



# Developing together

Regarding the federal structures in Germany, tens of different software variants might be used in the same specialist procedure. The housing allowance shows that there is another way.

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**G**ood news for people who are dependent on financial help in Germany. From January 2020, the federal government will increase housing subsidies by an average of 30 percent – provided the Bundesrat agrees. A two-person household will then receive an average of 190 Euros per month instead of 145 Euros as before. And the number of households receiving housing benefit is to rise from 560,000 to 660,000.

Citizens can apply for housing benefit by filling out a number of forms. In Berlin, for example, an eight-page application includes six more attachments. “Calculating the housing benefit is a relatively complex application procedure,” says Stephan Egerer of the Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing in Berlin. The housing office administrators use software to record the data, which has to be continually adapted and further developed due to changes in the law.

## MUNICIPALITIES DECIDE ON SOFTWARE

In Germany with its federal character, it is more the rule than the exception that states and municipalities use different software. “The federal government itself has not specified or developed any procedure. The municipalities themselves therefore decide how they want to process the housing benefit procedure and which software they use for it,” explains Egerer. Every change then means that every software provider has to make the necessary adjustments – which costs money and time.

So that the authorities can share the costs, four federal states and two cities have joined forces to form a development alliance. The software, which has been used in Berlin’s housing offices for more than 20 years, is now also used by the authorities in Baden-Württemberg, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt as well as in the state capitals of Magdeburg and Munich. They are responsible for about one third of the housing benefit households in Germany with an annual benefit amount of around 300 million Euros.

“We introduced the software in Berlin in 1996. Magdeburg and Baden-Württemberg were added at the end of the 1990s. It therefore made sense to set up a care circle in which all users could further develop the process,” says Egerer. A project steering committee meets about every six weeks to discuss the current legal adjustments and to

jointly discuss the change requests of the approximately 1,500 users in the authorities. And twice a year, representatives of the ministries and authorities as well as administrators discuss the larger strategic projects. T-Systems as the software developer then implements the changes for everyone and makes the new versions available to the respective data centers. The costs for the further development of the software are paid via a joint account, to which all members of the development alliance contribute.

## APPLY FOR HOUSING BENEFIT ONLINE

It was not until the fall of 2018 that T-Systems completely revamped the software. The program, which is now based on Java, is completely web-enabled. Proposals for changes made in practice by applicants and administrators were also incorporated into the development. “Since the processing of housing allowance applications is complex, the housing allowance procedure is regarded as a beacon project for e-government,” says Egerer, who is responsible in Berlin, among other things, for the further development of T-Systems software for the so-called “Dialogized Housing Allowance Procedure”. With DiWo, applications can be recorded step-by-step, notices can be issued and housing benefit amounts can be paid out. Since the new solution has a modular structure and a uniform technical basis, changes can now be incorporated more easily, which in turn reduces maintenance costs.

This year, the transnational team and T-Systems will take the next step. Under the Online Access Act (OZG), federal, state and municipal administrations must offer 575 administrative services online by 2022. DiWo will also be linked to an online application process via interfaces from fall 2019. Applicants will then be able to apply for the housing subsidy completely online – and get their housing subsidy faster than before.



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