Slovakian consumers had this opportunity in fewer than half of the offers. The EU average across all offers is 63%.
- Payment of invoice by money transfer prior to delivery: Austrian, Belgian, Dutch, and German consumers were offered to pay their invoice *by money transfer prior to delivery** in about half of all the cases. Consumers from Greece and Malta had this possibility only in around 20% of the offers. The EU average is 37% for all offers.
- PayPal and similar systems: Belgian, French, German, Italian, Maltese, and Spanish consumers were offered *PayPal and similar systems** in around one-third of offers. In contrast, Bulgarian, Cyprian, Czech, Danish, and Slovakian consumers were offered this payment option in about 15% of all cases. The EU average is 26% of all offers.
- Cash on delivery or pick-up in store: Austrian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Latvian, Polish, Romanian, Slovakian, Slovenian, and Swedish consumers were offered *cash on delivery or pick-up in store** in one-third of all cases and British, Danish, Finnish, French, Luxembourgian, and Portuguese consumers in only about 10% of all offers. The EU average is 21%.
- Payment of invoice after delivery: Austrian, German, and Swedish consumers were offered *payment of invoice after delivery of the product** (in more than one-quarter of all cases compared with the EU average of 14%) more often compared to consumers from Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom who found this payment option in fewer than 10% of offers.
- E-banking/online banking: Regarding the payment option *e-banking and online banking**, consumers from the European Union fall broadly into two groups:

one group with rare access to this payment option (in fewer than 10% of the test), and the other one with access in about 20% of the offers. Consumers from Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, and the United Kingdom reported rare access. In contrast, Belgian, Dutch, Finnish, German, Greek, Latvian, Polish, Slovenian, and Swedish consumers were offered *e-banking and online banking** in about 20% of all cases. The EU average is 12%.

- Direct debit: Consumers from Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands were offered *direct debit** more often (one-quarter of all the cases compared with the EU average of 11%).
- Cheque: Belgian and Italian consumers were offered to pay by cheque in 17% and 16% of all the offers, respectively. French consumers had this payment option in as many as 27% of all the offers (EU average of 8%).
- Gift voucher: French and German consumers had the possibility to pay with gift vouchers relatively often in contrast to all other consumers (15% and 23% respectively, compared with the 6% EU average).

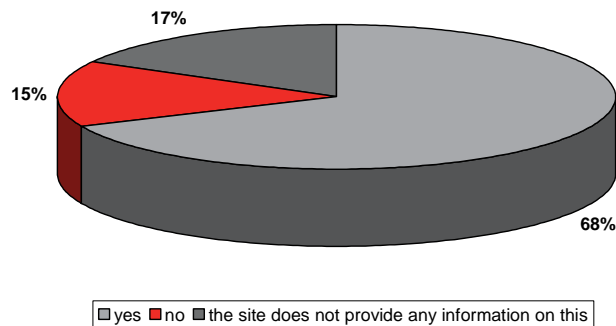
country of consumers	total number of offers	payment of invoice by money transfer prior to delivery	payment of invoice after delivery of the product	direct debit: payment with indication of bank details	e-banking/ online banking	cash on delivery or pick-up in store	credit/debit card	cheque	PayPal and similar systems	gift voucher	other
Austria	510	56.5%	26.3%	13.7%	11.6%	27.1%	59.2%	5.1%	28.0%	6.1%	10.8%
Belgium	500	48.0%	17.6%	25.6%	19.4%	21.2%	68.4%	16.8%	39.8%	5.8%	6.0%
Bulgaria	503	32.2%	8.0%	8.0%	8.3%	29.0%	44.9%	7.4%	18.5%	8.3%	13.9%
Cyprus	500	26.4%	6.2%	14.4%	6.0%	19.4%	54.4%	4.0%	18.2%	8.8%	5.2%
Czech Republic	500	29.4%	11.4%	6.6%	7.4%	21.8%	38.4%	2.4%	12.0%	1.6%	24.0%
Denmark	500	34.8%	14.6%	6.8%	13.6%	14.4%	66.2%	3.2%	17.8%	8.0%	15.8%
Estonia	500	37.4%	12.0%	9.0%	12.2%	17.0%	61.6%	6.6%	20.6%	4.6%	16.8%
Finland	500	30.2%	17.8%	8.8%	17.2%	12.0%	77.4%	8.2%	25.6%	8.2%	15.2%
France	500	33.8%	7.2%	10.6%	8.8%	11.8%	72.2%	27.2%	32.6%	15.2%	19.8%
Germany	506	44.7%	31.6%	18.4%	15.6%	26.7%	63.6%	4.3%	31.0%	22.7%	14.4%
Greece	500	22.6%	7.0%	12.6%	17.6%	19.0%	67.6%	8.8%	27.4%	9.0%	10.0%
Hungary	507	37.3%	12.6%	5.3%	6.1%	29.2%	56.0%	4.9%	22.7%	2.8%	11.6%
Ireland	500	38.4%	8.4%	8.8%	3.6%	20.2%	67.8%	4.2%	29.8%	3.8%	5.0%
Italy	500	41.0%	10.4%	10.2%	13.0%	22.2%	77.8%	16.0%	37.0%	9.6%	11.0%
Latvia	506	32.6%	16.4%	13.8%	20.8%	25.1%	60.1%	8.9%	25.9%	4.2%	12.5%
Lithuania	507	39.3%	16.4%	10.1%	13.8%	15.2%	59.8%	5.5%	26.0%	5.7%	11.6%
Luxembourg	509	37.5%	13.2%	14.5%	6.9%	8.6%	56.0%	7.5%	28.9%	5.5%	8.8%
Malta	500	18.6%	10.4%	9.4%	8.8%	14.0%	68.0%	5.0%	34.6%	1.6%	16.8%
Netherlands	500	51.8%	16.0%	24.4%	19.4%	23.8%	68.4%	8.6%	23.0%	4.0%	11.6%
Poland	500	40.4%	11.4%	10.4%	16.8%	25.0%	69.4%	5.6%	24.4%	6.2%	7.0%
Portugal	500	34.4%	15.2%	5.6%	7.4%	12.8%	59.4%	7.8%	26.8%	6.8%	8.2%
Romania	502	33.5%	16.3%	16.9%	13.5%	32.1%	63.5%	7.4%	21.5%	4.0%	21.7%
Slovakia	518	30.1%	4.1%	8.9%	8.1%	28.6%	48.3%	8.7%	16.2%	1.9%	16.6%
Slovenia	500	42.8%	19.4%	10.4%	24.6%	29.2%	72.0%	6.6%	20.4%	7.4%	21.2%
Spain	500	43.6%	15.6%	9.6%	5.2%	18.4%	70.0%	7.4%	31.4%	2.6%	10.0%
Sweden	505	34.7%	26.7%	5.1%	19.8%	25.9%	66.3%	2.0%	26.5%	4.8%	24.4%
United Kingdom	500	33.2%	8.0%	9.8%	4.4%	10.2%	74.0%	8.8%	27.0%	4.8%	15.4%
Total	13573	36.5%	14.1%	11.4%	12.2%	20.8%	63.3%	7.7%	25.7%	6.4%	13.5%

Table 6: Frequencies of payment options offered split by country of consumers, base n=13,573 offers

In a fifth of all offers, consumers found restrictions regarding the payment options or the transaction, for example age restrictions or geographical restriction related to the address of the cardholder (21%).²⁹ Consumers faced more restrictions for *cross-border** offers (23%) than for *domestic** offers (16%).

Overall, in 68% of the offers, the final order could be placed via a secure connection. In 15% of offers, there was no secure connection, and in 17% consumers found no information on whether the connection was secure or not (Figure 20).³⁰

Figure 20: Frequencies of secure connections offered



Note: Base n=13,573 offers

5.7. Shipment options

The most widespread shipment option is **standard delivery followed by courier services or delivery by logistics companies**. 20% of the offers did not provide any information on shipment options.³¹

All delivery options are more readily available for domestic offers than for cross-border ones. One-third of *domestic** offers gave consumers the possibility to pick-up

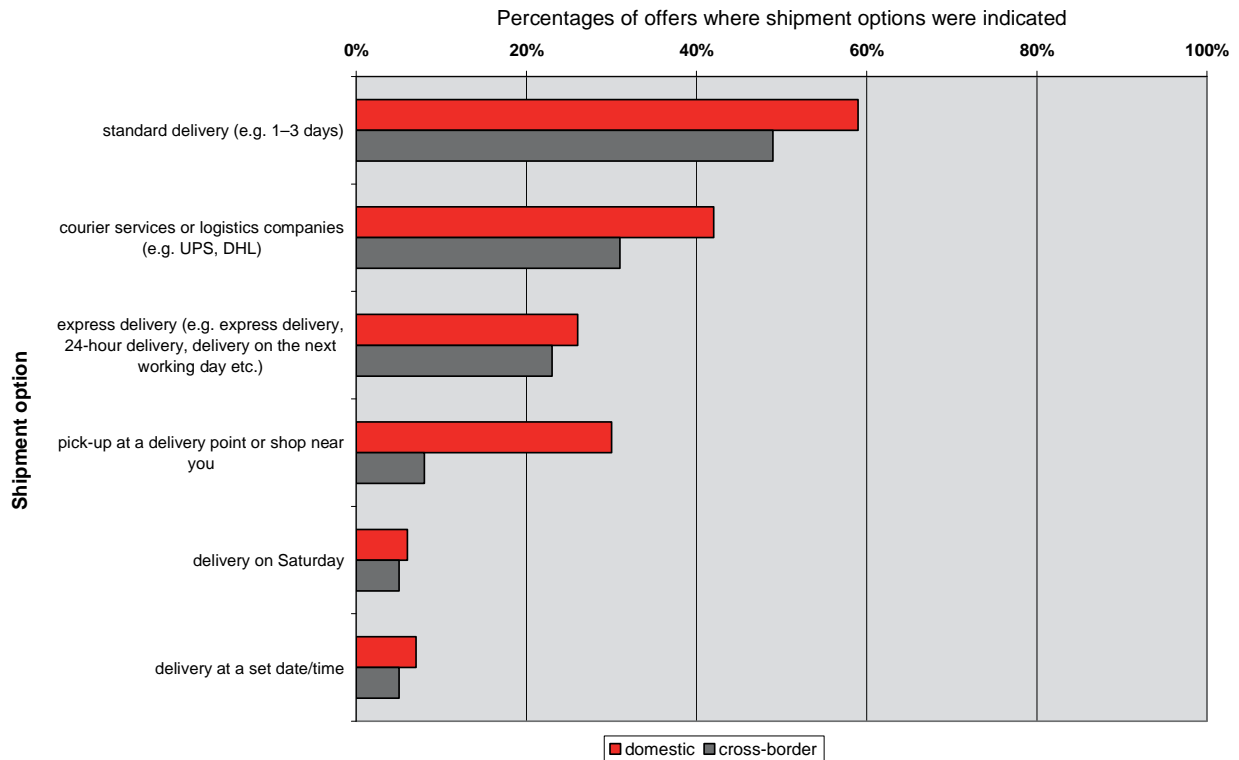
²⁹ Question: "Are there any particular restrictions regarding the payment options or the transaction (e.g. age restrictions, geographical restriction related to the address of the cardholder, other)?" Answering options: "yes", "no", "the site does not provide any information on this".

³⁰ Question: "Is the final order placed via a secure connection?" Answering options: "yes", "no", "the site does not provide any information on this".

³¹ The results refer to the question "What kinds of shipment options are offered?" Answering options were "'express' delivery (e.g. express delivery, 24-hour delivery, delivery on the next working day etc.)", "courier service or logistics companies (e.g. UPS, DHL)", "standard delivery", "delivery on Saturday", "delivery at a set date/time", "pick-up at a delivery point or shop near you", "other options".

their order at a delivery point compared to fewer than 10% of *cross-border** offers (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Frequencies of shipment options offered



Note: Base MIN: n=2,609 offers; MAX: n=10,964 offers. Multiple answers possible.

As far as shipment options are concerned, consumers found a broad variety of country-specific preferences (Table 7 presents all the frequencies for the general sample and split by the *country of consumers**):

- Finnish, German, Italian, Latvian, and Romanian consumers were offered express service more often (in approximately one-third of offers) than consumers from Cyprus, Denmark, and the Czech Republic (less than 13% of offers). The EU average is 23%.
- In 33% of all the offers, consumers indicated delivery via courier service or logistic companies. British, Dutch, and Slovenian consumers indicated this shipment option less often (fewer than 23% of offers). In contrast, half of the Polish offers provided this shipment option.

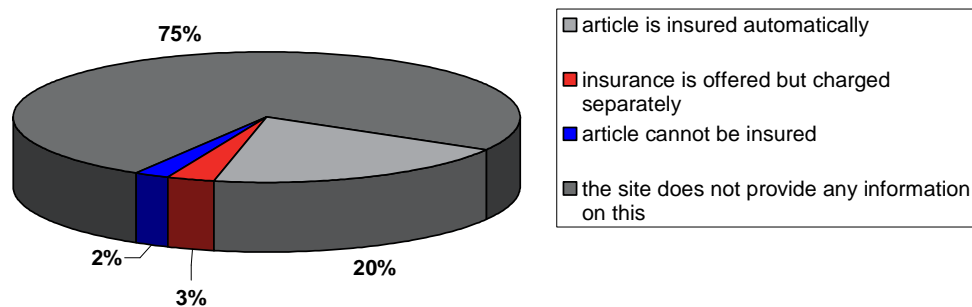
- Standard delivery was possible for Dutch and Irish consumers in around three-quarters of all the offers. However, standard delivery was mentioned in only one-third of the offers that the Cypriot consumers conducted. The EU average is 50% (Table 7).

country of consumers	total number of offers	express delivery	courier service	standard delivery	delivery on Saturday	delivery at a set date/time	pick-up at a delivery point or shop near you	other options
Austria	510	20.8%	37.8%	44.9%	3.9%	4.9%	12.5%	8.0%
Belgium	500	28.6%	43.0%	55.2%	13.2%	10.8%	12.6%	6.2%
Bulgaria	503	23.5%	41.9%	42.1%	6.4%	11.9%	12.7%	32.6%
Cyprus	500	9.0%	24.2%	32.4%	2.2%	2.0%	3.6%	12.2%
Czech Republic	500	13.0%	26.6%	44.0%	2.8%	2.4%	21.4%	22.2%
Denmark	500	11.6%	37.2%	38.2%	4.2%	1.4%	14.4%	6.2%
Estonia	500	20.8%	31.0%	36.0%	2.4%	4.6%	8.4%	27.4%
Finland	500	31.6%	28.0%	63.4%	5.0%	10.0%	14.6%	11.2%
France	500	27.8%	33.2%	47.6%	5.4%	1.8%	16.8%	13.6%
Germany	506	32.8%	31.0%	62.3%	5.5%	6.7%	15.2%	7.5%
Greece	500	22.0%	25.0%	52.8%	7.2%	5.0%	9.8%	18.4%
Hungary	507	21.3%	38.9%	54.2%	5.1%	2.8%	14.6%	11.4%
Ireland	500	25.6%	25.0%	70.4%	3.6%	2.4%	6.8%	9.4%
Italy	500	31.4%	43.4%	45.0%	6.2%	5.8%	10.6%	17.6%
Latvia	506	35.0%	43.5%	52.4%	5.3%	6.3%	13.8%	16.0%
Lithuania	507	18.5%	41.6%	38.3%	5.7%	4.1%	13.4%	8.7%
Luxembourg	509	17.9%	27.7%	49.3%	4.5%	3.1%	5.9%	15.1%
Malta	500	22.2%	28.2%	56.6%	5.0%	2.8%	4.8%	18.4%
Netherlands	500	24.2%	15.6%	75.4%	2.6%	2.6%	8.8%	7.6%
Poland	500	25.6%	48.6%	54.2%	5.0%	3.8%	15.0%	7.2%
Portugal	500	19.6%	30.0%	46.8%	3.4%	3.0%	6.0%	6.8%
Romania	502	36.1%	40.2%	60.0%	5.6%	9.4%	13.1%	19.1%
Slovakia	518	19.9%	36.7%	46.5%	5.2%	1.9%	16.4%	10.2%
Slovenia	500	22.2%	20.2%	41.8%	9.6%	8.8%	12.8%	42.2%
Spain	500	22.8%	37.8%	36.0%	2.6%	3.4%	9.8%	6.0%
Sweden	505	17.0%	35.6%	56.2%	2.2%	4.2%	15.8%	18.0%
United Kingdom	500	26.2%	22.8%	55.8%	6.4%	7.4%	9.0%	8.6%
Total	13573	23.2%	33.2%	50.3%	5.0%	4.9%	11.8%	14.4%

Table 7: Shipment options offered split by country of tester, base n=13,573 offers

75% of the offers provided no information on whether the article was insured or on whether such insurance was offered, for example against damages or against non-delivery.³² 20% of the offers would have been insured automatically and for 3% of offers insurance was offered but charged separately. 2% of offers indicated explicitly that delivery could not be insured (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Possibility of insurance of the product delivered



Note: Base n=13,573 offers

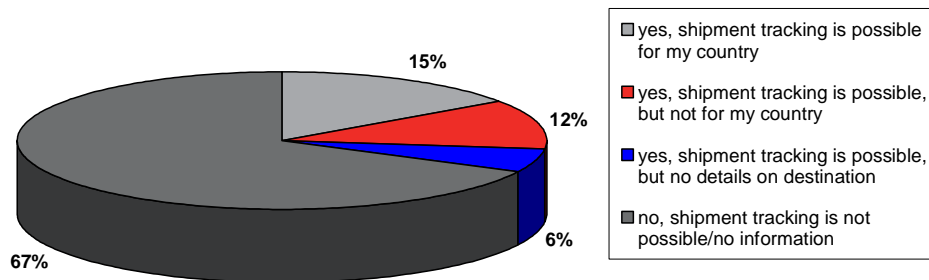
Cross-border offers* were insured automatically slightly more often than domestic offers* (21% versus 14%).

Shipment/order tracking was possible for 33% of offers.³³ Shipment tracking was not always possible to the consumer's country. Shipment tracking was possible for the consumer's country for 15% of offers (Figure 23).

³² The results refer to the question "Is the shipment of the article insured, or is such insurance offered (e.g. against damages or against non-delivery)?" Answering options were "article is insured automatically", "insurance is offered but charged separately", "article cannot be insured", "the site does not provide any information on this".

³³ The respective question was "Is shipment/order tracking (automatic delivery information) possible?" Answering options were "yes, shipment tracking is possible for my country", "yes, shipment tracking is possible but not for my country", "yes, shipment tracking is possible, but no details on destination covered", "no, shipment tracking is not possible/no information".

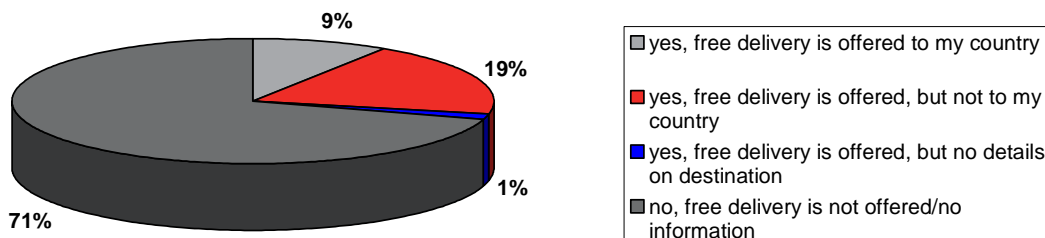
Figure 23: Possibility of shipment/order tracking



Note: Base n=13,573 offers

Shops offered free delivery for 29% of offers, but not always to the consumer's country.³⁴ Free delivery was offered to the consumer's country for 9% of offers in general (Figure 24). **Free delivery was more often indicated in offers of domestic* shops (29%) than in offers of cross-border* shops (5%).**

Figure 24: Frequencies of free delivery



Note: Base n=13,573 offers

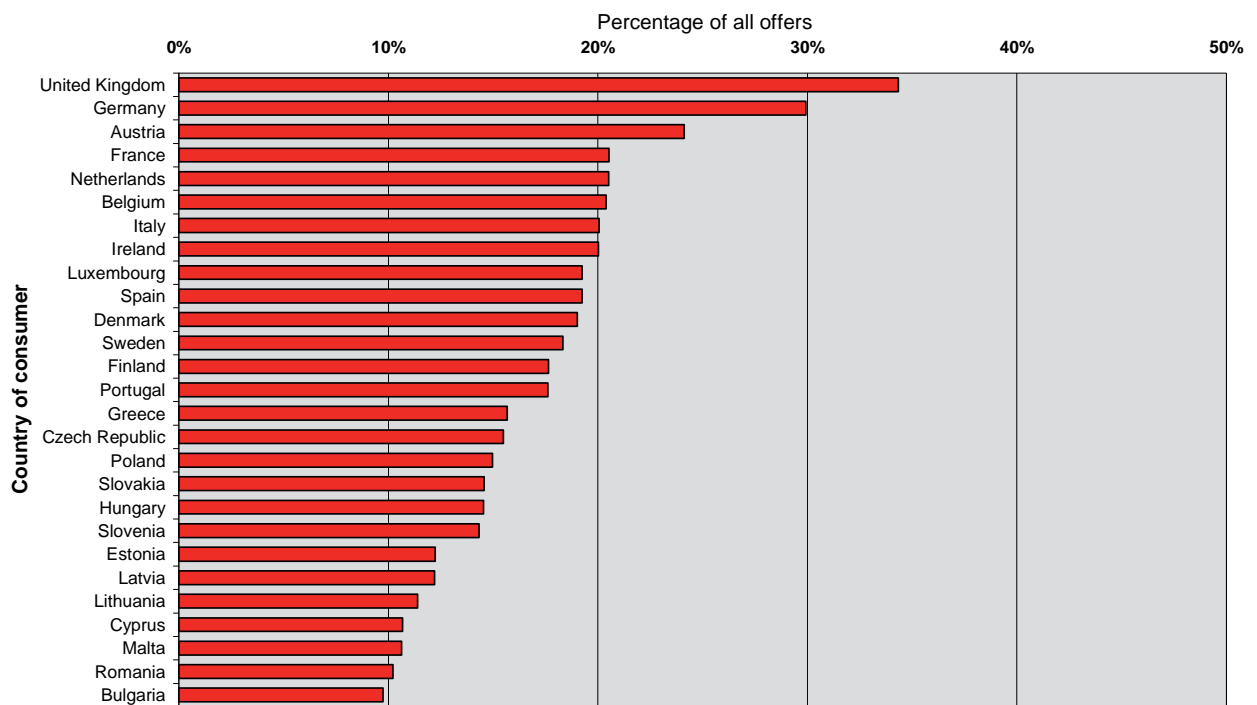
Consumers searched the websites for information on the specific EU countries mentioned as eligible for delivery for a particular product, as indicated in the websites' shipment policy and terms and conditions.³⁵ For 6% of all the offers, consumers found that EU delivery would be possible but that individual countries

³⁴ The respective question was "Does the shop offer free delivery for this product?" Answering options were "yes, free delivery is offered for my country", "yes, free delivery is offered but not for my country", "yes, free delivery is offered, but no details on destination covered", "no, free delivery is not offered/no information".

³⁵ The results refer to the question "To which EU countries can the product be delivered?". These results were derived from information consumers found on the websites (shipment policy and terms and conditions). As this information is sometimes incomplete or ambiguous, consumers were also asked in a separate question to actually indicate their country/address in the relevant fields. See results in section 5.1.1 above.

were not mentioned on the website. For 2% of the offers, they found no information on the general shipment policy of the shop. **For more than 30% of all the offers, shops mentioned Germany and the UK as countries to which delivery was possible. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta, and Romania were named in only 10% of the offers (Figure 25).**

Figure 25: Countries to which delivery is possible



Note: Base: MIN n=1,324 offers; MAX n=4,661 offers. Multiple answers possible.

A quarter of all the offers did not indicate a delivery time.³⁶ The delivery time varied considerably between *domestic** offers and *cross-border** offers. **The delivery time indicated for *domestic** offers was on average four days, compared to seven days for *cross-border** offers.**

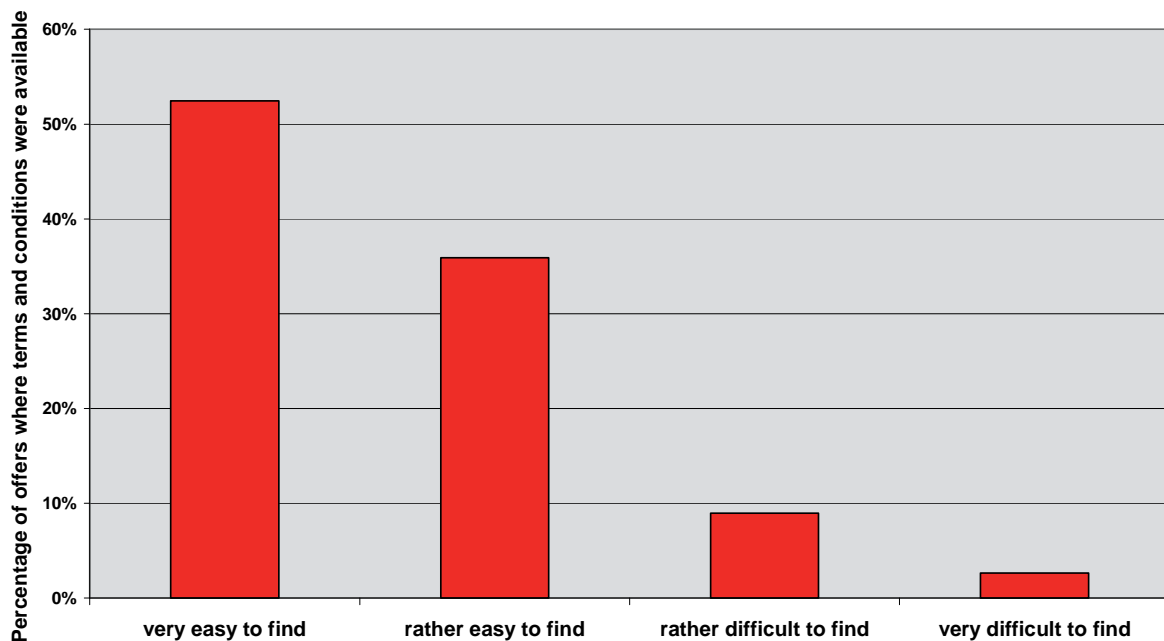
³⁶ The results refer to the question "What is the delivery time to your country?"

5.8. Provision of information on consumer rights

5.8.1. Accessibility and comprehensibility of the terms and conditions

Overall, it was either “very easy” or “rather easy” to find the terms and conditions on the shops’ websites. In more than half of all the offers, consumers reported that it was very easy to find the terms and conditions (Figure 26).³⁷

Figure 26: Difficulty/ease of finding the terms and conditions

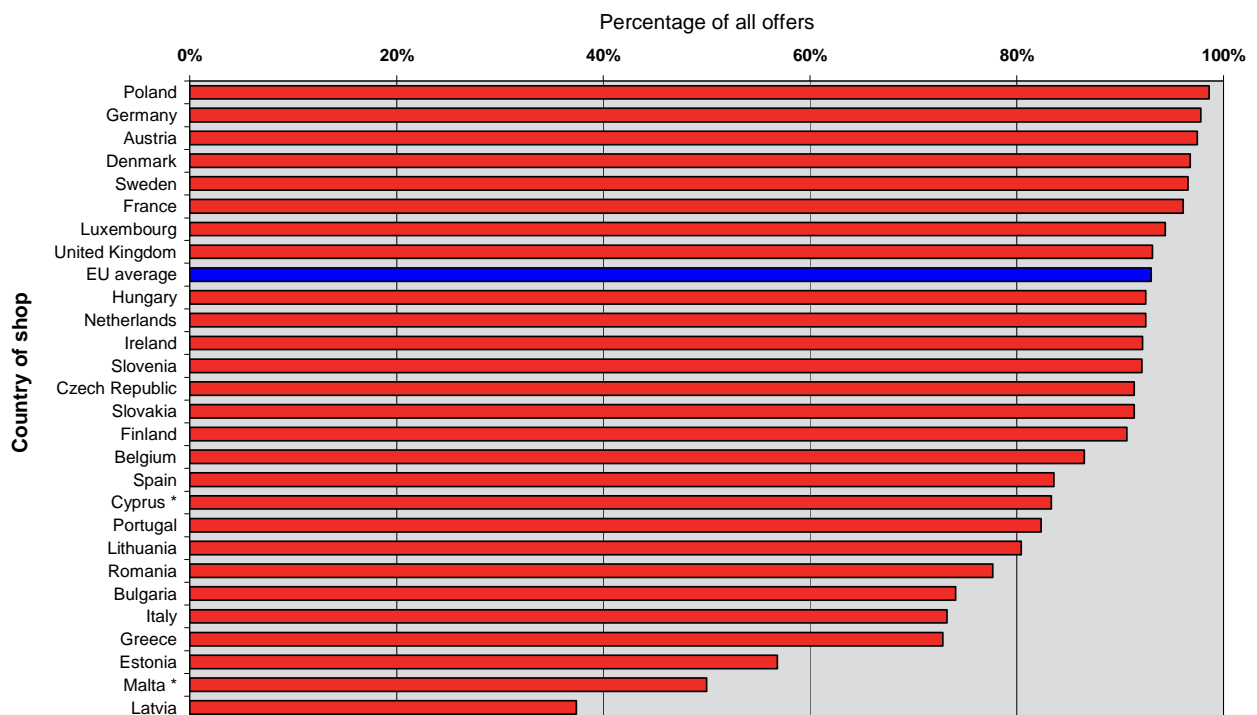


Note: Base n=12,628 offers

In 93% of all the offers, the consumers found the terms and conditions on the home page of the online shop. However, the availability of terms and conditions differed significantly between the offers from shops with different country locations. Nearly all the **offers from shops in Poland (99%) and Germany (98%) displayed terms and conditions on their website.** Offers from shops located in Latvia (37%) and Estonia (57%), more rarely provided consumers with the terms and conditions (EU average 93%). Terms and conditions were less often available in offers from shops located in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Romania than average. Three-quarters of the offers from shops in these countries provided consumers with terms and conditions (EU average 93%, Figure 27).

³⁷ Question: “Is it easy to find the terms and conditions on the website?”, ranging from 1=“very easy” to 4=“very hard to find”.

Figure 27: Availability of terms and conditions split by country (location of the shop)



Note: Base (country of shop) MIN n=4 offers; MAX n=4,527 offers; * = country below sample size of n=35

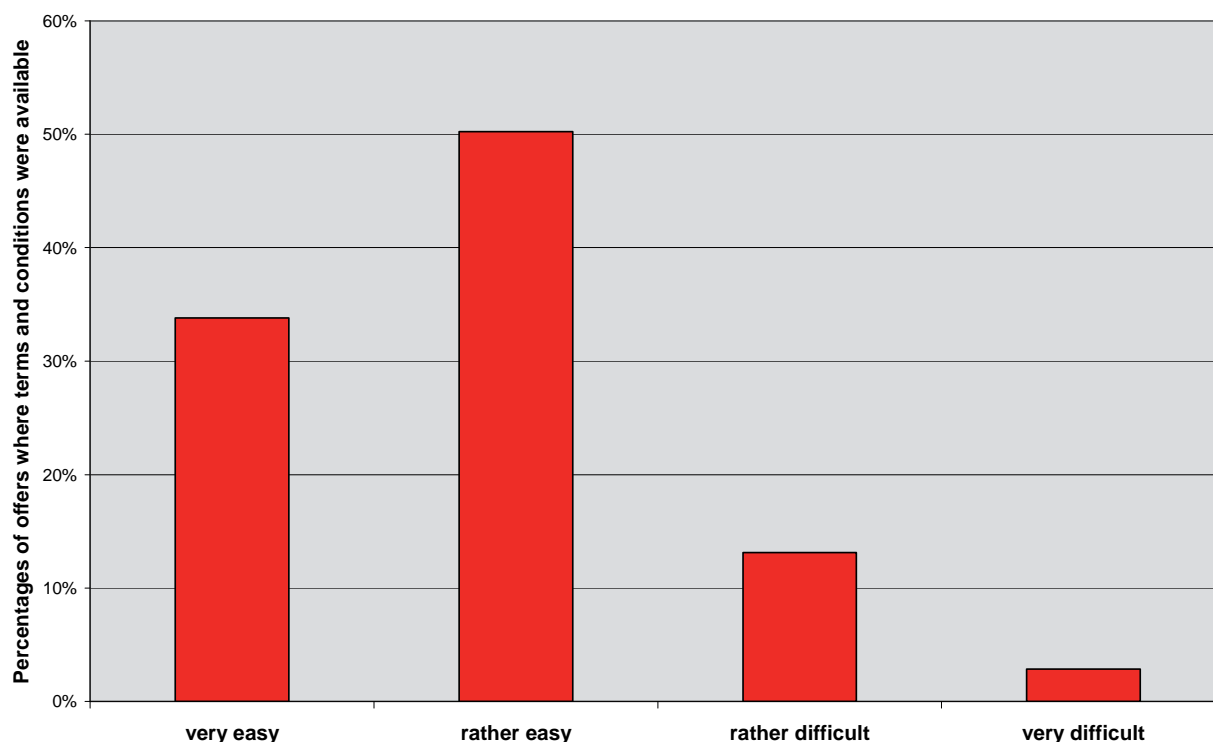
For a high percentage of cross-border* offers, the terms and conditions were provided in the same language as the rest of the website, but not always (87% of all the cross-border* offers).³⁸

In general, the consumers found the terms and conditions easy to understand.³⁹ In about one-third of all the offers, the consumers found it very easy to understand the terms and conditions, and in half of all the offers rather easy (Figure 28).

³⁸ The respective question was "Are the terms and conditions available in the same language you conducted your test?" Answering options were yes–no.

³⁹ Question: "Are the terms and conditions easy to understand?", ranging from 1="very easy" to 4="very hard to find".

Figure 28: Difficulty/ease of understanding the terms and conditions



Note: Base n=12,695 offers

5.8.2. General contractual information

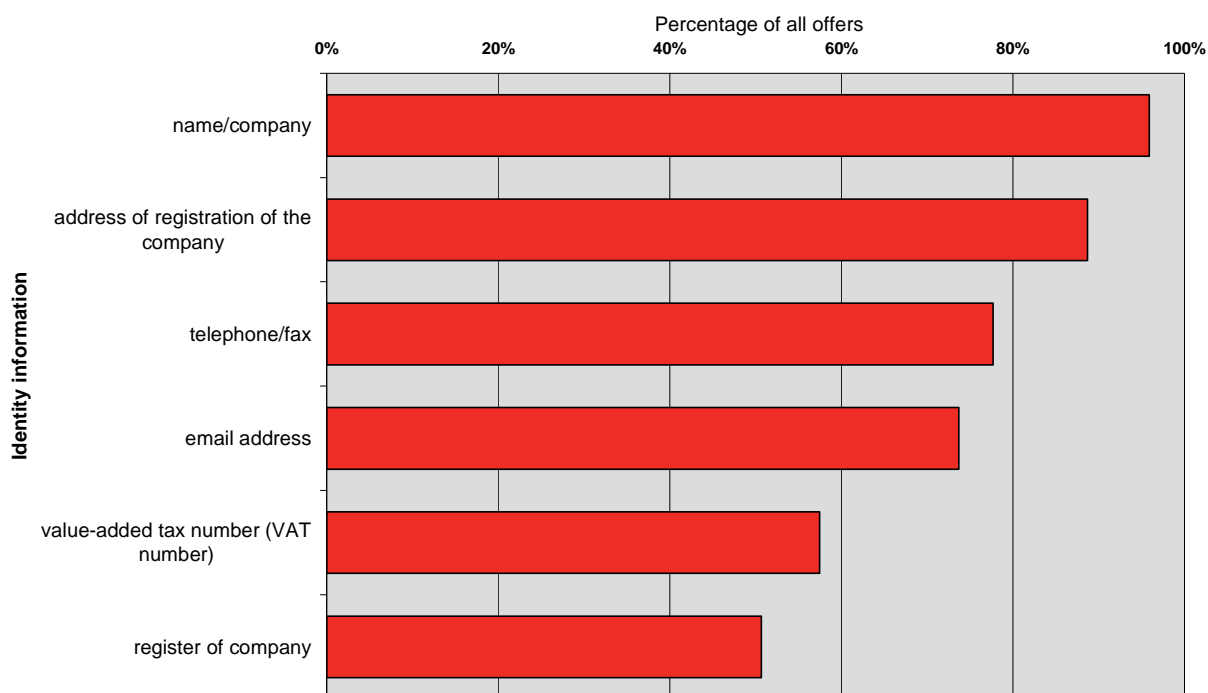
In 87% of all the offers, the consumers found information on the protection and handling of personal data. In 13% of all the offers, the websites did not give this information⁴⁰.

It is important that consumers know who they are dealing with if they experience a problem with their order. **Nearly all the online shops presented information on their identity in a legal notice or elsewhere on the website.**⁴¹ Consumers found information on the shop's identity in 98% of offers. Most frequently, the company indicated a name and address in the **legal notice** (96% and 89% of all the offers), followed by a telephone and fax number, as well as an e-mail address (around 75%). About half of the offers indicated a VAT number and a company register. 10% of the offers gave additional information, such as bank details or the name of the CEO, manager, or owner, etc. (Figure 29).

⁴⁰ The results refer to the question "Does the website contain any information on the protection and handling of your personal data?" Answering options: yes–no.

⁴¹ The results refer to the question "Does the website show the identity of the online shop/trader?" Answering options yes–no.

Figure 29: Information on the shop's identity



Note: Base n=13,573 offers. Multiple answers possible.

Concerning the **law applicable to the sales contract**, in **one-quarter of the offers it was not possible to find this particular information on the online shops' websites.**⁴²

In about two-thirds (66%) of all offers, consumers stated it was clear at which point the sales contract became legally binding.⁴³ 14% did not know when the contract became legally binding as the information provided was not clear or was contradictory in these cases. **In 20% of all offers, consumers found no information at all about the point at which the contract became binding.**

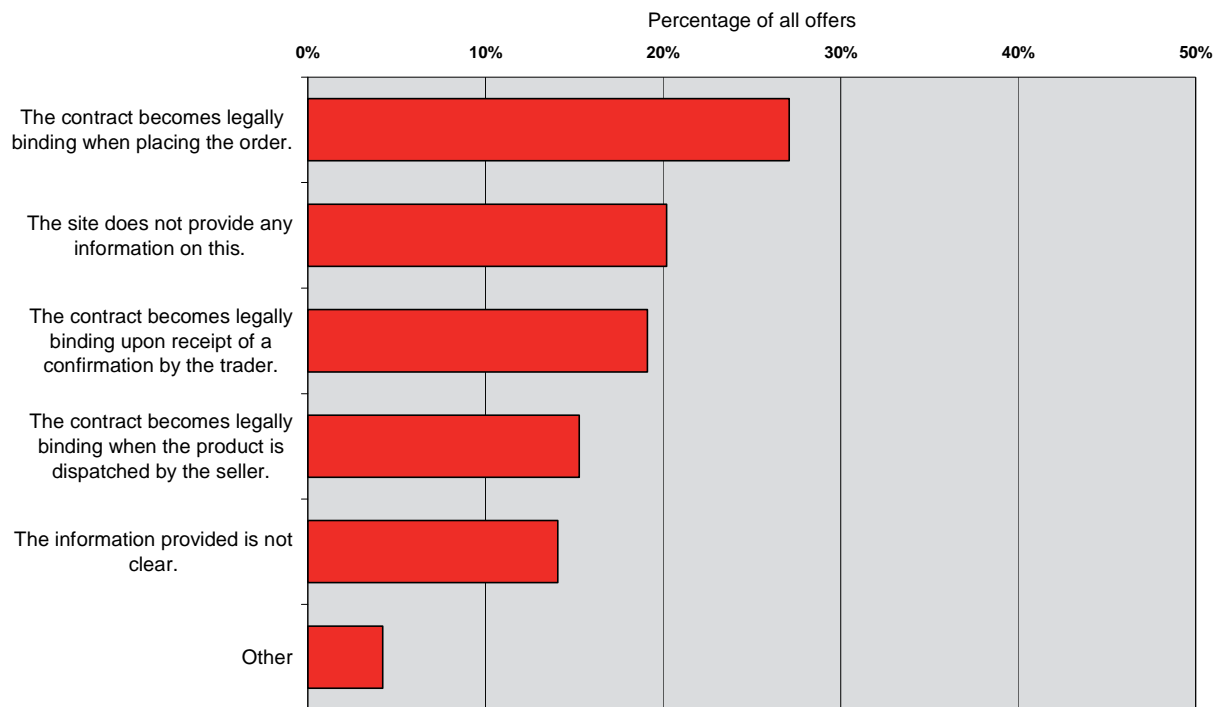
In more than one-quarter of the offers, the contract became legally binding when placing the order, in 19% of the offers upon receipt of confirmation by the trader, and in 15% when the product was dispatched by the seller. In 4% of the offers, customers indicated other points in the ordering process. Within this open category, consumers

⁴² The respective question was "Does the website contain any information on the law of the country applicable to the sales contract?" Answering options: "yes, law of country...", "no information found".

⁴³ The results refer to the question "Is there clear information when the sales contract becomes legally binding?" Answering options: yes-no.

mentioned “after confirmation or dispatch” most often (around a quarter of all the answers in the open field), followed by “after payment/acceptance of payment” and “after receipt of the product” (about 20%, Figure 30).

Figure 30: Information on the point the sales contract becomes legally binding



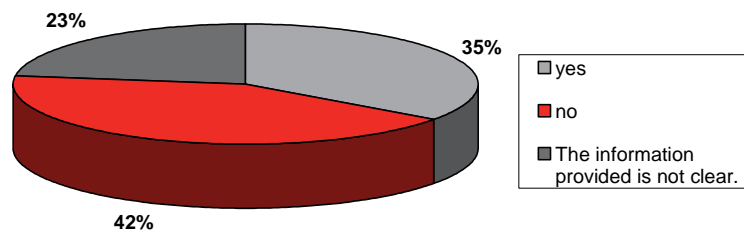
Note: Base n=13,573 offers

5.8.3. Commercial guarantee

For more than one-third of all the offers, online shops offered a **commercial guarantee*** (35% of offers).⁴⁴ Shops offered no **commercial guarantee*** for 42% of offers. For 23% of offers, the information provided was unclear and consumers couldn't tell whether it referred to a commercial guarantee or not (Figure 31).

⁴⁴ The results refer to the question “Does the online shop/trader or the manufacturer offer a guarantee for that specific product (a commercial guarantee)?” Answering options were “yes”, “no”, and “the information provided is not clear. I can't tell whether this is a commercial guarantee or not”.

Figure 31: Information on commercial guarantee

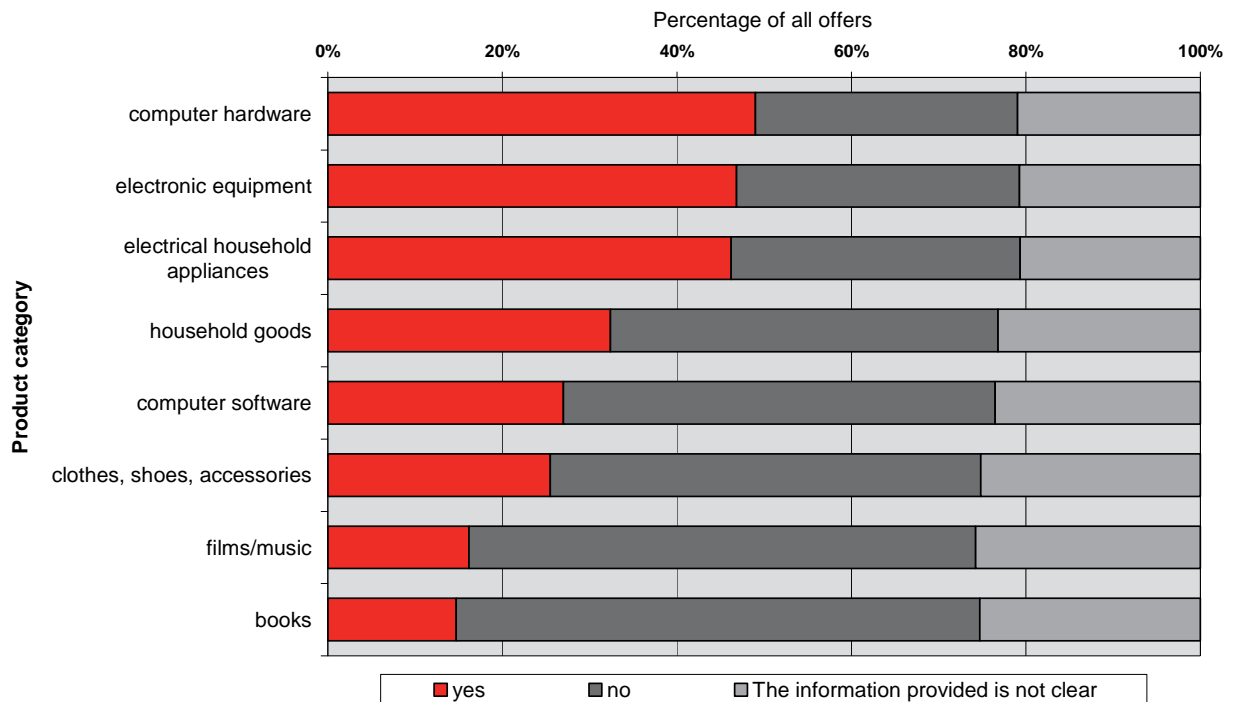


Note: Percentages refer to all offers, base n=13,573 offers

The **country of the shops*** affected the offer of a **commercial guarantee***. **Slovenian and Belgium shops offered a commercial guarantee* more often** than average (70% and 52% of offers in shops with a location in Slovenia and Belgium compared with 35%, the EU average). **Shops located in Romania and in the Netherlands provided this guarantee less often** than average (around a quarter of offers in shops with the respective location compared with 35%, the EU average). Consumers indicated comparatively often that it was not clear if the guarantee offered was a commercial or a legal guarantee when testing shops with a location in Bulgaria and Ireland (41% of offers in Bulgarian and 33% of offers in Irish shops compared with 23%, the EU average).

Online shops offered a **commercial guarantee*** for products belonging to the categories “computer hardware”, “electronic equipment”, and “electrical household appliances” more often than average. In nearly half of the cases, they offered a **commercial guarantee*** for these products. For products of the categories “films/music” and “books”, consumers found that a **commercial guarantee*** was offered only in 15% of the cases (35%, the EU average, Figure 32).

Figure 32: Information on commercial guarantee split by product category

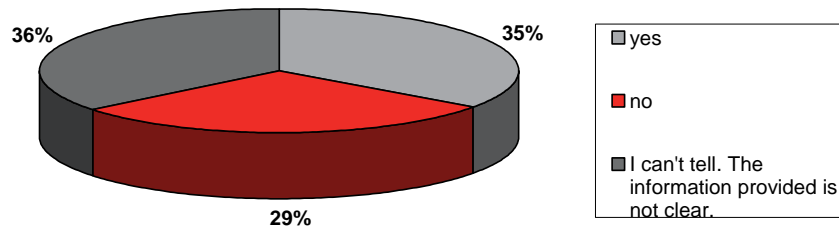


Note: Base (product category) MIN n=740 offers; MAX n=2,829 offers

In 35% of all the offers where a **commercial guarantee*** was indicated, the websites clearly stated that the **commercial guarantee*** would not affect the **consumer's legal rights***.⁴⁵ 29% of offers provided no such information about the **legal rights***. 36% of offers provided unclear information and consumers could not tell if their legal rights would actually be affected by the **commercial guarantee*** or not (Figure 33). It is important that traders make clear that the consumer's legal rights are not affected by the commercial guarantee since the latter may sometimes not offer the same advantages that the consumer would otherwise enjoy under the 24 months legal guarantee period.

⁴⁵ The respective question was "Does the information provided on the commercial guarantee also make clear that the consumer's legal rights are not affected by the commercial guarantee?" Answering options: "yes", "no", "I can't tell. The information provided is not clear".

Figure 33: Information that legal rights are not affected by the commercial guarantee



Note: Percentage of offers where a commercial guarantee is indicated, base n=4,727 offers

Across all the offers, shops offered an **average commercial guarantee* period of 22 months**.⁴⁶ In about three-quarters of all the offers, the offered guarantee period ranged **between 12 and 36 months**.

The kind of products offered affects the guarantee period. Consumers found the shortest guarantee period in the category “computer software” (20 months on average), and the longest in the category “electrical household appliances” (24 months on average). Shops provided a *commercial guarantee** of 20 months on average for “computer software”. For “electrical household appliances”, “books”, “films/music”, and “clothes, shoes, accessories” the guarantee period was 24 months on average.

Shops with different country locations* provided different commercial guarantee* periods. Online shops located in France, Hungary, Ireland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom usually offered a shorter guarantee period than average (more than 19 months compared with the EU average of 22 months). Shops located in Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Slovakia offered the longest guarantee periods (more than 25 months on average).

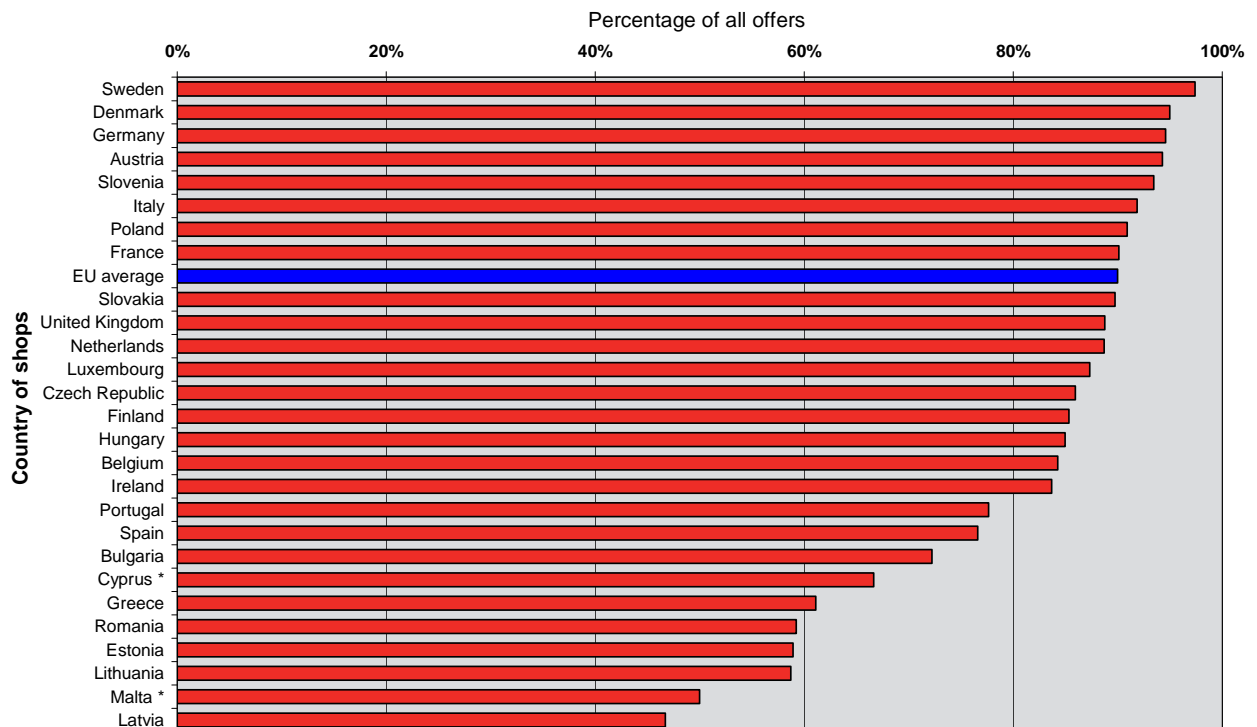
⁴⁶ The respective question was “How long is the guarantee period for the product?”

5.8.4. Withdrawal

90% of offers provided information on the right of withdrawal.⁴⁷

The *country of the shop** had an impact on the provision of this information. **In Baltic online shops, consumers found this information less often than on average as well as for offers from shops located in Portugal, Spain, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania. More than 94% of the offers found on Austrian, Danish, German, and Swedish shops specified the right of withdrawal** (Figure 34).

Figure 34: Information on right of withdrawal



Note: Base (country of shops) MIN n=4 offers; MAX n=4,614 offers; * = country locations below sample size of n=35

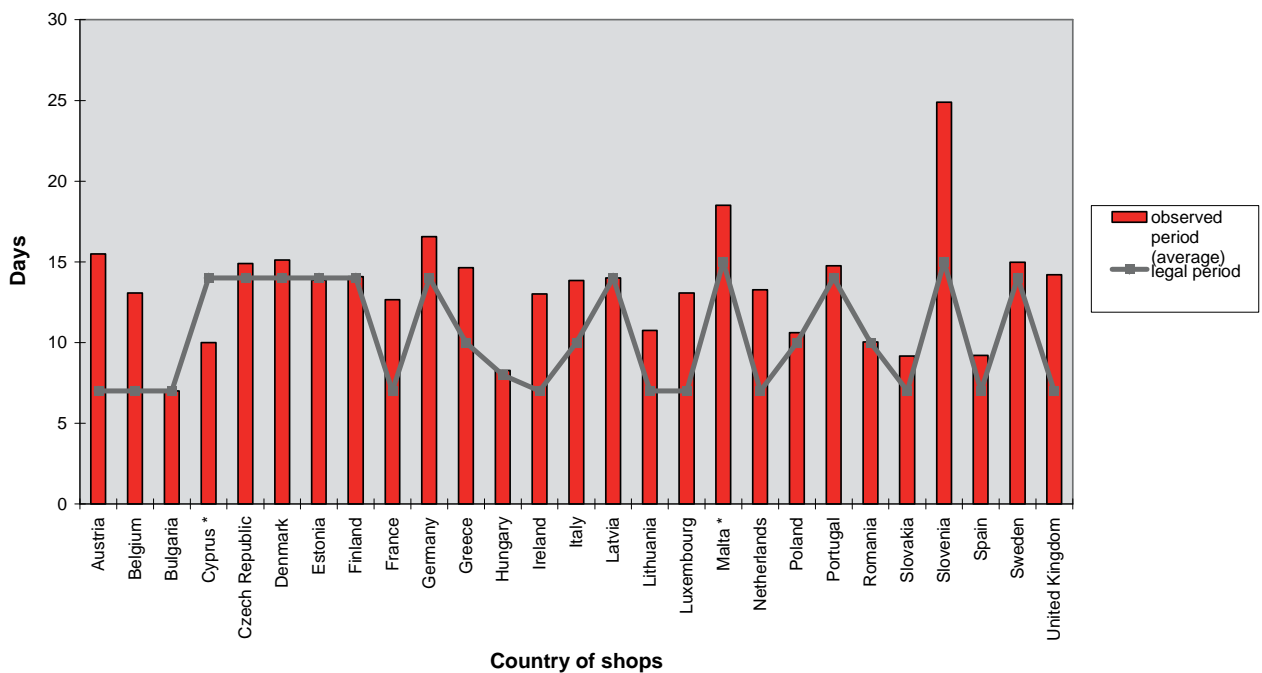
The withdrawal periods differed with respect to the *country of the shops**.⁴⁸ It should also be noted that the length of the withdrawal period is very different depending on the national legislation. **For all countries, the average period observed on the websites was equal or longer than the period defined in the national**

⁴⁷ Respective question „Is there any information on the right of withdrawal?“ Answering options yes-no

⁴⁸ The respective question was “How many days is the right of withdrawal effective?”

legislation.⁴⁹ Results for Cyprus and Malta may not be reliable given the small number of offers found in shops from these countries. In offers from Slovenian shops, the average withdrawal period was as long as 25 days, due to the fact that many products had a withdrawal period of 45 days (Figure 35).

Figure 35: Right of withdrawal: average length of the period observed compared to national legal periods



Note: Percentage of offers where rights of withdrawal are indicated; base (country location of shop) n=13,573 offers, * = country locations below sample size of n=35

90% of offers specified the starting point of the withdrawal period.⁵⁰

In nearly two-thirds of the offers, the information explained how consumers would be refunded in case they decided to return the product.⁵¹

Shops located in Bulgaria, Latvia, and Lithuania were reluctant to provide information on the process of refunding (the information was found in fewer than 31% of offers from shops in these countries). Offers from Slovenian (88%) and Italian shops (85%)

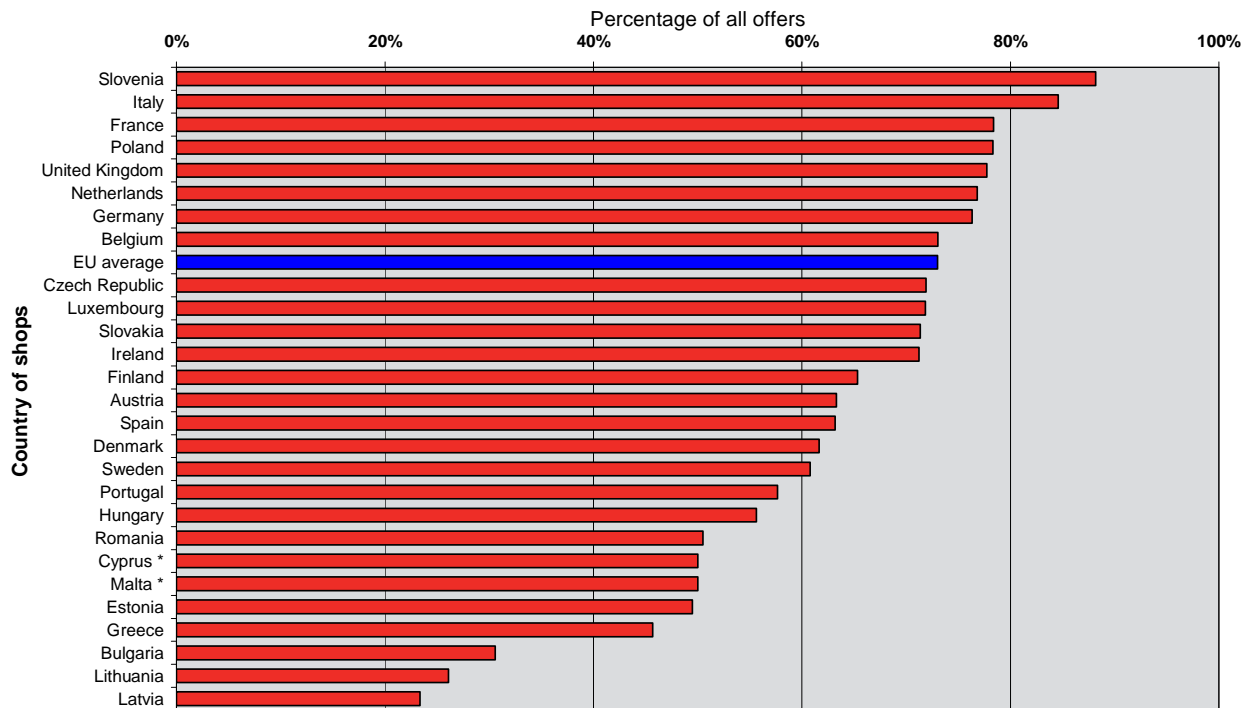
⁴⁹ National legal periods based on: "EU Consumer Law Compendium: a Comparative Analysis", 2008, accessible at: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/rights/cons_acquis_en.htm#comp See pp. 555-556.

⁵⁰ The results refer to the question: "Does the information provided on the right of withdrawal indicate when the withdrawal period starts (e.g. the right of withdrawal starts when the consumer receives the good)?" Answering options: yes–no.

⁵¹ The respective question was "In case the consumer decides to return the product, does the website explain how he/she will be refunded?" Answering options: yes–no.

provided information on refunding in most cases (88% of offers in Slovenian shops and 85% of offers in Italian shops; Figure 36).

Figure 36: Information on refunding split by country of shops

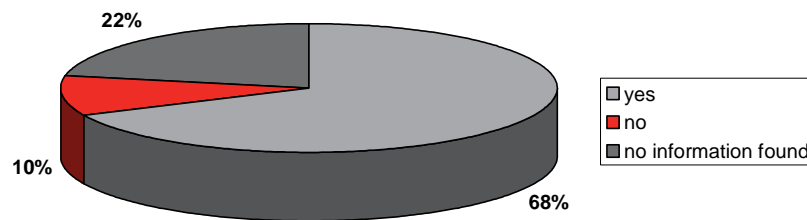


Note: Base (country of shops) MIN n=4 offers; MAX n=4,614 offers; * = country locations below sample size of n=35

Special conditions imposed by traders may limit consumers' ability to exercise their right of withdrawal. **68% of the offers were subject to special conditions regarding the right of withdrawal, for example returning the article unsealed.**⁵² In 22% of offers the consumers found no information on whether there were special conditions for returning the product. In 10% the article was not subject to special conditions (Figure 37).

⁵² The results refer to the question "Is the article subject to special conditions regarding the right of withdrawal?" Answering options: "yes", "no", "no information found". "Computer software" and "films/music" were excluded from this analysis because the applicable national law may provide an exemption to the right of withdrawal for audio or video recordings or computer software which were unsealed by the consumer.

Figure 37: Article subject to special conditions regarding the right of withdrawal



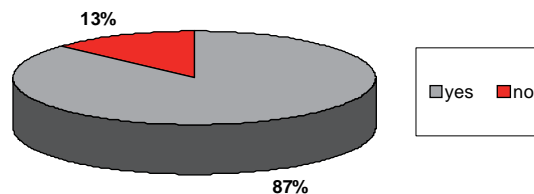
Note: Base (product category without "films/music" and "computer software"): n=11,052 offers

5.8.5. Customer support

In total, for 91% of the offers, consumers found information on customer support.⁵³

Customer support was available in the consumer's language for 87% of **cross-border* offers** whereas this was always the case for domestic offers (Figure 38).⁵⁴

Figure 38: Customer support provided in the language of the offers



Note: Percentage of cross-border offers when customer support is indicated; Base n=9,977 cross-border offers

Consumers noted differences between countries regarding customer support (for example a free hotline for domestic calls, but subject to charge for calls from abroad) for only 8% of offers.⁵⁵

The communication channel most widely used for contacting the online shops was via email (81%), followed by mail/post (62%).⁵⁶ For half the offers, shops

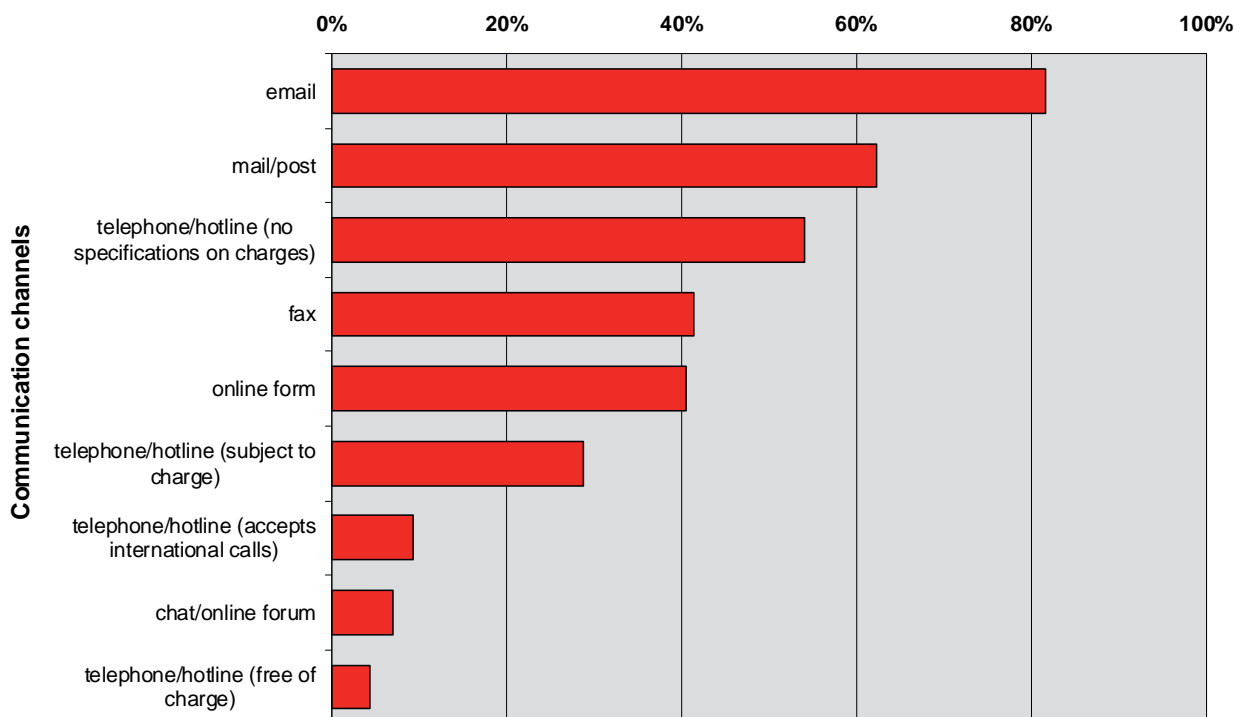
⁵³ The results refer to the question "Does the website contain any information on customer support?" Answering options: yes–no.

⁵⁴ The respective question was "Is customer support provided in the same language you conducted your test?" Answering options: yes–no.

⁵⁵ The respective question was "Are there any differences between countries regarding customer support (e.g. free hotline for domestic calls, subject to charge for calls from abroad)?" Answering options: "yes", "no", "no information found".

offered a telephone hotline, but made no specifications on charges. For 41% of all offers, shops could be contacted via an online form or by fax. For one-third of offers, shops provided a telephone hotline that was clearly subject to charges. Other communication channels used to contact the online shops were a telephone hotline that accepted international calls (9% of all offers), a chat/online forum (7%), and a free telephone hotline (4%). Other communication channels were mentioned only infrequently (fewer than 3% of offers): e.g. visiting the office, Internet-assisted communication (e.g. Skype, ICQ, MSN, Yahoo), or call-back services. In only 1% of all the cases, there was no possibility to contact the online shop (see Figure 39).

Figure 39: Communication channels for customer support



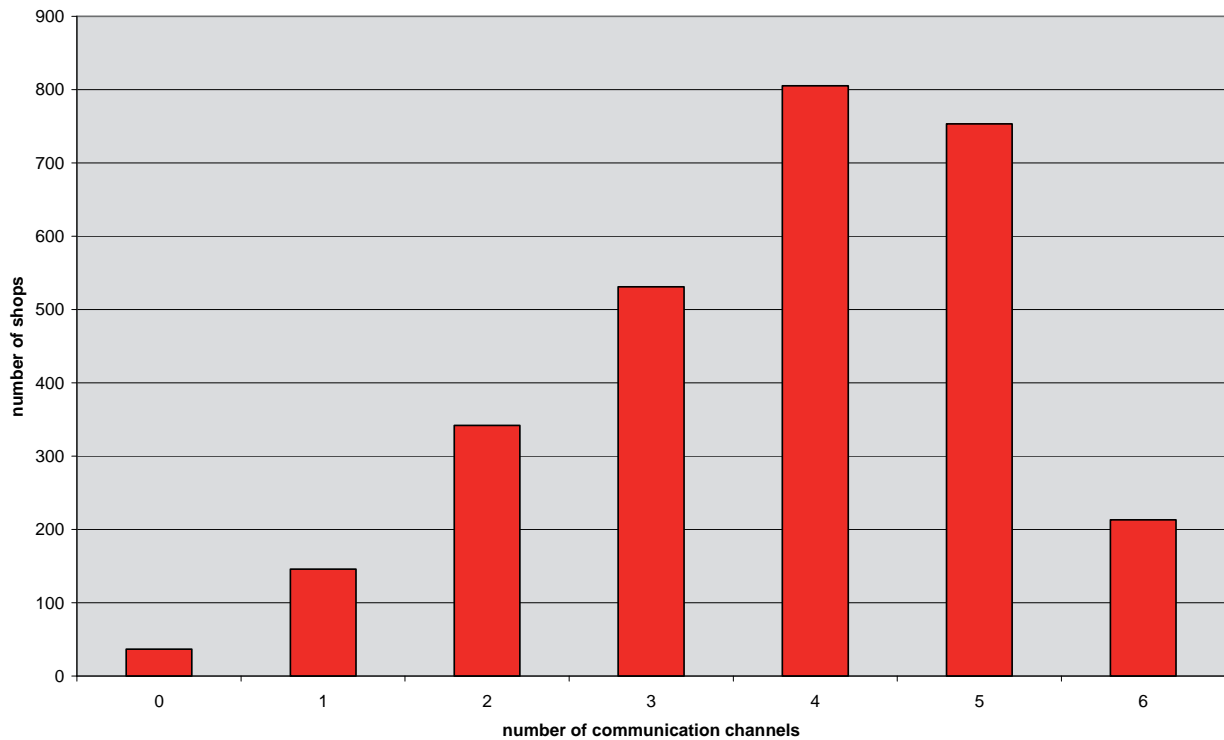
Note: Base n=13,573 offers. Multiple answers possible.

About 5% of the shops provided only one communication channel (predominantly email) and 8% offered all the channels covered in the questionnaire (mail,

⁵⁶ The results refer to the question "Which communication channels can you technically use to contact the online shop/trader?" Answering options were "mail/post", "online forum/chat", "email", "online form", "telephone/hotline (subject to charge)", "telephone/hotline (free of charge)", "telephone/hotline (no specifications on charges)", "telephone/hotline (accepts international calls)", "fax", "other => please specify", and "no possibility to contact online shop/trader". Multiple answers possible.

chat/online, email, online form, telephone, fax). **Most shops provided 4 or 5 communication channels** (Figure 40).

Figure 40: Number of communication channels provided by shops



Note: Base n=13,573 offers

5.8.6. Pre-ticked boxes

Pre-ticked boxes* were presented to consumers during the ordering process for 36% of all offers.⁵⁷

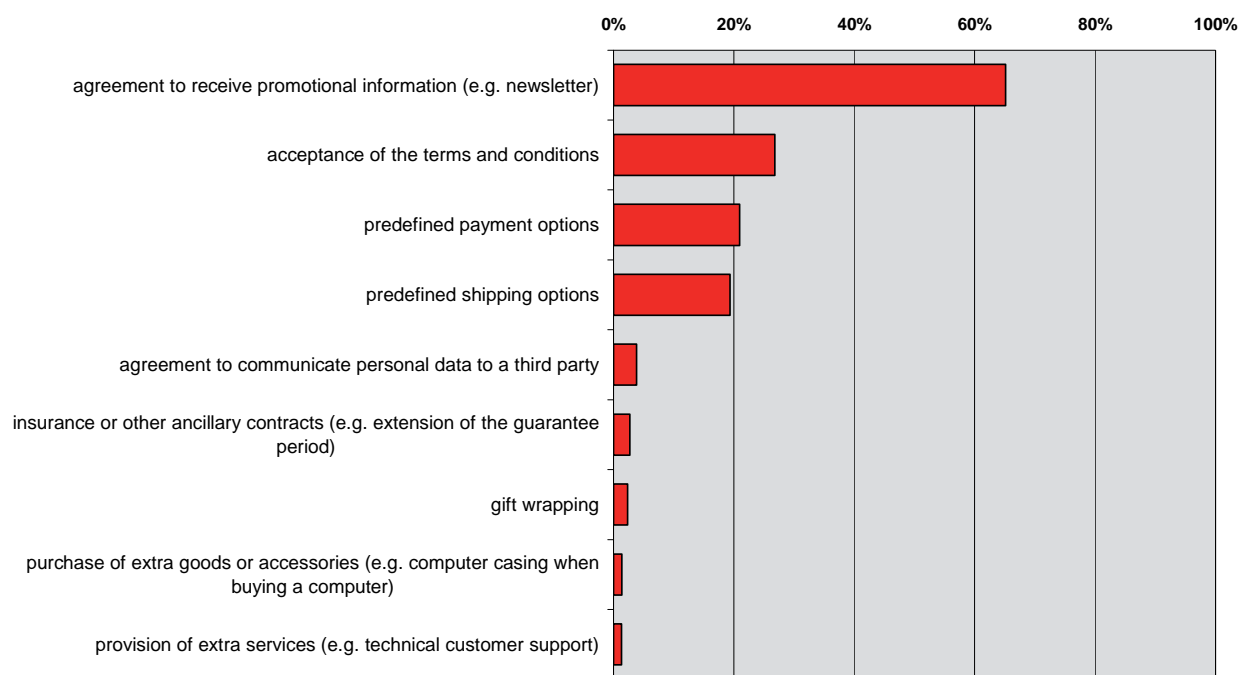
Pre-ticked boxes* served different purposes, but **most often they concerned the agreement to receive promotional information**, for example a newsletter (62% of offers).⁵⁸ In one-quarter of the offers, acceptance of the terms and conditions was pre-ticked. In one-fifth, payment options were pre-ticked (when such a pre-ticked

⁵⁷ The respective question was "In the course of the ordering process, have you come across any pre-defined options in the form of pre-ticked boxes?" Answering options: yes-no.

⁵⁸ The respective question was "What is the purpose of the pre-ticked boxes?" Answering options were "acceptance of the terms and conditions", "agreement to receive promotional information (e.g. newsletter)", "agreement to communicate personal data to a third party", "gift wrapping", "insurance or other ancillary contracts (e.g. extension of the guarantee period)", "provision of extra services (e.g. technical customer support)", "purchase of extra goods or accessories (e.g. computer casing when buying a computer)", "predefined payment options, if yes please specify the cheapest option, most expensive option, or don't know if cheapest or most expensive", "predefined shipping options, if yes please specify: cheapest option, most expensive option, or don't know if cheapest or most expensive option".

option was presented, consumers did not know if the cheapest or the most expensive payment option was pre-ticked for 59% of offers and, for 37% of offers, the shops offered consumers the cheapest option). 18% of pre-ticked offers concerned the shipment options (when such a pre-ticked option was presented, in about one-third of the offers it was not clear if the *pre-ticked box** offered a cheaper or a more expensive shipment possibility and, in more than half of the offers, consumers found that the cheapest shipment option was pre-ticked (Figure 41).

Figure 41: Purpose of the pre-ticked boxes



Note: Percentage of offers where the consumer found a pre-ticked box, base (multiple answers possible) MAX n=6,484 offers. Multiple answers possible.

6. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

6.1. Most significant differences between cross-border and domestic offers

- In general, important differences between *domestic** and *cross-border** offers were found. Some of the findings challenge popular assumptions about *e-commerce**, others are less surprising.
- The evaluation confirmed that consumers are likely to run into a series of obstacles when shopping *cross-border**, mainly because online shops refuse to serve the consumer's country. However, refusal to sell is usually not immediately apparent to the consumer. Paradoxically, *cross-border** offers were easy to find using search engines and price comparison websites.
- The evaluation also confirmed that *cross-border** payment and shipment is more cumbersome for consumers, compared to *domestic** shopping. From the consumer point of view, conditions vary dramatically from one country to the next. However, overall, most payment options are not readily available to consumers for *cross-border** transactions. *Cross-border** shipment potentially takes longer, costs more, and is often impossible to the specified destination.
- Despite these differences, consumers could save money by shopping *cross-border** quite often on average (all costs for their country included). In addition, for many countries, *cross-border** shopping represents the only alternative when products are not available in *domestic** shops. For example, consumers from Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain stand to gain a lot from *cross-border** shopping.
- Surprisingly, the practice of automatically redirecting customers to another website depending on the consumer's country was marginal. Online shops seem to have largely abandoned this practice.
- Concerning the provision of pre-contractual information to the consumer, the most notable differences were due to the provision of information in another language (translation of the terms and conditions, customer support in the consumer's language). Many websites are simply not available in several

languages. Currency conversion is not widespread, which makes it difficult to know what the actual price in the consumer's currency will be.

- Some best practices seem to have been largely adopted, such as providing information on the right of withdrawal (this is a fundamental legal obligation for distance sellers) although some country differences were observed. However, while consumers found the terms and conditions rather easy to understand, some points remain obscure, notably on *commercial guarantees**.

6.2. Lessons learned and problems encountered by the mystery shoppers

- Products and brands offered online differed enormously between the countries. It was therefore challenging to select 100 products in 8 product categories that were well represented in the online offers of each country.
- The number of online shops available differed between the countries. Small countries like Malta and Cyprus showed a lower range of *domestic** offers in comparison with countries like Sweden and the United Kingdom.
- *E-commerce** is a fast-moving industry. Less than four months elapsed between the first and second steps of the research, yet 27% of the offers found in the first step were no longer available by the time they were supposed to be tested.
- The structure of the online shops also differed enormously, especially since not all steps of the ordering process follow the same sequence. To overcome this challenge, a modular questionnaire was designed.
- In their feedback, the mystery shoppers indicated the following technical problems facing consumers. The order process could not be completed successfully, because the respective country is not supplied. Registration failed (e.g. the postal code was not accepted), because the respective country is not supplied. It was therefore impossible to complete the order process.
- The website opened too slowly for both registration and ordering (possibly due to server problems of the shop).

- Products could not be placed in the shopping cart. The error message displayed "cookies not accepted" but despite switching to correct browser settings, the order could not be completed.
- The complete forwarding charges for shipment abroad are only issued upon enquiry.
- Despite the provider's information of having different language settings on the shop's site, information relevant to the order process was only partly translated. For instance, information on parts of the transaction process was only available in the original language. This also applied to parts of the general terms and conditions.
- The general terms and conditions were phrased very summarily so that important information (conclusion of the contract, *right of withdrawal**, etc.) was missing or could not be found. In some instances, there were no general terms and conditions, only "frequently asked questions" (FAQs).
- Providing credit card details would have concluded the transaction or information about whether the credit card was accepted was only available after confirming the order. Therefore, it was impossible to say whether this payment option was available.
- In order to successfully complete the ordering process, the credit card number plus the three-digit security number needed to be indicated. For unknown reasons, the credit card was not authorized by the system.

7. APPENDIX

7.1. Glossary

Expression/Term	Definition
Domestic (domestic e-commerce)	A purchase or transaction when both the trader and the consumer have the same country of residence.
Commercial guarantee	The seller or manufacturer may offer a guarantee (commercial guarantee) that the product will function properly for a specific period of time. If this is the case, traders are required by the applicable national law to clearly state that the guarantee does not affect the rights of the consumer (see "consumers' legal rights").
Consumers' legal rights concerning the guarantee	Under the applicable national law, a consumer who bought a faulty product is always entitled to have it repaired or replaced (in some instances, the consumer may require an appropriate reduction of the price or have the contract rescinded). This applies for up to two years. Sometimes the consumer's legal rights are referred to as the "legal" guarantee.
Country of the consumer	The primary place of residence of the mystery shoppers, out of which they conducted the tests.
Cross-border (cross-border e-commerce)	A purchase or transaction where the trader is located in an EU member state different from the consumer's country of residence.

Expression/Term	Definition
E-commerce	Sale of goods over the Internet, offered on an Internet site (website) or an online marketplace*.
Country of shop	The location of the online shop according to the suffix* or the registration of the company (in case the suffix is “.com”, “.org”, “.net” etc.).
Marketplace	A third-party platform that hosts independent professional traders.
Mystery shopping	A market research tool used for measuring the quality of retail services. Mystery shoppers are normal customers attempting to purchase a product and subsequently providing detailed reports or feedback on their experience.
Pre-ticked boxes	Pre-defined options (obligatory or voluntary) that can be accepted during the ordering procedure. The customer must un-tick the boxes in case he/she disagrees.
Price comparison site	A website where it is possible to compare offers for a specific product from different online shops.
Redirection	The practice of automatically redirecting customers to another online shop or to the same shop but with a different country-specific suffix.

Expression/Term	Definition
Right of withdrawal	When purchasing a product from a website, the customer has the legal right to cancel the contract, without giving any reasons, within at least seven working days (the withdrawal period varies depending on the applicable national legislation). Sometimes the right of withdrawal is referred to as the “cooling-off period”, the right of “cancellation” or of “retraction”, “satisfied or reimbursed”, etc.
Suffix	Country domain suffix, the top-level country domain name at the end of the Internet address, for example “.de” (Germany).
Illustration of payment options	
Payment of invoice by money transfer prior to delivery	The customer receives an invoice or the bank details of the online shop and must transfer the money in order to receive the product.
Payment of invoice after delivery of product	The customer receives an invoice in paper form with the delivery of the product or after that and has to transfer the money (it is not important if it is online or not).
Direct debit: payment with indication of bank details	Direct debit is the direct/automatic transfer of money through the customer's bank account. On the website of the online shop, the customer is asked to fill in the required information (bank account, etc.) in the foreseen online form.

Expression/Term	Definition
E-banking/online banking/Internet banking	The customer has the option to be redirected to his/her bank and to conduct the financial transaction on the website operated by his/her virtual bank or credit union.
Cash on delivery or pick-up in store	The customer pays when receiving the product or when picking it up from a shop or location near by.
PayPal or similar systems	PayPal is an e-commerce business allowing payments and money transfers to be made through the Internet. A PayPal account can be funded with an electronic debit from a bank account or by a credit card.

7.2. Shopping List

Category	Product
Books (5 products)	Reference book – English version
	Novel – English language
	Novel – French language
	Novel – Spanish language
	Audio book – English version
Films/music (5 products)	CD – pop music
	CD – classical music
	DVD - film
	DVD - TV series
	CD - world music
Household goods (13 products)	Toy doll
	Baby equipment
	Board game – children
	Board game – adults
	Sports – bicycle
	Sports – football
	Sports – inline skates
	Sports – bike helmet
	Sports – hiking sticks
	Cookware (brand)
	Cutlery 30-piece
	Console steering wheel
	Game console
Computer software (10 products)	Software
	Software
	Software
	PC game action
	PC game role-playing
	PC game strategy
	Console game action
	Console game role-playing
	Console game adventure
	Console game strategy

Category	Product
Computer hardware (12 products)	XPS 625
	Screen 18 inch
	Screen 20 inch
	Screen 24 inch
	Notebook 15 inch
	Notebook 17 inch
	Notebook 18 inch
	Notebook 12 inch
	Hardware
	Printer
	Scanner
	Fax machine
Electronic equipment (16 products)	Digital camera 5m pixels
	Digital camera 7m pixels
	Video camera
	Landline telephone
	Mobile phone 'Fun' (prepaid card)
	Mobile phone 'Standard'
	Mobile phone 'Business'
	TV – CRT
	TV – flat screen 32 inches
	TV – flat screen 42 inches
	TV – flat screen 52 inches
	MP3 player
	Walkman CD
	Hi-fi unit
	DVD recorder
	Portable navigation system

Category	Product
Clothes, shoes, accessories (22 products)	Men – perfume
	Men – shirt
	Women – perfume
	Women – underwear
	Women – sportswear
	Men – shoes summer
	Men – shoes sports
	Women – shoes winter
	Women – shoes sports
	Children – shoes summer
	Children – shoes sports
	Handbag – women
	Men – watch
	Women – watch
	Men – glasses
	Women – glasses
	Men – sunglasses
	Women – sunglasses
	Pen
	Men's ring
	Women's ring
	Jacket

Category	Product
Electrical household appliances (17 products)	Fridge (upright refrigerator)
	Freezer
	Glass-ceramic kitchen stove
	Oven
	Mixer
	Washing machine
	Laundry dryer
	Drilling machine
	Cordless screwdriver
	Jigsaw
	Electric shaver
	Electric toothbrush
	Epilator
	Microwave oven
	Iron
	Vacuum cleaner
	Filter coffee maker

7.3. Questionnaire (Step 1 Market overview)

EU E-Commerce – Questionnaire

Note: this instrument solely serves as a coordination guideline for the web-based survey. For this, the instrument will be transformed into a computer-aided survey tool.

Programming instruction:

If not indicated differently, only one answer category may be selected. Please "do answer check" for all the questions.

I. Assignment of domestic and cross-border offers to the list (1 st step)	
1. Tester ID as well as first and last name: <i>Programming: show automatically!</i>	ID: _____ your first and last name: _____
1.1. Country the tests are conducted for: <i>Programming: show automatically!</i>	[corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members]
1.2. Product the test is conducted for: <i>Programming: show automatically!</i>	[corresponding final coordinated product list, 100 products]
Please type the name of the corresponding product into a search machine of your country:	
1.3. Please enter the complete URL of the national online shop with copy and paste.	1 st shop: _____ 2 nd shop: _____ 3 rd shop: _____ [77] no websites found
1.4. Please enter the complete URL of the international online shop with copy and paste. <u>Note: At least one cross-border shop outside GER/FR and UK must be listed.</u>	1 st shop: _____ 2 nd shop: _____ 3 rd shop: _____ ... 7 th shop: _____ [77] no websites found
1.5. Please check if there is an alternative product label for the specified characteristics and look for that product.	[1] name of alternative product: _____ [2] no alternative product found (=>TEST END)
1.6. What is the name of the online shop? (Please pay attention to the correct spelling)	name of online shop: _____

<p>1.7. In which languages is the website available?</p> <p><i>Multiple answers possible</i></p>	<p>[1] Bulgarian [2] Danish [3] German [4] English [5] Estonian [6] Finnish [7] French [8] Greek [9] Irish (Gaelic) [10] Italian [11] Latvian [12] Luxembourgish [13] Lithuanian [14] Maltese [15] Dutch [16] Polish [17] Portuguese [18] Romanian [19] Russian [20] Swedish [21] Slovak [22] Slovene [23] Spanish/Basque/Catalan/Galician [24] Czech [25] Turkish [26] Hungarian</p>
<p>1.8. What is the price for the product?</p>	<p>[1] __, __ {currency} [77] no details specified</p>
<p>1.9. Were you redirected to another website?</p>	<p>[1] yes, same shop but different country [2] yes, another shop [3] no</p>
<p>1.10. Please enter the new URL with copy and paste as well as the name of the new shop.</p>	<p>URL of the new shop: _____ name of the online shop: _____</p>
<p>1.11. From your point of view, were the online shops easy to find?</p>	<p>[1] very easy to find [2] rather easy to find [3] rather hard to find [4] very hard to find</p>
<p>1.12. Did any problems occur during the testing? Please specify.</p>	<p>_____ _____ _____</p>

7.4. Questionnaire (Step 2 Roll-out)

EU E-Commerce – Questionnaire

Note: this instrument solely serves as a coordination guideline for the web-based survey. For this, the instrument will be transformed into a computer-aided survey tool.

Programming instruction:

If not indicated differently, only one answer category may be selected. Please "do answer check" for all the questions.



II. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – introduction

1	Please click on the following link... (Programming: URL is automatically assigned) and conduct the test for the following product ... (Programming: product and name of shop are automatically assigned)
1.1.	Tester ID as well as first and last name: <i>Programming: show automatically!</i>
1.2.	Country: <i>Programming: corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members</i>
1.3.	<i>Programming: domestic or cross-border offer? Question not visible to tester!</i> <input type="checkbox"/> domestic offer <input type="checkbox"/> cross-border offer
1.4.	Please enter today's date: _____.2009
1.5.	Please enter the current local time: ____ h, ____ min
1.6.	In which country is the online shop located? (Please look at the suffix or the registration of the company!) <i>Programming: corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members</i> Other: please specify: _____ (=>Test end)
1.7.	Is the URL address of the website for that specific product still valid? Can you see the specific product? <input type="checkbox"/> yes (=>1.9) <input type="checkbox"/> no, this URL address is not valid any more <input type="checkbox"/> no, this product is not available any more
1.8.	Please go to the home page of the <u>same</u> online shop in the <u>same country</u> and search for the product. Please enter the new URL with copy and paste. New URL: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No product found on the website of the <u>same</u> shop in the <u>same</u> country. (=>Test end) <input type="checkbox"/> I was redirected to another shop or to the same shop but a different country. (=>Test end)
1.9.	In which language are you conducting the test? <i>Programming: corresponding list of languages</i>
1.10.	Who is selling the product? <input type="checkbox"/> The product is sold by an official online shop. <input type="checkbox"/> The product is sold by an independent professional trader hosted on a third-party platform (e.g. sub-trader on an electronic marketplace). <input type="checkbox"/> It is not possible to buy the product on this site (e.g. this is a price comparison site or an information site). (=>Test end) <input type="checkbox"/> The product is sold by a second-hand trader or a private trader or the product is used. (=>Test end)

III. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – beginning of ordering process: product details on the first site: price, information on the product

2. The following questions are regarding the beginning of the ordering process. Initial information, like price on the first page and product details, is requested.

2.1. Does the page of the shop directly give a price for the product?	[1] yes [2] no [=>2.3]
2.2. What does the price shown include?	[1] the price <u>includes</u> VAT and is ____ (currency) [2] the price <u>excludes</u> VAT and is ____ (currency) [3] <u>more</u> than one price is shown. Please write down the price including VAT: ____ (currency) [4] I do not know, the price shown is ____ (currency)
2.3. Do you have the possibility to convert currencies on the site?	[1] yes [2] no
2.4. Is there any information about the exchange rate?	[1] yes [2] no
2.5. Does the website advertise special offers or a reduced price in connection with this product?	[1] yes [2] no [=>2.7]
2.6. Does the website show any information on the period for which the special offer or reduced price remains valid?	[1] yes [2] no
2.7. Is the consumer provided with information on the main characteristics of the good? (e.g. size, weight, material characteristics, etc.)?	[1] yes [2] no

Programming: instruction: Please choose one of the following parts to answer next:

1. Registration
2. Shipment
3. The indication of the final price/payment options
4. Consumer protection regulations/terms and conditions/contact and complaints management

IV. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – registration

3. The following questions are regarding the registration process.

3.1. Do you have the possibility to register/create an account on the shop website to proceed with the ordering process? (If you have the possibility to register please do so!)	[1] yes [2] no [=>4 or other part, which should be chosen by the tester]
3.2. Which details did you have to indicate (obligatory) for registration? Multiple answers possible	[1] personal name [2] <u>mailing/home</u> address (e.g. country, postal code etc.) [3] email address [4] <u>payment</u> information (bank details etc.) [5] date of birth [6] gender [7] title [8] none of the above [9] other, please specify: _____

3.3. Were you able to register on the website successfully?	<p>[1] yes [=4 or other part, which should be chosen by the tester]</p> <p>[2] no, because when indicating my details I was redirected to another website (e.g. domestic website)</p> <p>[3] no, because my country is not available on the registration form [=4 or other part, which should be chosen by the tester]</p> <p>[4] no other reason => please specify [=4 or other part which should be chosen by the tester]</p>
3.4. Please enter the new URL with copy and paste and the name of the new shop.	<p>URL of the new shop: _____</p> <p>name of the online shop: _____</p>
3.5. In which country is the shop located? (Please look at the suffix or the registration of the company!)	<p>(corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members)</p> <p>Other: please specify: _____</p>
3.6. Is the indicated product the same as the product on the original website?	<p>[1] same product</p> <p>[2] alternative product, please specify (copy and paste the new name of the product): _____</p>
3.7. Please enter the total product price (complete price for the product, incl. VAT, packaging costs, shipment, and other taxes, etc.) indicated on the new website.	<p>[1] the total, final price is ____ (currency)</p> <p>[2] the total, final price is not indicated, the price incl. VAT is ____ (currency)</p> <p>[3] the total, final price is not indicated, the price excl. VAT is ____ (currency)</p> <p>[4] I do not know, the price shown is ____ (currency)</p> <p>[0] no price indicated</p>
<p>Programming after question 3.7 if 3.3=[2]: Instruction: please go back to the first online shop (before the redirection) and answer the other parts of the questionnaire if possible. (Do not test the new online shop where you have been redirected!)</p>	

V. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – shipment

4. The following questions refer to the shipment. You have to enter your country address to answer the questions. Please always use the same address every time it is requested (e.g. delivery address, billing address etc.).	
<p>4.1. What kinds of shipment options are offered?</p> <p>Multiple answers possible</p>	<p>[1] 'express' delivery (e.g. express delivery, 24-hour delivery, delivery on the next working day etc.)</p> <p>[2] courier service or logistics companies (e.g. UPS, DHL)</p> <p>[3] standard delivery</p> <p>[4] delivery on Saturday</p> <p>[5] delivery at a set date/time</p> <p>[6] pick-up at a delivery point or shop near you</p> <p>[7] other options, please specify: _____</p> <p>[0] the site does not provide any information on this</p>
4.2. Is the shipment of the article insured, or is such insurance offered (e.g. against damage or against non-delivery)?	<p>[1] article is insured automatically</p> <p>[2] insurance is offered but charged separately</p> <p>[3] article cannot be insured</p> <p>[0] the site does not provide any information on this</p>

4.3. Is shipment/order tracking (automatic delivery information) possible?	<p>[1] yes, shipment tracking is possible for my country</p> <p>[2] yes, shipment tracking is possible but <u>not</u> for my country</p> <p>[3] yes, shipment tracking is possible, but no details on destination covered</p> <p>[4] no, shipment tracking is not possible/no information</p>
4.4. Does the shop offer free delivery for this product?	<p>[1] yes, free delivery is offered to my country</p> <p>[2] yes, free delivery is offered, but <u>not</u> to my country</p> <p>[3] yes, free delivery is offered, but no details on destination covered</p> <p>[4] no, free delivery is not offered/no information</p>
4.5. To which EU countries can the product be delivered? (Please look for this information in the terms and conditions or in the delivery/shipment policy). Multiple answers possible	<p>Programming: corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members</p> <p>[1] EU delivery is possible but individual countries are not mentioned</p> <p>[0] I could not find any information on that</p>
4.6. Is shipment to your country possible? (Please enter your home address or select your country on the website to answer this question).	<p>[1] yes, my country is served [=>4.11]</p> <p>[2] no, my country is not served [=>5 or other part, which should be chosen by the tester]</p> <p>[3] no, but when indicating my address I was redirected to another website (e.g. domestic website)</p>
4.7. Please enter the new URL with copy and paste and the name of the new shop.	<p>URL of the new shop: _____</p> <p>name of the online shop: _____</p>
4.8. In which country is the shop located? (Please look at the suffix or the registration of the company!)	<p>[corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members]</p> <p>Other: please specify: _____</p>
4.9. Is the indicated product the same as the product on the original website?	<p>[1] same product</p> <p>[2] alternative product, please specify (copy and paste the new name of the product): _____</p>
4.10. Please enter the product price (complete price for the product, incl. VAT, packaging costs, shipment and other taxes, etc.) indicated on the new website.	<p>[1] the total, final price is ____ [currency]</p> <p>[2] the total, final price is not indicated, the price incl. VAT is ____ [currency]</p> <p>[3] the total, final price is not indicated, the price excl. VAT is ____ [currency]</p> <p>[4] I do not know, the price shown is ____ [currency]</p> <p>[0] no price indicated</p>
4.11. What is the delivery time to your country? (Choose the cheapest option.)	<p>_____ days</p> <p>In the case there is a time frame offered, please indicate:</p> <p>Minimum ____ and maximum ____ days</p> <p>[0] the site does not provide any information on this</p>
<p>Programming after question 4.11 if 4.6=[3]: Instruction: please go back to the first online shop (before the redirection) and answer the other parts of the questionnaire if possible. (Do not test the new online shop where you have been redirected!)</p>	

VI. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – final step: the indication of the final price/payment options

5. You are now one step before the final confirmation of the order. The following questions refer to the indication of the final price and the payment options. Please make a screenshot of the final page of the ordering process. This screenshot should be uploaded at the end of the questionnaire.

<p>5.1. Is there clear information when the sales contract becomes legally binding? (Is there any information on this, e.g. via email confirmation)?</p>	<p>[1] yes, the contract becomes legally binding when placing the order</p> <p>[2] yes, the contract becomes legally binding upon receipt of a confirmation by the trader</p> <p>[3] yes, the contract becomes legally binding when the product is dispatched by the seller</p> <p>[4] yes, other: please specify: _____</p> <p>[5] the information provided is not clear. I do not know when the contract becomes legally binding</p> <p>[0] the site does not provide any information on this</p>
<p>5.2. What is the total, final price for the product, incl. VAT, taxes, packaging costs, shipment, other taxes, etc.? (Please choose the cheapest shipment option available)</p>	<p>___,___ <u>[currency]</u></p> <p>[0] not possible to see the total, final price</p>
<p>5.3. Please list all costs and additional costs indicated on the order form.</p> <p>(Leave blank if not indicated!)</p>	<p>[1] ___,___ <u>[currency]</u> price excluding VAT</p> <p>[2] ___,___ <u>[currency]</u> packaging and shipment (including costs for insurance if applicable)</p> <p>[3] ___,___ <u>[currency or %]</u> value-added tax (VAT)</p> <p>[4] ___,___ <u>[currency]</u> other taxes if shown (e.g. recycling of electronic waste)</p> <p>[5] ___,___ <u>[currency]</u> other costs if shown (e.g. service charges, extension of guarantee period, or other costs charged separately)</p> <p><u>[if = 1.3=(2)]</u></p> <p>[6] ___,___ <u>[currency]</u> additional costs for shipment abroad (choose the cheapest option to "my country")</p> <p><u>[if = 1.3=(2)]</u></p> <p>[7] ___,___ <u>[currency]</u> additional costs for using a foreign credit/debit card</p> <p>[0] the details of the total, final price are not shown</p>

<p>5.4. Which payment options are offered?</p> <p>Multiple answers possible</p>	<p>[1] payment of <u>invoice</u> by money transfer prior to delivery</p> <p>[2] payment of invoice after delivery of product</p> <p>[3] direct debit: payment with indication of bank details</p> <p>[4] e-banking/online banking</p> <p>[5] cash on delivery or pick-up in store</p> <p>[6] credit/debit card</p> <p>[7] cheque</p> <p>[8] PayPal and similar systems</p> <p>[9] gift voucher</p> <p>[10] other, please specify: _____</p> <p>[0] not possible to see the payment options [=>5.12]</p>
<p>5.5. Does the shop accept my direct debit/bank details?</p>	<p>[1] yes [=>5.7]</p> <p>[2] no => please specify: _____</p> <p>[3] this payment option is not available</p>
<p>5.6. Does the shop accept my credit/debit card?</p>	<p>[1] yes</p> <p>[2] no => please specify: _____</p> <p>[3] this payment option is not available [=>5.12]</p>
<p>5.7. Have you been redirected to another website (e.g. shop in your country) when entering your payment details?</p>	<p>[1] yes</p> <p>[2] no [=>5.12]</p>
<p>5.8. Please enter the new URL with copy and paste and the name of the new shop.</p>	<p>URL of the new shop: _____</p> <p>name of the online shop: _____</p>
<p>5.9. In which country is the shop located? (Please look at the suffix or the registration of the company!)</p>	<p>[corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members]</p> <p>Other: please specify: _____</p>
<p>5.10. Is the indicated product the same as the product on the original website?</p>	<p>[1] same product</p> <p>[2] alternative product, please specify (copy and paste the new name of the product): _____</p>
<p>5.11. Please enter the product price (complete price for the product, incl. VAT, packaging costs, shipment and other taxes, etc.) indicated on the new website.</p>	<p>[1] the total, final price is __. __ [currency]</p> <p>[2] the total, final price is not indicated, the price incl. VAT is __. __ [currency]</p> <p>[3] the total, final price is not indicated, the price excl. VAT is __. __ [currency]</p> <p>[4] I do not know, the price shown is __. __ [currency]</p>
<p>5.12. Are there any particular restrictions regarding the payment options or the transaction (e.g. age restrictions, geographical restriction related to the address of the cardholder, other)?</p>	<p>[1] yes</p> <p>[2] no</p> <p>[0] the site does not provide any information on this</p>
<p>5.13. Is it possible to conduct the complete ordering process up to the final order confirmation?</p>	<p>[1] yes</p> <p>[2] no, the shop does not serve my country</p> <p>[3] no, it is not clear when the order will be placed and I do not want to be charged for the product</p> <p>[4] no, other reason => please specify: _____</p>

5.14. Is the final order placed via a secure connection (does the URL start with 'https'? SSL certificate)?	<input type="radio"/> [1] yes <input type="radio"/> [2] no <input type="radio"/> [0] the site does not provide any information on this
Programming after question 5.11 if 5.7 = {1}: Instruction: please go back to the first online shop (before the redirection) and answer the other parts of the questionnaire if possible. (Do not test the new online shop where you have been redirected!)	
VII. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – consumer protection regulations/terms and conditions/contact and complaints management	
6. The following questions refer to the general terms and conditions (please read carefully). Please check the website of the online shop for the following information.	
6.1. Is it easy to find the terms and conditions on the website? (Note: please check the "help", "contact", "FAQ" etc. pages as well. The terms and conditions in most cases have their own link.)	<input type="radio"/> [1] yes, very easy <input type="radio"/> [2] rather easy <input type="radio"/> [3] rather hard to find <input type="radio"/> [4] very hard to find <input type="radio"/> [0] no terms and conditions found [= > 6.4]
6.2. Are the terms and conditions available in the same language you conducted your test?	<input type="radio"/> [1] yes <input type="radio"/> [2] no
6.3. Please enter the URL of the terms and conditions (copy and paste).	URL: _____
6.4. Does the online shop/trader or the manufacturer offer a guarantee for that specific product (a commercial guarantee)?	<input type="radio"/> [1] yes <input type="radio"/> [2] no [= > 6.8] <input type="radio"/> [3] The information provided is not clear. I can't tell whether this is a commercial guarantee or not.
6.5. How long is the guarantee period for the product?	____ number of months <input type="radio"/> [0] no information found
6.6. Is the period the same for all countries?	<input type="radio"/> [1] yes <input type="radio"/> [2] no <input type="radio"/> [0] no information found
Programming if 6.4 = {1}: 6.7. Does the information provided on the commercial guarantee also make clear that the consumer's legal rights are not affected	<input type="radio"/> [1] yes <input type="radio"/> [2] no <input type="radio"/> [0] I can't tell. The information provided is not clear.
6.8. Is there any information on the right of withdrawal?	<input type="radio"/> [1] yes <input type="radio"/> [2] no [= > 6.11]
6.9. How many days is the right of withdrawal effective?	____ number of days <input type="radio"/> [77] no information found
6.10. Does the information provided on the right of withdrawal indicate when the withdrawal period starts (e.g. the right of withdrawal starts when the consumer receives the good)?	<input type="radio"/> [1] yes <input type="radio"/> [2] no

6.11. In case the consumer decides to return the product, does the website explain how he/she will be refunded?	[1] yes [2] no
6.12. Is the article subject to special conditions regarding the right of withdrawal (e.g. return only in original product packaging, unsealed etc.)?	[1] yes [2] no [0] no information found
6.13. Does the website contain any information on the protection and handling of your personal data, e.g. transferring personal information to a third party? (Please also read the terms and conditions and privacy policy to answer this question!)	[1] yes [2] no
6.14. Does the website contain any information on the law of the country applicable to the sales contract (e.g. court of jurisdiction)? (Please also read the terms and conditions to answer this question!)	[1] yes, law of country <i>Programming: corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members + other countries; please specify:</i> [0] no information found
<i>Programming if 6.1#0:</i> 6.15. Are the terms and conditions easy to understand?	[1] very easy [2] rather easy [3] rather difficult [4] very difficult
6.16. Does the website show the identity of the online shop/trader? (Please check the website for an imprint or terms of use or legal notice containing the following details): <i>Multiple answers possible</i>	[1] name/company [2] address of registration of the company [3] telephone/fax [4] email address [5] value-added tax number (VAT number) [6] register of company <i>Programming: corresponding list of countries, 27 EU members + other countries; please specify:</i> [7] other => please specify: _____ [0] none of the above are available on the website
6.17. Does the website contain any information on customer support? (e.g. service hotline, mail support, complaint handling etc.)	[1] yes [2] no (=6.20)
6.18. Is customer support provided in the same language you conducted your test?	[1] yes [2] no
6.19. Are there any differences between countries regarding customer support (e.g. free hotline for domestic calls, subject to charge for calls from abroad)?	[1] yes [2] no [0] no information found

6.20. Which communication channels can you technically use to contact the online shop/trader (e.g. to address a complaint, customer support etc.)?	<p>[1] mail/post</p> <p>[2] online forum/chat</p> <p>[3] email</p> <p>[4] online form</p> <p>[5] telephone/hotline (subject to charge)</p> <p>[6] telephone/hotline (free of charge)</p> <p>[7] telephone/hotline (no specifications on charges)</p> <p>[8] telephone/hotline (accepts international calls)</p> <p>[9] fax</p> <p>[10] other => please specify: _____</p> <p>[0] no possibility to contact online shop/trader</p>
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Multiple answers possible

VIII. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – pre-ticked boxes

7. The following questions refer to any pre-defined options in the form of pre-ticked boxes during the ordering process. Please note all the pre-ticked boxes that you have seen during the ordering process on that online shop.	
7.1. In the course of the ordering process have you come across any pre-defined options in the form of pre-ticked boxes?	<p>[1] yes</p> <p>[2] no (= > 8)</p>
7.2. What is the purpose of the pre-ticked boxes?	<p>[1] acceptance of the terms and conditions</p> <p>[2] agreement to receive promotional information (e.g. newsletter)</p> <p>[3] agreement to communicate personal data to a third party</p> <p>[4] gift wrapping</p> <p>[5] insurance or other ancillary contracts (e.g. extension of the guarantee period)</p> <p>[6] provision of extra services (e.g. technical customer support)</p> <p>[7] purchase of extra goods or accessories (e.g. computer casing when buying a computer)</p> <p>[8] predefined payment options, if yes please specify:</p> <p>a. cheapest option</p> <p>b. most expensive option</p> <p>c. don't know if cheapest or most expensive</p> <p>[9] predefined shipping options, if yes please specify:</p> <p>a. cheapest option</p> <p>b. most expensive option</p> <p>c. don't know if cheapest or most expensive</p> <p>[10] other, please specify: _____</p>

Multiple answers possible

IX. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – concluding general evaluation

8. Please check your email account for a confirmation email for your registration.	<p>[1] yes, I got a confirmation mail for my registration</p> <p>[2] no, I did not get a confirmation mail for my registration</p>
9. Did any problems occur during the test? Please specify: (if no problems leave empty)	<p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
10. Please enter what time it is at the end of the test:	<p>__ h , __ min</p>

X. Testing the online shops (2nd step) – upload

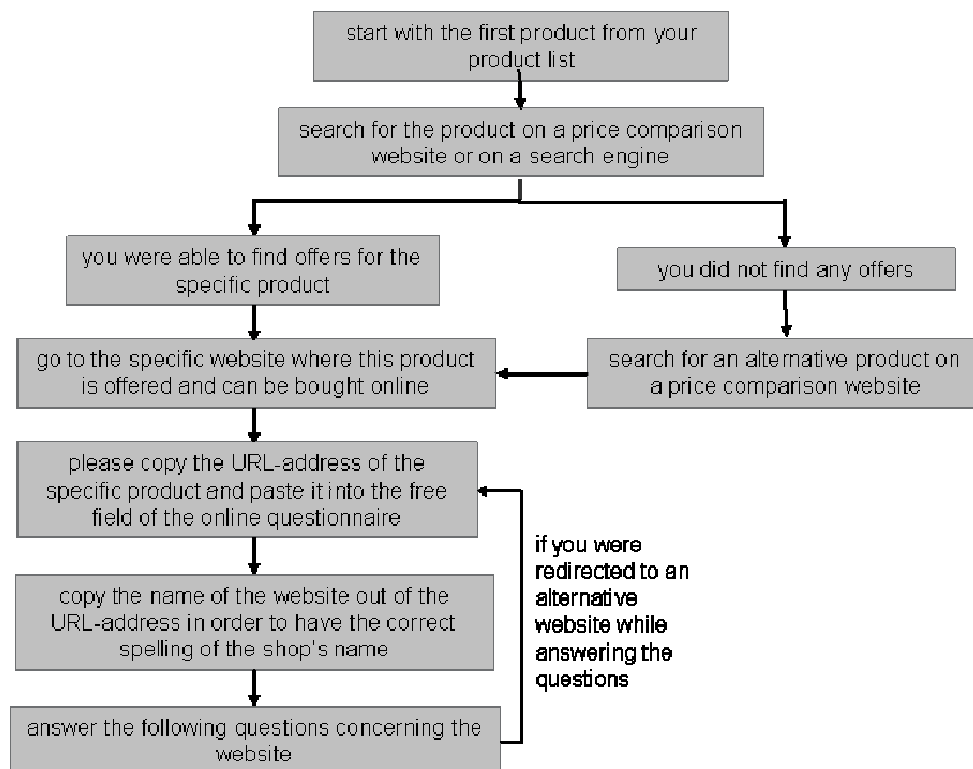
11. Please click here to upload the screenshot (e.g. press <ALT><Print Scrn> to make a screenshot) you made from the final step of the ordering process.	
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7.5. Market overview (Step 1)

In order to provide an overview of the online market in a first step, consumers in each country tested the availability of offers in each Member State of the European Union. For each of the 100 products of the shopping list, the consumers in each country received a link to an online questionnaire (the procedure is depicted in Figure 42) and were asked to find three *domestic** and seven *cross-border** offers for the product by using country-specific search engines and *price comparison sites**.

For each product, the mystery shoppers were instructed to search for a specific brand and product reference. In case it was impossible to find the specific product reference, they were instructed to search for a model of the same brand with the same technical features. This procedure ensured that the offers for each product are strictly comparable.

Figure 42: Procedure of the first step (instructions for the consumers)



The primary objective was to provide a sample of online offers for all the EU member states representing the range of available offers accessible to online shoppers. For a greater variety of offers, the consumers were further instructed to include offers

originating from *cross-border** shops that are located outside France, Germany, or the United Kingdom – the countries with the greatest market share in e-commerce*. The results provide an overview of the existing possibilities for online shoppers to compare prices and offers.

For each offer, the tester recorded in which language(s) the offer was available, the price of the specific product on the web page, and whether the tester had been automatically redirected to another online shop when browsing the website. The consumers also recorded any problems that occurred during the search for the specific product.

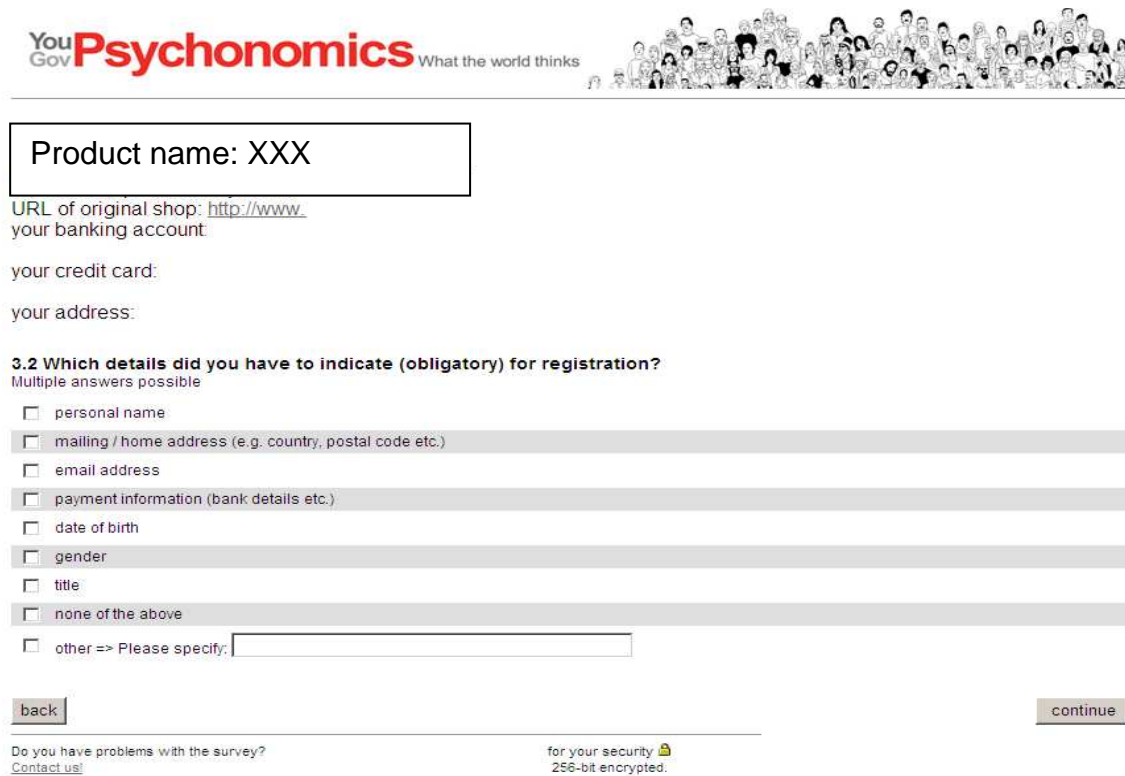
At the end of the product search, the testers were asked to rate the difficulty of finding the offers for the specific product on a rating scale, ranging from “very easy to find” to “very hard to find”. In addition, the testers were asked to note down potential problems that occurred during the test.

The search time was limited to 45 minutes per product in order to reflect real-life consumer behaviour and to provide a realistic basis to rate how easy it was for the mystery shoppers to find the offers.

The offers and corresponding online shops had to fulfil the following criteria:

- The online shop is located within the EU.
- The product can be bought directly online.
- The offer is provided by a business, not a private trader.
- No second-hand goods.
- The online shop is not a price comparison site*.

Figure 43: Details of questionnaire



YouGov **Psychonomics** What the world thinks

Product name: XXX

URL of original shop: <http://www.>

your banking account:

your credit card:

your address:

3.2 Which details did you have to indicate (obligatory) for registration?
Multiple answers possible

☐ personal name

☐ mailing / home address (e.g. country, postal code etc.)

☐ email address

☐ payment information (bank details etc.)

☐ date of birth

☐ gender


☐ title

☐ none of the above

☐ other => Please specify:

[back](#) [continue](#)

Do you have problems with the survey?
[Contact us!](#)

for your security 
256-bit encrypted.

7.6. Roll-out (Step 2)

The questionnaire for the second step of the research aimed at recording information on the offers identified and on the information provided by the online shops. Offers found in the step 1 were selected and assigned to the consumers according to the following criteria:

- In each country 5 offers per product were selected.
- For each product, out of these 5 offers, a maximum of 2 *domestic** offers were selected, the rest consisting of *cross-border** offers.
- Any given shop should not represent more than 5% of all the offers.
- The selection should ensure a wide range of shops per product and per country.
- Offers were selected from official online shops* and from third-party platforms*.

- Offers should to the extent possible also be selected from outside Germany, the UK, and France so as to include a maximum of smaller countries.

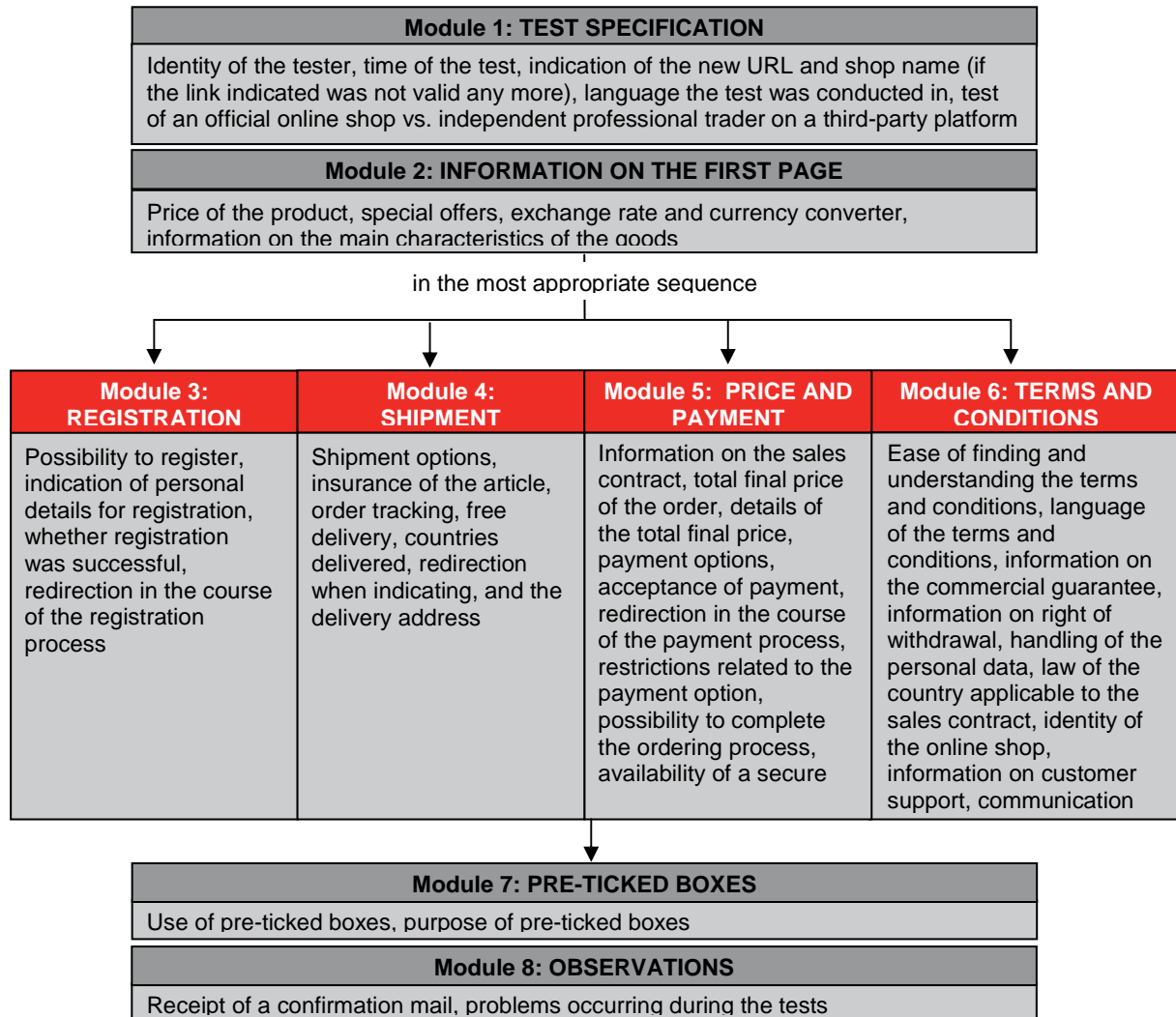
In order to fulfil the criteria, *cross-border** offers were sometimes re-assigned across countries (see below). The tester was instructed to go through the entire ordering process up to the final order confirmation without placing an order at the end. During the purchasing process, the tester completed the online questionnaire, noting the information displayed on the websites.

The fieldwork lasted from 29 April to 2 July 2009. In total, the consumers conducted more than 13,500 offers. Each test lasted for 32 minutes on average.

A particular challenge at this stage was to adapt the research method to capture a wide diversity of online shopping experiences as ordering processes are customised differently and the technical features of online shops are heterogeneous.

YouGovPsychonomics developed a dynamic and flexible way of capturing the data based on ten answering modules. Modules three to six could be answered in the sequence most appropriate to the online shop and the offer being evaluated (Figure 44). For example, in most cases, putting the product into the shopping basket or cart is sufficient to initiate the ordering process but, depending on the websites' technical design, shops sometimes require consumers to create an account first. The terms and conditions that online sellers offered also differed in amount, structure, and content – sometimes they were just a pop-up window on the way to a purchase.

Figure 44: Modules of the questionnaire



In the first and second consecutive modules of the questionnaire, the testers had to complete a number of preliminary questions. The Internet is a fast-moving industry with offers and information being constantly updated. The testers were asked to check the location of the shop and if the link to the online shop was still valid. If the link was not valid any more, the testers' instructions were to search for the same product in the same shop (in the same country) in order to take into account the possibility that the online shop had been updated between the time when the offers were collected and the testing phase. If the product was no longer available in the shop, the test was terminated. The testers were then asked to indicate the language in which they were conducting the test. They were also asked to check that the

product was sold by an official online shop or by an independent professional trader hosted on a third-party platform.

The second module referred to the information given by the shop on the first page displaying the offer, i.e. the price of a product, the currency and exchange rate, special offers, and product features presented on the first site of the shop. These two parts of the questionnaire were fixed. In order to complete the other parts of the questionnaire, the testers had to start with the ordering process, which meant in most cases putting the product into the shopping basket or cart.

Due to the fact that the online shops differed enormously in their structure, the testers were able to choose the most appropriate sequence in order to complete the following modules: (1) registration, (2) shipment, (3) indication of final price and payment, and (4) terms and conditions.

The questions concerning the registration process tested the possibility to register and the provision of personal details. The testers were instructed to register on the website with their real names, but were advised to use an alternative email address to protect them from promotional information.

The questions referring to shipment dealt with the shipment options and issues linked to product delivery. For example, the mystery shoppers needed to enter the delivery options available to their country, the objective being to identify whether specific features are limited to specific countries and which countries are served.

In the module referring to the final price and payment options, the testers had to indicate the kind of payment options available. The mystery shoppers' directions were to evaluate potential geographic restrictions due to payment options by indicating cardholder bank details for direct debit (if offered) and credit card payment. The testers reported whether their payment details had been accepted by the shop prior to the final order confirmation. They recorded the total, final price for the product showing all the applicable costs, taxes, and shipping rates. Finally, they also confirmed that they had been able to conduct the complete ordering process up to the final order confirmation.

Another module of the questionnaire referred to the general terms and conditions presented on an online shop's website. The testers needed to evaluate how easy it

was to find the specific information concerning terms and conditions and whether they were presented in the tester's language. The testers' instructions were to check whether the online shop offered a commercial guarantee and the duration of the guarantee period. Other questions referred mainly to the right of withdrawal, information on returns and refunds, and whether the article is subject to special conditions regarding the right of withdrawal. The testers also noted down the applicable law mentioned in the terms and conditions and the place of registration of the business. The testers rated whether the terms and conditions were easy to understand from their point of view. Finally, they were asked to search for information on customer support and the communication channels available to contact the trader.

After completing the main steps of the ordering process, the testers needed to assess the use of pre-defined options in the form of pre-ticked boxes. In closing, they were asked to check their email account for a confirmation mail of their registration and to write down any kind of problems that they encountered during the test.

At several points during the test, the mystery shoppers indicated whether they had been redirected to another website, for example when indicating their personal details, address, or country on the websites. When this was the case, they recorded the new link to the website and the name of the shop they had been redirected to. Furthermore, they had to indicate the location of the new shop, the price offered in the new shop, and whether the product offered on the new site was still the same or an alternative.

On the whole, the questionnaire and briefing materials turned out to be understandable and clear. Only in 3% of all the tests did the testers use the open question in order to comment on the procedure of the tests. The comments included that it was hard to find the product/label, that it was hard to find *domestic** offers, and that the testers only found offers from outside the European Union.

7.7. Pre-test

The aim of the pre-test was to find out if the test procedure of the second phase and the questionnaire used were comprehensible and adequate to reflect the consumers' experiences with online shopping.

In general, the results were valid and only a few qualitative comments from the testers were registered: the pre-test for the second step confirmed the methodology and delivered valuable comments for the adjustment of the questionnaire.

The following six countries were selected for the pre-test:

- Austria
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Portugal
- United Kingdom

Some problems occurred during the pre-test, which are outlined in the following:

- In many cases, the testers could not finish the test completely
- Sometimes the retrieval of payment options would require a confirmation of the order. Our testers therefore had to stop the test.
- Another reason for discontinuing the test before completion was that the country the test was conducted for was not served.
- Some shops did not accept the personal details, e.g. the zip code or the bank details, of the testers.
- In some cases, the product or even the whole online shop was not available any more.
- Some online shops did not provide information on how far the ordering process had been processed, which increased the testers' insecurity.
- Another problem was to identify the point at which the contract becomes legally binding.
- In the majority of cases, information concerning the countries delivered was not given.
- The terms and conditions were often poorly arranged and hard to understand for the testers, who are not legal experts.

7.8. Re-assignment of links (Step 2)

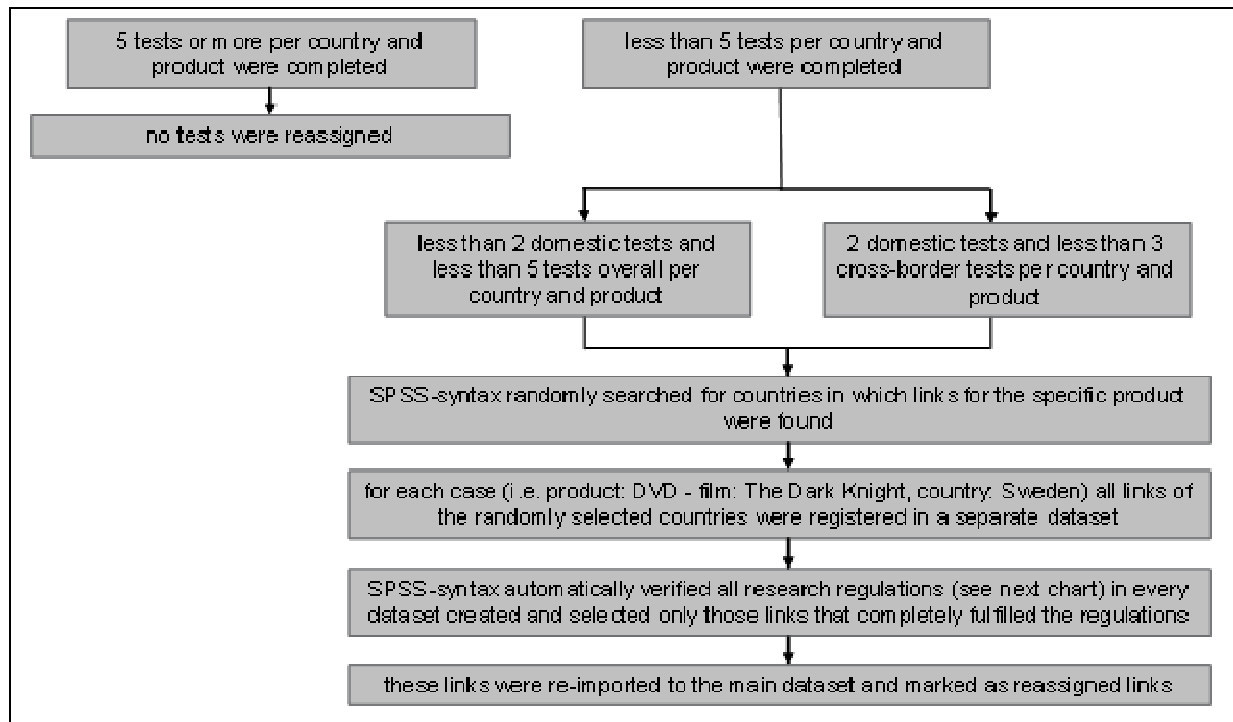
The second step analysed the links from the first step in more detail. In the course of data collection, links were re-assigned, which means that links that were found in one country were also tested from another country. The re-assignment was necessary because of two main reasons. First of all, after the first step of the research, it was obvious that it was not possible to provide enough online shops to test each product (at least) five times per country in five different shops (at least two *domestic** and three *cross-border* shops), as requested. Secondly, more links than expected no longer worked because the product was not available any more. This rate increased from 6% (pre-test) to 27% during the roll-out.

One reason for the percentage of non-usable links might be the fast-moving character of the Internet. As about two months elapsed between the generation of the links (first step) and the subsequent conduct of the tests (second step), some of the products were out of stock. Others were discontinued or replaced by new ones.

In order to minimise the percentage of non-usable links, the testers' instructions were to look for an identical product in the same shop of the same country. In addition, the tester's language skills influenced which links could be assigned to which tester. This was the case when, for example, a Bulgarian tester was to test a French shop, but the shop's website was only available in French and the Bulgarian tester did not speak any French. For these reasons, a re-assignment of links was necessary to accomplish the total number of 13,500 tests.

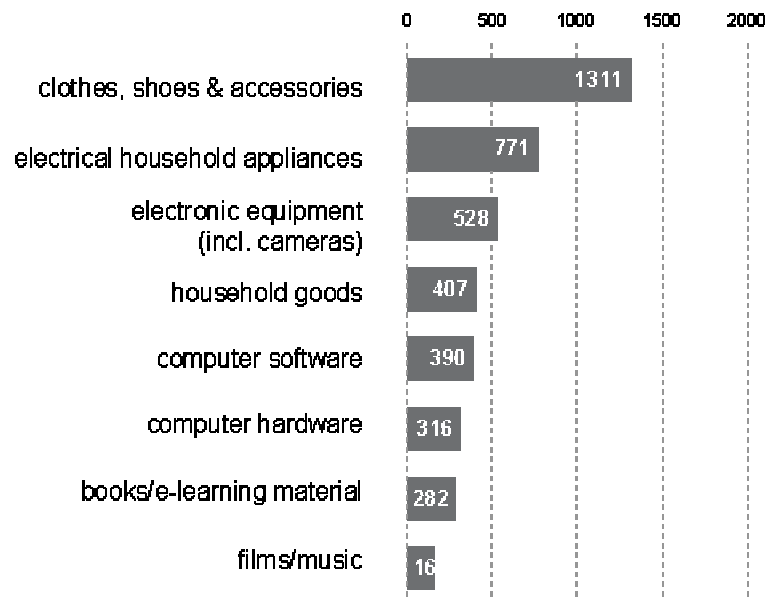
From a technical point of view, we created a syntax-based SPSS program that automatically searched for proper links. Please find an overview of the re-assignment process in Figure 45.

Figure 45: Re-assignment process of the second step



In total, we reassigned 4,168 tests, and in some categories, more than others (Figure 46).

Figure 46: Total number of re-assigned tests – split by product category



Before conducting the analyses, we checked whether re-assigned links and links from the first step yielded statistically different results. We found no statistically significant difference, which means that the validity of the results was not affected by the re-assignment method.

7.9. Description of the test sample

In total, the study tested 13,573 online offers, 2,609 of which were *domestic** (19% of all the tests) and 10,964 *cross-border** offers (81% of all the tests). On average, it tested 97 *domestic** offers per country. In Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom, more *domestic** offers than on average (>150) were analysed, due to the broad range of *domestic** shops in the respective countries. In Cyprus, Malta, and Luxembourg, fewer *domestic** offers than average were tested (< 42). On average, the study tested about 400 *cross-border** offers in each country. In Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom, it tested fewer *cross-border** offers than average, because of the high number of *domestic** offers tested in these countries (<350). In Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Malta, more *cross-border** offers were tested than in the other countries (>460) to balance out the smaller number of *domestic** tests and to assure a minimum of 500 tests conducted for each country. **In total, the study tested 13,573 online offers, 2,609 of which were *domestic** (19% of all the**

offers) and 10,964 *cross-border offers (81% of all the offers).** Table 7 depicts the frequencies of all the tests, split by *domestic** and *cross-border** offers, product categories, and country of testers.

The products' characteristics strongly affected the availability of offers. The product category, however, showed no effect on the availability of products. In all categories, some products were easily available, and some had a limited availability. For instance, specific hiking sticks, one computer, one jacket, one oven, one pair of sunglasses, and one toy doll were only offered in fewer than 10 *domestic** shops throughout the European Union. One game console, software products, one perfume, and one electric shaver were highly available in both *domestic** and *cross-border** shops.

The language skills of the testers also influenced the sample. Almost half of all the tests were conducted in English (42%), followed by German (33%) and French (4%) with the other tests spread across the languages of the 27 EU Member States.

93% of all the offers were found in official online shops. 7% were offers made by independent professional traders hosted on a third-party platform (marketplace).

In nearly half of all the cases, the company register was not presented on the websites of the tested shops. In the cases where the registration of the company was displayed, most of the offers tested were from shops registered in Germany (43%) and the United Kingdom (27%). Of the offers tested, 6% were from shops registered in Austria, and 4% from shops registered in France and Luxembourg, respectively; 1% of the offers tested were from shops registered outside the EU, like Jersey or Hong Kong.

Country of consumers	Number of tests	Number of domestic tests	Number of cross-border tests	Clothes, shoes, accessories (22 products)	Books (5 products)	Films/music (5 products)	Computer hardware (12 products)	Computer software (10 products)	Electronic equipment (16 products)	Household goods (13 products)	Electrical household appliances (17 products)
Austria	510	123	387	106	29	27	50	69	81	54	94
Belgium	500	65	435	105	25	30	54	64	77	47	98
Bulgaria	503	99	404	104	29	28	51	68	80	48	95
Cyprus	500	2	498	104	29	40	44	59	74	54	96
Czech Republic	500	107	394	104	21	27	55	66	84	51	92
Denmark	500	158	342	97	31	28	53	70	84	54	83
Estonia	500	76	424	105	29	26	55	59	80	51	95
Finland	500	66	434	107	27	27	53	64	75	54	93
France	500	121	379	101	28	28	52	67	75	48	101
Germany	506	231	275	106	25	28	54	67	84	53	89
Greece	500	78	422	99	29	35	47	65	76	49	100
Hungary	507	110	397	114	23	28	54	67	77	50	94
Ireland	500	50	450	96	28	27	51	65	84	56	93
Italy	500	108	392	100	28	26	52	63	87	50	94
Latvia	506	72	434	98	27	32	48	64	82	57	98
Lithuania	507	42	465	105	28	27	47	69	82	54	95
Luxembourg	509	32	477	111	30	28	51	64	74	52	99
Malta	500	4	496	110	26	28	56	61	72	52	95
Netherlands	500	132	368	103	31	27	51	64	77	53	94
Poland	500	115	385	104	28	26	52	63	78	53	96
Portugal	500	70	430	106	28	32	48	63	75	53	95
Romania	502	89	413	104	26	27	60	65	74	53	93
Slovakia	518	89	429	103	26	34	55	61	86	52	101
Slovenia	500	73	427	107	26	27	50	64	77	52	97
Spain	500	148	352	104	27	25	47	63	81	52	101
Sweden	505	129	376	114	29	30	46	65	78	52	91
United Kingdom	500	221	279	112	27	25	45	69	75	53	94
Total	13573	2609	10964	2829	740	773	1381	1748	2129	1407	2566

Table 8: Total number of domestic* and cross-border* offers and number of tests per product category split by country of consumers. Base n=13,573 offers

