



European
Commission

UK FACTSHEET

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DIGITAL CONTRACTS FOR EUROPE



What is the untapped potential of cross-border e-commerce in the United Kingdom?

Businesses

Despite the rapid growth of e-commerce, most businesses in the UK do not yet make the most of the Digital Single Market.

Only 7% of British retailers sell online to consumers in other EU countries while **more than one third** (34%) sell online in their own country.



Differences in national contract laws are a significant obstacle for cross-border sales for **more than one third of British retailers** (36%) currently selling online.

If the same rules for e-commerce applied across the EU, **49% of British businesses** that are either active or interested in online cross-border trade would 'definitely' or 'to some extent' start or increase their online cross-border sales.



Consumers

Consumers in the United Kingdom also miss out on the potential of broader choice of products and better prices. **Only 18%** buy online from other EU countries, while 71% buy online in their own country.



Low confidence plays a key role: **only 48% of British consumers feel confident** buying online from another EU country.

Three out of ten consumers' top concerns about buying online from other EU countries are related to key contract law rights, such as non-delivery of their order, delivery of a wrong or damaged product, or repair and replacement of a faulty product.

42% of British consumers who accessed four popular types of **digital content** (music, games, anti-virus software

and cloud storage) over the last 12 months had **at least one problem** related to the quality, access or terms and conditions of the content they had paid for. Moreover, 22% had at least one problem with content that they did not pay for with money.



22%

What solution is the European Commission proposing?

The Commission is proposing two Directives: one for digital content and another for goods. Together they will ensure that the same key contract law rules apply across the EU for online purchases of goods and the supply of digital content.

Businesses

How will these Directives improve life for businesses in the United Kingdom?

Businesses in the United Kingdom will be able to supply digital content and sell goods online to consumers throughout the EU, based on the same set of contract law rules. This will increase legal certainty and create a business friendly environment.



When supplying digital content, businesses will avoid the cost of legal fragmentation which is emerging due to the lack of EU wide rules and the fact that some Member States are starting to put into place specific national legislations. When selling goods, UK businesses will save the costs of adapting to the contract law rules of every Member State they wish to sell in.



Common rules across the EU will reduce contract law-related consumer concerns. More **consumers** will be encouraged **to start buying online from other EU countries**, thus creating a market of up to **70 million** online cross-border buyers. This will open up new markets and will be particularly beneficial for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), who need to build their customer-base and often need to go beyond their home market.



Consumers

How will these Directives improve life for consumers in the United Kingdom?

Consumers in the United Kingdom will have access to offers from more traders across the EU and will therefore benefit from a **wider choice of products**, at **more competitive prices**.

Consumers will have specific rights with a high level of protection when accessing digital content and buying

goods online. For digital content, the new EU rules will add to the level of protection UK consumers already enjoy under the recently enacted 'Consumer Rights Act'.

DIGITAL CONTENT:



Supplier's liability for defects: If the digital content is defective, consumers will have the same rights regardless of whether they pay with money or give their personal data to the supplier in order to access the content (e.g. by simply registering).



Reversal of burden of proof: If the digital content is defective, it will not be up to the consumer to prove that the defect existed at the time of supply, but rather for the supplier to prove that this is not the case. There will be no time limit for this reversal of burden of proof, considering that the technical nature of digital content can make it especially difficult for consumers to prove the cause of a problem.



Right to end a contract: Consumers will have the right to terminate long-term contracts, and contracts to which the supplier makes major changes.

GOODS:



Reversal of the burden of proof for two years: Currently in the UK, for a period of 6 months a consumer asking for a remedy for a defective product does not have to prove that the defect existed at the time of delivery; it is up to the seller to prove the opposite. The time period during which the seller has this burden of proof will now be extended to two years.

How will these Directives contribute to economic growth?

Removing contract law-related obstacles will facilitate cross-border trade.



The increased economic activity is expected to **increase EU GDP** by **€4 billion** from its current level.



UK's GDP in particular is expected to increase by about **€1.12 billion**.



Increased competition will drive consumer prices down throughout the EU. This will lead to additional consumer welfare and is estimated to increase household consumption in the EU by **€18 billion** from its current level.



In the **UK**, the decrease of consumer prices is estimated to increase household consumption by **€4.6 billion**.

SOURCES:

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- *Eurostat Survey on Internet purchases by individuals (2015)*
- *Eurobarometer 397 'Consumer attitudes towards cross-border trade and consumer protection' (2014)*
- *'Consumer surveys identifying the main cross-border obstacles to the Digital Single Market and where they matter most', GfK (2015)*
- *'Economic Study on Consumer Digital Content Products', ICF International (2015)*
- *'The Macro-economic Impact of e-Commerce in the EU Digital Single Market' (2015)*

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