



POLICY BRIEF

Understanding the EU Once-Only Technical System (OOTS)

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union is undergoing a significant digital transformation to simplify how public services are delivered to citizens and businesses. Central to this effort is the Once-Only Principle (OOP), which aims to eliminate the need for individuals and companies to repeatedly provide the same information to different government bodies. If one public authority already has the information in electronic form, others should be able to access it securely, reducing paperwork and improving service efficiency.

The [Once-Only Technical System \(OOTS\)](#) is the practical tool designed to make this principle a reality. It is a digital network that allows different EU countries to share information and official documents directly and securely. This system is not limited to specific sectors; it can be used for various administrative tasks, making it easier for governments to work together without needing citizens or businesses to act as go-betweens. This marks a shift from traditional paper-based processes to a more streamlined, data-focused approach, where public administrations handle data exchanges themselves, fostering trust and cooperation.

The legal framework supporting the OOTS is the [Single Digital Gateway Regulation](#) (Regulation (EU) 2018/1724), which sets the rules for creating a digital environment where public administrations can share information reliably. An additional Implementing Regulation ((EU) 2022/1463) ensures that all EU countries apply these rules consistently. In other words, a series of online procedures should be fully operational, allowing people to identify themselves, complete applications, and provide necessary documents through the OOTS. These procedures cover important life events, such as studying, moving, working, retiring, or starting a business across EU borders, enhancing the freedom of movement and reducing bureaucratic obstacles.

Drafted based on a thorough desk research and review of all available content on the topic, this policy brief aims to explain the OOTS in simple terms for public administrations. By providing clear information, this policy brief seeks to empower these entities to move one step closer to effectively using the OOTS, thereby improving administrative processes and promoting greater integration across Europe.

WHY OOTS MATTERS: OVERCOMING CROSS-BORDER ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

Navigating cross-border administrative processes within the European Union has historically been a complex and frustrating experience for both citizens and businesses. Individuals often find themselves having to identify equivalent documents across different Member States and repeatedly submit the same information to various public authorities.





This process can be confusing and time-consuming, with information scattered across multiple websites that may not always be reliable or up-to-date. Additionally, many procedures still rely on paper-based methods or require physical visits to offices, leading to unnecessary delays and costs. Cross-border users also face challenges with national procedures that are tailored for domestic use, requiring specific local details like phone numbers or postal codes. These inefficiencies not only inconvenience users but also hinder the development of a seamless Single Market, affecting both mobility and economic activity. The fragmented nature of these processes creates barriers to the free movement of people and goods, which are fundamental principles of the EU.

The OOTS aims to tackle these issues by creating a secure network that connects public authorities across the EU, enabling the direct exchange of official documents and data. This system removes the need for citizens to act as intermediaries or repeatedly provide the same information, thereby reducing administrative burden. The OOTS serves as a strategic tool to unlock economic and social potential, fostering a more competitive and inclusive European Union. By streamlining the exchange of information, the OOTS helps removing redundant steps and ensures that data is shared efficiently and accurately. These interconnected systems enhance the overall user experience, making administrative processes more straightforward and less burdensome.

For citizens, the OOTS simplifies various processes, making it easier to study, relocate, work, retire, or conduct business anywhere in the EU. Since 2024, individuals should be able to use their national eID to request the direct sharing of necessary documents between authorities, without having to identify matching evidence themselves. Importantly, citizens maintain control over their personal data, providing explicit consent for sharing and having the right to review data before it is exchanged. This ensures a secure and privacy-friendly environment. As part of the Single Digital Gateway, the OOTS will digitalise and streamline numerous procedures, such as vehicle registration and pension claims, reducing bureaucratic hurdles. By facilitating the exchange of evidence from authentic sources, the OOTS enhances trust in digital public services, minimising risks of fraud and errors. The system's ability to guarantee the provenance and accuracy of data significantly improves the reliability and credibility of public administrations, fostering greater confidence in digital interactions.

Businesses, especially SMEs operating across EU borders, face similar challenges in navigating diverse national regulations and completing administrative tasks. The Single Digital Gateway, with the OOTS as a key component, is expected to save companies over [€11 billion](#) annually and boost cross-border economic activity. The OOTS simplifies essential business procedures, including activity notifications, pension and insurance registrations, and corporate tax submissions. Implementing the "once-only" principle for data registration is projected to yield benefits of around [€5 billion](#) per year for both businesses and citizens. By reducing the time and resources spent on administrative tasks, businesses can focus more on their core activities, driving innovation and growth. The streamlined processes also make it easier for businesses to expand and operate across different Member States, enhancing their competitiveness in the Single Market.

By addressing these challenges, the OOTS plays a vital role in improving the efficiency and reliability of public services, promoting greater European integration, and supporting economic growth across the EU. The system's ability to facilitate seamless data exchange and reduce administrative burdens is crucial for fostering a more dynamic and interconnected European Union, where citizens and businesses can fully leverage the opportunities of the Single Market.

OOTS BENEFITS	 <p>Efficiency & Cost Savings</p>	 <p>User Experience & Empowerment</p>	 <p>Data Quality & Trust</p>	 <p>Single Market Integration</p>
FOR CITIZENS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reduced time and effort for administrative procedures ✓ Eliminated need for repeated document submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Easier cross-border study, work, and relocation ✓ Full control over data via explicit consent and preview ✓ Faster and simpler administrative procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Confidence that personal data is securely exchanged from authentic sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dismantling of administrative barriers to free movement ✓ More tangible benefits of EU membership
FOR BUSINESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reduced administrative burden and costs ✓ Faster compliance with regulatory requirements ✓ Less duplication of effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Simplified regulatory procedures across borders ✓ Easier market access in other Member States 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Trust that business data is exchanged securely and accurately between authorities ✓ Lower risk of data breaches or compliance errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Smoother cross-border operations and service provision ✓ Boost to internal market participation
FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Significant reduction in administrative burden and processing costs ✓ Streamlined internal processes ✓ Reduced manual verification and paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enhanced ability to serve citizens more effectively ✓ Improved data accuracy for decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Improved authenticity and update of exchanged data ✓ Enhanced trust in cross-border data exchange ✓ Reduced risk of fraud and errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Facilitates seamless cross-border collaboration and data exchange ✓ Supports broader EU digital transformation goals

INSIDE THE OOTS: TECHNICAL COMPONENTS AND HOW IT WORKS

The previous sections introduced the OOTS and explained why the solution matters and which challenges it intends to solve. With this context in place, this section will now examine the technical aspects of the OOTS by explaining its core components and how the system facilitates the exchange of information.

The OOTS operates on a decentralised architecture, meaning that control, data, and decision-making are distributed across multiple entities (Member States), rather than concentrated in a single central authority (European Union). This approach uses and connects existing national systems, allowing public authorities to connect to the system while minimising the impact on their existing IT systems. The only requirement Member States must meet is to implement a data exchange platform that acts as an intermediary connecting the national data sources to the OOTS.

The functioning of the OOTS relies on two key interoperability enablers, that are already used in the EU:

- **eID** (electronic identification): This is a secure way for individuals and businesses to prove who they are when accessing public services online. With eID, users can log in using their national digital identity—such as an ID card or a mobile app—to start a procedure or request information, even when dealing with a public authority in another EU country. This ensures that the right person is accessing the right data, safely and efficiently.
- **eDelivery**: This is a secure digital channel that allows public administrations in different countries to send and receive official information and documents. It works like a trusted postal system for digital data. Because the OOTS is based on a decentralised model, each country can set up its own eDelivery access point, choosing what works best for its systems—whether that's one national connection point or multiple regional ones. This flexibility ensures reliable, secure communication between authorities, while keeping national systems in place.

Next to these interoperability enablers, the European Commission provides essential **Once-Only Common Services** that Member States integrate with to enable the system's functionality. These services are outlined below.

- **Online Procedure Portal**: This is the interface through which users initiate administrative procedures and request the exchange of evidence.
- **Data Service**: This component acts as the interface connecting the OOTS to national data sources within each Member State.
- **Data Service Directory (DSD)**: An EU-wide catalogue that enables requesting authorities to discover which evidence providers in other Member States can supply specific types of evidence.
- **Evidence Broker**: This service automates the complex mapping of evidence types between different Member States' systems. It publishes what types of evidence each Member State can provide for particular procedural requirements.

- **Semantic Repository:** This component ensures semantic agreement across the system and stores machine-readable metadata about the various assets and evidence types.

Member States can further help individual competent authorities (entities that need to connect to the OOTS) by using Intermediary Platforms. These technical solutions act as a central platform, connecting multiple competent authorities to the OOTS via an easier-to-integrate interface.

The OOTS is designed around a clear, user-centric process for the exchange of data, ensuring transparency and user control by design. The process of exchanging data involves seven steps, which are explained in the visual below.



The OOTS user journey focuses on user consent and explicit control over personal data, representing a strategic design choice to build and maintain public trust in cross-border data exchange. This is crucial as automated data sharing may potentially cause concern among public administrations and citizens. Instead, the user-controlled journey contributes to the legitimacy and success of the OOTS.

FROM VISION TO REALITY: IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY

While the previous section introduced the technical building blocks of OOTS, this section outlines how these components are being put into practice and the collaborative effort involved in their implementation.

A collaborative implementation across Member States

The implementation of the OOTS is a collaborative effort between the European Commission, Member States and competent authorities. Because of the decentralised nature of the solution, Member States bear the primary responsibility for the system, developing or upgrading several critical national components to integrate with the system. This includes their national Online Procedure Portals, which must incorporate a preview area for users; the cross-border evidence exchange infrastructure, specifically eDelivery Access Points; Data Services that connect to national data sources; and the Data Sources themselves.

The European Commission provides essential "[common services](#)" that Member States integrate with. These include the Evidence Broker, Data Service Directory, eDelivery Common Services, and the Semantic Repository mentioned before. These common services have been fully operational and available for use since December 2023, providing a stable foundation for national implementations.

Member States are currently engaged in a comprehensive initiative to consult with competent authorities at all levels, including regional and local administrations. This effort aims to accurately identify the specific administrative procedures, portals, and responsible authorities that will be required to integrate with the OOTS for efficient cross-border evidence requesting and provision. This presents a dual challenge: it involves not only technical integration but also the substantial organisational and human effort required to connect potentially tens of thousands of diverse public authorities, many of which are local, across the EU. Even with the core technical infrastructure largely in place, the organisational and human aspect of connecting these numerous entities, and integrating their processes, remains an ongoing challenge. The ultimate success of the OOTS would not only be a technical achievement but it also heavily relies on the cooperation between Member States and the public administrations within these Member States. Member States should offer enough guidance so that public administrations – whose integration is crucial for the system's success – can adapt their internal processes, integrate their systems and adequately train their staff. This involves pro-active communication and guidance towards local authorities as well as hands-on assistance when integrating onto the national solution.

To transparently track and monitor the progress of Member States in implementing the OOTS, the Commission developed the [OOTS Acceleratormeter](#). This tool shows at which stage of the implementation journey each Member State is, indicating their readiness for end-user transactions and integration of local public administrations.

Key actors involved

To guide the diverse range of stakeholders involved in the OOTS implementation, the Commission provides comprehensive resources such as the [OOTS Onboarding Playbook](#) and [Toolkit](#). Key actors in national implementation include:

- **National Coordinators:** These individuals or entities lead or significantly contribute to the central OOTS implementation within their respective EU or EEA country. They are crucial for coordinating national efforts and managing user access to OOTS tools.
- **Evidence Requesters:** These are competent authorities responsible for one or more procedures covered by the OOTS where a user needs to submit supporting evidence. They will use the OOTS to retrieve evidence from other Member States.
- **Evidence Providers:** These are competent authorities legally authorised to issue evidence for OOTS-covered procedures. They are responsible for making their data available through the OOTS by creating and linking evidence types to procedural requirements within the Common Services Administration Tool.
- **Intermediary Platforms:** These are technical solutions that can connect multiple evidence providers or requesters to the OOTS. They serve to abstract the technical complexities, offering an easier-to-integrate interface for competent authorities.

National support for local authorities

To facilitate the effective integration of the OOTS at the local level, national governments play a crucial role in providing direct support to their competent authorities. This can include developing and deploying Intermediary Platforms, as mentioned before. Additionally, national governments are responsible for translating EU-level guidance into country-specific technical specifications and providing comprehensive training programs and helpdesk support. This ensures that local administrations understand new workflows, adapt their internal processes, and effectively utilise the national systems connected to the OOTS. By coordinating national efforts, offering tailored technical assistance, and ensuring the legal frameworks are in place, national governments enable local authorities to participate fully. The increase in adoption, in turn, is essential for fully unlocking the OOTS' added value for EU citizens.

IMPACT: IMPROVED EXPERIENCE FOR CITIZENS, BUSINESSES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

The OOTS is set to transform how public administrations across the EU handle cross-border administrative tasks. By simplifying the way data is retrieved and shared, OOTS makes these processes more efficient. One of the major benefits is the increased trust in the information exchanged. Public authorities can receive data directly from reliable sources using a secure system, ensuring they always get the most up-to-date version. This applies to all types of information, reducing the need for manual checks and cutting down on administrative work. The system also provides a list of trusted evidence providers across the EU, making it easier for administrations to verify the authenticity and freshness of the data they receive.

While new policies can sometimes add to the workload, the OOTS is designed to lighten the load by automating data exchanges, which helps save time and money. Successful examples, like the Netherlands' open data efforts, show how making data reusable can reduce the workload and costs for government workers. The OOTS is more than just a rule to follow; it's a strategic move towards creating a more efficient, transparent, and citizen-friendly public sector across Europe. By focusing on performance and reducing costs through digital solutions, the OOTS helps modernise public services and build trust in government.

The OOTS also significantly enhances the experience for both citizens and businesses within the EU. For individuals, OOTS simplifies the process of accessing information from authorities in other countries, eliminating the need to act as intermediaries or search for equivalent documents. Businesses, on the other hand, especially those operating across borders, benefit from the OOTS by streamlining the navigation of diverse national regulations and administrative tasks. This efficiency reduces the time and resources spent on paperwork, enabling companies to focus on core activities and drive innovation. The simplified procedures enhance competitiveness within the Single Market, facilitating expansion and boosting cross-border economic activity.

The [eGovernment Benchmark 2025 report](#) highlights the importance of the OOTS in making digital services more accessible to people moving between countries. It stresses the need for strong cybersecurity to protect data, maintain trust, and ensure Europe's digital systems are resilient. While the OOTS offers great benefits in terms of efficiency and convenience, any security issues could damage public trust and slow down its adoption. Therefore, investing in cybersecurity, clear data management, and transparent communication about data protection is crucial for the OOTS' success.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO GET STARTED

For public administrations interested in implementing the OOTS, practical steps and guidance are essential. This section provides key lessons learned and recommendations which aim to offer a helpful guide for connecting to the OOTS.

The implementation of the OOTS and broader EU digital transformation efforts offer valuable insights. A primary lesson highlights the importance of interoperability and standardisation. The OOTS is an interoperability layer, and the recent Interoperable Europe Act reinforces the need for common standards to avoid fragmentation, errors, and inefficiencies in data exchange. This is an ongoing commitment requiring public administrations to adapt to evolving standards. Secondly, user-centric design and accessibility are not just preferred but essential for widespread adoption. The system must be intuitive, easy-to-use, and accessible to all, with "consent and preview" principles at its core to enhance trust and control. Thirdly, effective stakeholder coordination and communication are of essence. Successful OOTS implementation requires strong cooperation between the Commission, Member States, and critically, local authorities. Finally, learning from pilot projects and national digitalisation efforts is a good way to acquire hands-on knowledge. Participating in [Projectathons](#) or national initiatives is also helpful to get a tangible understanding of what the OOTS implementation entails. In fact, the success of the OOTS depends on "last mile" implementation. Therefore, connecting local administrations is key to ensure system-wide success. Commission and national efforts must translate into practical, understandable and well-supported actions at the local level.

In concrete terms, to ensure a smooth and effective implementation of the OOTS, public administrations should consider the following key steps to get started.

Build strong foundations

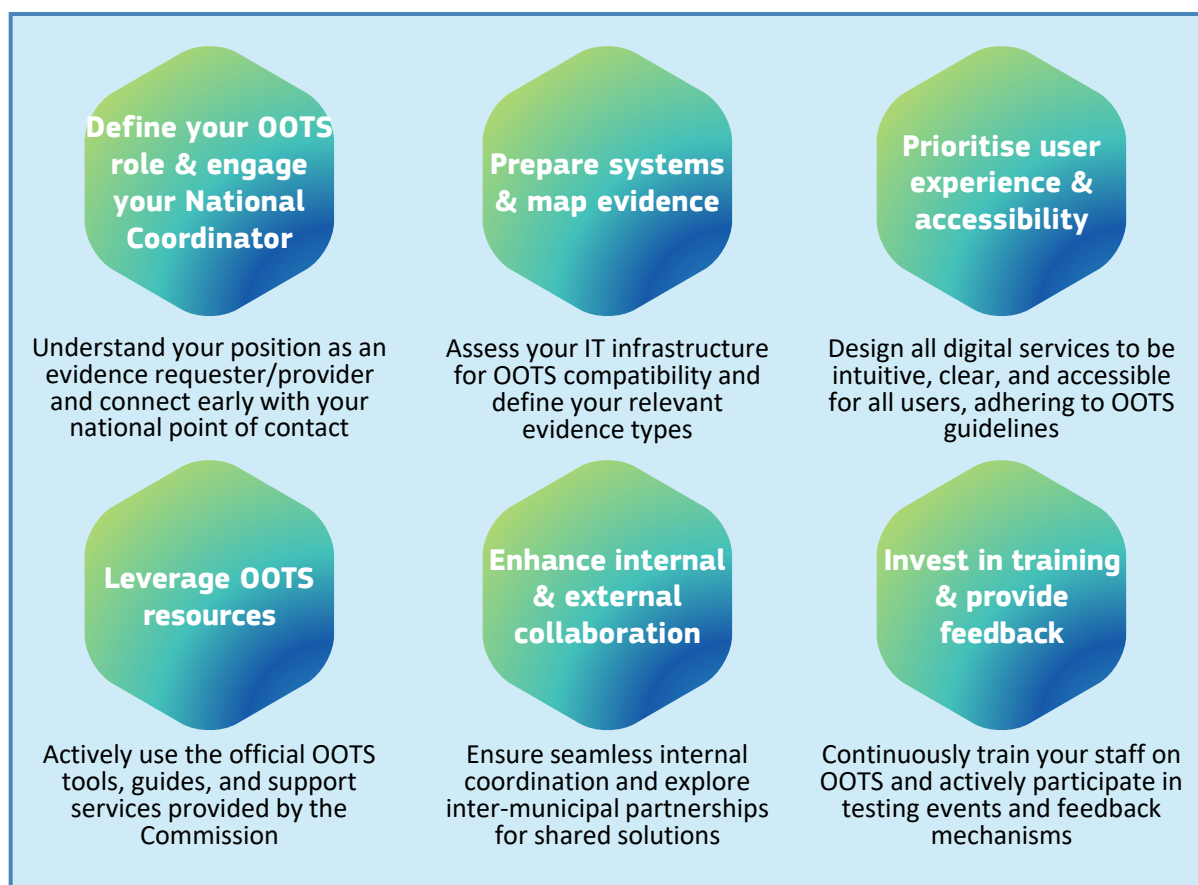
- **Identify your OOTS role:** Determine if your administration will primarily be an "Evidence Requester" or "Evidence Provider," or both, to guide implementation.
- **Engage your National Coordinator:** Establish early contact with your country's National Coordinator for guidance, roadmap, and national support structures.
- **Assess existing systems:** Evaluate current portals and back-end systems for OOTS compatibility, and investigate leveraging national data exchange infrastructure.
- **Map evidence types:** Systematically identify and define all relevant evidence types for your administration within the OOTS Common Services Administration Tool.
- **Prioritise UX and accessibility:** Design online portals with clear language, intuitive navigation, and robust accessibility, adhering to OOTS UX Recommendations.

Leverage available resources and guidance

- **Utilise OOTS resources:** Consult the Onboarding Playbook, Toolkit, Common Services Administration Tool, OOTS Hub, and Service Desk for comprehensive support and documentation.
- **Explore reusable services:** Investigate the Catalogue of Reusable Services to leverage existing solutions and avoid redundant efforts.

Enhance collaboration and capacity building

- **Strengthen internal coordination:** Ensure seamless coordination across internal departments (IT, legal, service delivery).
- **Explore inter-municipal collaboration:** Seek opportunities to collaborate with other local/regional administrations for shared solutions and reduced complexity.
- **Participate in testing events:** Engage in national or EU-level Projectathons to ensure interoperability and receive expert support.
- **Invest in continuous training:** Provide ongoing training for staff on OOTS technical aspects, user-centric design, and data protection.
- **Provide constructive feedback:** Leverage feedback mechanisms to report obstacles and contribute to OOTS improvement.





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