



EU Single Use Plastic

The EU Commission has published its guidelines on single-use plastic products: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/pdf/plastics/guidelines_single-use_plastics_products.pdf

The Directive on single-use plastics (SUP Directive) was adopted in June 2019. To support implementation and ensure a harmonised application, the European Commission published on 31 May 2021 guidelines on single-use plastic rules. It provides guidelines on the definition of plastic, of single-use plastic products made wholly or partly of plastic, and the different items covered by the Directive.

Under the Directive, the **definition of plastic** includes materials consisting of a polymer to which additives or other substances may have been added, and which can function as a main structural component of final products, with the exception of natural polymers that have not been chemically modified. The Directive exempts paints, inks and adhesives.

The guidelines clarify that **biodegradable/bio-based plastics** are considered to be plastic under the SUP Directive. Considering the fast developments in this area, it will be reviewed in 2027. On this matter, the Commission also plans to develop in 2022 a policy framework on the use of biodegradable or compostable plastics, based on an assessment of the applications where such use can be beneficial to the environment, and of the criteria for such applications.

The guidelines also clarify that **single-use paper-based products with plastic lining or coating** are included in the scope of the Directive. When a plastic coating or lining is applied to the surface of a paper- or board-based or other material to provide protection against water or fat, the final product is considered a composite product composed of more than one material of which one is plastic. In this case, the final product is seen as being made partly of plastic and therefore fall within the scope of the Directive.

Packets and wrappers are typical flexible packaging products processed by the flexo industry. They are in scope of the Directive when “made from flexible material containing food that is intended for immediate consumption without any further preparation”. Under the Directive, they are subject to an Extended Producer Responsibility scheme and awareness raising campaigns.

The guidelines clarify that packets and wrappers of crisps, sweets, chocolate bars, biscuits, nuts, frozen goods in single units are in scope. So are wrappings for multiple-serve portions like bakery goods, as well as sandwich wrappers. On the contrary, packets of breakfast cereals or uncooked pasta are excluded from the scope of the Directive.

On the **impact of COVID on the implementation of the SUP Directive**, the Commission says the Directive does not cover personal protection equipment like single-use face masks or gloves that have increased in use and in litter in the environment due to the efforts to fight the COVID pandemic. Food containers are included in the scope of the Directive but they are still allowed to be placed on the market. Member States should only ensure that their overall consumption is reduced, without compromising food safety.

Note that **wet wipes** are included in the scope of the Directive. The guidelines clarify that printing industry wipes (used for machine cleaning) are excluded from the scope of the Directive.