

# The role of Points of Single Contact and other information services in the Single Market

The [original full study](#)<sup>1</sup> analyses the role and development of Points of Single Contact and other information services. It reviews recent policy documents and identifies a range of weaknesses for the provision of contact points. It recommends improved monitoring and the use of infringement proceedings in case of non-compliance, building on the instruments available under the Single Digital Gateway Regulation.

## Background

A range of tools have been developed to simplify the administrative procedures that service providers and citizens need to be able to operate across the European Union. **Points of Single Contact** (PSCs) are one such tool, established by the 2006 Services Directive as one-stop shops where providers should be able to **access information on rules and formalities** and complete all **procedures** needed to establish themselves and grow in the Single Market. Since the establishment of the PSCs, several other contact points have been established in other areas. However, a number of **weaknesses remain in the regulation**, preventing contact points from achieving their full potential in the Single Market.

## Key findings

Contact points have been established to **provide information and procedures** needed to operate in the Single Market, in areas such as the free movement of goods and services, professional qualifications and consumer protection. Their purpose is to provide information about rights under EU law, to simplify and speed up administrative procedures and to solve problems when EU rights have been breached.



Contact points have been found to be **underperforming by several evaluations**. A 2013 study, entitled "A European Single Point of Contact" identified issues such as the fragmentation of information and online services, limited signposting, limited awareness and understanding, and difficulty among users in identifying and accessing the most

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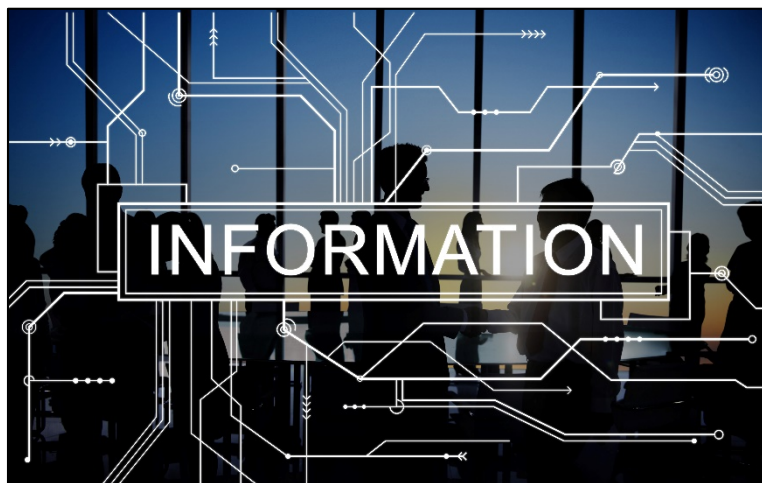
While the requirements on contact points contained some mandatory provisions, a number of weaknesses were identified in their implementation. As such, the **Single Digital Gateway (SDG) Regulation** was adopted to overcome the fragmented nature of existing one-stop shops and to make certain administrative procedures fully available online. In 2020, the Commission published a **long-term Action Plan** for better implementation and enforcement of Single Market rules. It includes the use of infringement proceedings and close collaboration at all levels of governance, as well as the establishment of a common feedback and a process to collect user statistics.



appropriate services. Most recently, the SDG impact assessment (2017) summarised the main problems as: lack of online information; poor quality of information and assistance services; lack of availability of online procedures (especially for non-national users); poor awareness of their existence and accessibility for foreign users; and a lack of overview of their general performance. The SDG Regulation is expected to remedy many of these problems. However, **further measures** can be taken to facilitate its implementation, including the **harmonisation** of the **acceptance of remote identification** methods and supporting measures for **cross-border payments** and the **submission of electronic evidence** in the context of the SDG.

**"Best practice" can be difficult to define** in relation to PSCs because of the centrality of **users' experiences and context**. Overall, contact points are often criticised for taking into account an administrative rather than user point of view. Therefore, user feedback, web analytics or survey data should be used to determine the most useful designs for

contact points. "Your Europe" is an example of a good portal, as it is **accessible** to foreign users, offers **performance statistics** and good **navigation**, and **takes users into consideration**.



Currently, there are a **range of weaknesses in the legal framework**. These are related to: disparity; the heterogeneity in provision; the need for more precise guidance; the current administrative (not user) perspective; the lack of data, no benchmarking, no learning from best practice; the lack of enforcement powers; outstanding shortcomings in the legal framework; and the need for improved definitions of some concepts.

## Conclusions and recommendations

To increase the development of contact points, there is a need for more monitoring and enforcement, including penalties when breaches are found. On the basis of this, the study makes two main recommendations and three additional recommendations:

- **Improve monitoring:** use existing indicators provided by the Single Market Scoreboard (SMS) and develop new ones, exploit Articles 24-26 of the SDG Regulation to enhance monitoring, propose neutral measures and encourage the breakdown of data for comparison and benchmarking purposes;
- **Improve enforcement:** use the Commission's power to initiate infringement proceedings as introduced by the SDG Regulation in case of non-compliance by Member States;
- **Complementary legislative and implementing initiatives:** harmonise acceptance of remote identification methods under the eIDAS Regulation, promote the use of electronic identification under the SDG Regulation and support the removal of barriers related to the submission of electronic evidence for online procedures and cross-border payments;
- **Present new, clear definitions and avoid using the same terminology for different concepts:** clarify and define the different instruments and concepts relating to contact points and provide homogeneity in the concepts and terminology used in different regulations and policy documents; and
- **Move to outcomes-based approaches for the evaluation and monitoring of contact points:** progressively abandon prescriptive approaches about contact point design, take into account experiences from broader regulatory practices and encourage learning from successful experiences in different Member States.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658179/IPOL\\_STU\(2020\)658179\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658179/IPOL_STU(2020)658179_EN.pdf).

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