

TOOP and the Single Digital Gateway

The Single Digital Gateway Regulation (EU) 2018/1724¹ aims to eliminate discriminatory obstacles by ensuring that any procedure currently available online for domestic users will be also accessible to users from other Member States and EEA countries. Helping citizens and businesses comply with obligations across borders, the Regulation requires Member States and EEA countries to offer at least 21 key administrative procedures fully online in a safe, central and user-centric national platform. This means that users will be able to interact with public administrations at all stages of the process, from initial contact to completion. According to the European Commission, this legislation could help EU citizens save up to 855.000 hours of their time annually and companies could save more than EUR 11 billion per year².

The key services are listed in Annex II to the Regulation and include inter alia: requests for a birth certificate, car registration, starting a business or submitting a corporate tax declaration. For the procedures defined in Annex II and the procedures provided in Directives 2005/36/EC (on professional qualifications), 2006/123/EC (the Services Directive), 2014/24/EU1 and 2014/25/EU2 (both on public procurement), the Regulation mandates the use of **the 'once-only' principle (OOP)**, minimizing the administrative burden on citizens and businesses that exercise their internal market rights. To do so, data submitted by citizens or businesses once to any EU and EEA country will be reusable by public administrations in the other countries, fully respecting data protection rules.

In order to achieve automated exchange of evidences and seamless digital communication between competent authorities in the different Member States, a dedicated technical system will connect the 21 online procedures established in each Member State with the data sources across Europe. The Regulation defines only basic requirements for that system, therefore the technical specifications, operational procedures and governance framework will be defined in an Implementing Act. The work done within the TOOP project on all these aspects is expected to provide the basis for drafting this Implementing Act, which will be finalised by June 2021,

The pilot phase of the TOOP project, which was initiated in July 2018, provides the opportunity to test, in operational conditions and with actual information systems running in the Member States, the solution for implementing the OOP under the provisions contained in the Single Digital Gateway Regulation. The TOOP project allows Member States participating in the

¹ Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 October 2018 establishing a single digital gateway to provide access to information, to procedures and to assistance and problem-solving services and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012, OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 1–38; see <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32018R1724>

² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180711IPR07739/single-digital-gateway-a-time-saver-for-citizens-and-companies>

project to take the early steps towards SDGR implementation by developing and testing OOP-enabled versions of their systems and services, and start to learn how to integrate their national environments with the upcoming OOP infrastructure to be built at a pan-European level.

From a more legal perspective, the TOOP project can also provide support to the European Commission which will be useful to complete the legal framework. In addition to the Regulation itself – which establishes the core rules of the Single Digital Gateway – the Regulation foresees the adoption of several implementing acts that will define certain operational details. The Regulation anticipates the adoption of rules on technical and operational specifications of the technical system, i.e. a formalisation and legal validation of the principles on which the TOOP infrastructure operates. The TOOP project can provide methodologies and experiences in order to ensure that the Once-Only implementing Act is well suited for the purposes intended by the Single Digital Gateway Regulation.

The Regulation thus provides a clear legal basis for the infrastructure required to implement the OOP, and for the exchange of information between public administrations for the administrative procedures concerned. It encourages – and under some conditions requires - public administrations to make digital evidence available to other public entities and to more easily accept and recognize such evidence for their own purposes, thus supporting digitisation of public services and strengthening administrative efficiency.

With respect to timing, the OOP will become a reality on 12 December 2023, five years after the Regulation enters into force. This implementation of the OOP will be an important milestone in enhancing the functioning of the EU Single Market. Interactions with public bodies all over the European Union will be facilitated through the digitalization of public services in line with the OOP. At the same time, the SDG Regulation will ensure sustainability of the project outcomes and pilots, allowing them to continue beyond the project's duration.

Policy background:

The SDG Regulation is part of the “compliance package”, aimed at making it easier for people and companies to manage their administrative affairs online in their home country or when working, living or doing business in another EU country. The creation of the gateway is in line with the European Union’s Digital Single Market Strategy and the e-Government Action Plan 2016-2020. Following the Commission’s initial proposal in May 2017, the Regulation was debated both within Parliament and within the Council, leading to the final adoption of the text on 2 October 2018. The Single Digital Gateway Regulation was published on 21 November 2018 in the Official Journal of the European Union, and entered into force on 11 December 2018.