

AFFORDABLE COMMUNICATIONS FOR BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

Information and communication technologies (ICTs), as well as data services, now surpass traditional telephone services in importance for both consumers and businesses. With the surge in on-demand content and 4G/5G growth, the EU has introduced a telecommunications regulatory framework. This encompasses all types of telecommunications, including broadcasting. Research indicates that telecommunications services, network equipment, content and applications contribute up to EUR 1 trillion to the EU's GDP annually, representing about 4.7% of the EU's GDP.

LEGAL BASIS

Since the Treaties did not provide for any direct powers in the field of electronic communication networks and services, jurisdiction over this field has instead been drawn from various articles within the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Given the complex nature of media goods and services, which can be defined neither solely as cultural goods nor simply as economic goods, policies have to be created based on that jurisdiction. The EU may take relevant actions within the framework of sectoral and horizontal policies, such as: industrial policy (Article 173 TFEU); competition policy (Articles 101-109 TFEU); trade policy (Articles 206 and 207 TFEU); the trans-European networks (Articles 170-172 TFEU); research and technological development and space (Articles 179-190 TFEU); the approximation of laws for technological harmonisation or the use of similar technological standards (Article 114 TFEU); the free movement of goods (Articles 28, 30 and 34-35 TFEU); the free movement of people, services and capital (Articles 45-66 TFEU); education, vocational training, youth and sport (Articles 165 and 166 TFEU); and culture (Article 167 TFEU).

OBJECTIVES

Following on from the Lisbon Strategy, the 10-year Digital Agenda for Europe, published in 2010, identified for the first time the key enabling role of ICTs in helping the EU to reach its goals. In 2015, the agenda further built on the five-year digital single market (DSM) strategy to ensure a fair, open and secure digital environment based on three pillars: providing consumers and businesses with better access to digital goods and services across Europe, creating the right conditions for digital networks and services to flourish, and maximising the growth potential of the digital economy.

In 2020, the second five-year digital strategy, 'Shaping Europe's digital future', focused on three key objectives: technology that works for people, a fair and competitive economy, and an open, democratic and sustainable society. In 2021, it was followed by the 10-year 'Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade', which translates the EU's digital ambitions for 2030 into concrete terms.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Digital single market

In 2015, the Commission published the DSM strategy ([COM\(2015\)0192](#)) aimed at removing virtual borders, boosting digital connectivity and making it easier for consumers to access cross-border online content.

This commitment to boosting digital connectivity has been renewed in the EU's '[2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade](#)', as one of its cardinal points that focuses on the expansion of infrastructure. According to the communication, all EU households should have gigabit connectivity and all populated areas should be covered by 5G. Moreover, the production of cutting-edge and sustainable semiconductors in Europe should amount to 20% of global production and 10 000 climate-neutral, highly secure edge nodes should be deployed across the EU. On 17 January 2022, the EU launched its first quantum computer, a highly advanced technology system that forms part of the Jülich Supercomputing Centre in Germany.

B. Roaming Regulation

The Roaming Regulation established the 'roam like at home' rule that mandated the end of retail roaming charges as of 15 June 2017 in the EU, while also establishing price caps on wholesale charges to enable both cost recovery and sustainable 'roam like at home'. The regulation represents part of the EU's DSM achievements and was in force until 30 June 2022. Given its success, by showing how EU citizens benefit from the DSM, a [new regulation was published in April 2022](#) to extend free roaming throughout the EU until 2032. It also bans additional charges greater than the wholesale roaming caps once consumers have exceeded their roaming limits. EU roaming rules stopped applying to the United Kingdom once it left the single market on 31 December 2020.

C. European Electronic Communications Code

In 2015 and 2016, the Commission introduced [proposals to reform the EU telecommunications regulatory framework](#), including the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC) to replace four key directives. The EECC ([Directive \(EU\) 2018/1972](#)), which came into force in December 2018, updated the EU's telecommunications regulations. Additionally, in December 2020, EU-wide voice termination rates were established under Commission [Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2021/654](#), with rates of EUR 0.07 cent per minute for fixed calls put in place in 2022 and EUR 0.2 cent per minute for mobile calls to be introduced by 2024.

D. Regulation on privacy and security

Better protection for consumers and businesses has been ensured by the following measures: the adoption of legislation on privacy ([Directive 2009/136/EC](#)) and data protection ([Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679](#) and [Directive \(EU\) 2016/680](#)); strengthening the mandate of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity^[1]; the adoption of [Directive \(EU\) 2016/1148](#) concerning measures for a high common level of security of

[1]Established under [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/881](#), the Cybersecurity Act repeals Regulation (EC) No 460/2004 and significantly revamps the mandate and scope of the agency. It expands its responsibilities to include a wider range of cybersecurity issues, such as setting up a framework for a European cybersecurity certification of ICT products, services, and processes, and increasing its role in supporting Member States in handling cybersecurity threats and attacks.

network and information systems across the EU (the NIS Directive); strengthening the right to change fixed-line or mobile operator within one working day while retaining one's original phone number, i.e. number portability ([Directive 2009/136/EC](#)), and establishing the 112 single European emergency number (Directive 2009/136/EC), the 116 000 missing children helpline, the 116 111 child helpline, the 116 123 emotional support helpline, and an [online platform](#) for dispute resolution between consumers and online traders.

In order to further develop the NIS Directive, [Directive \(EU\) 2022/2555](#) (the NIS2 Directive), published in December 2022, will effectively ensure that the level of cybersecurity in private and public organisations is well matched to the contemporary challenges these organisations face.

E. Competition and market regulations

Better access to telecommunications has been ensured by the introduction of legislation to stimulate competition with clear and inclusive rules, better quality, better prices and more services ([the EECC](#)); by investing in broadband networks supporting high-speed internet; by supporting wireless technologies, such as LTE and 5G, through the radio spectrum policy programme; and [by harmonising the use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band in the EU](#) to establish gigabit connectivity for all the main socio-economic drivers.

In order to improve the consistency of national regulatory procedures for telecommunications, the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (established by [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1971](#)) provides for cooperation between national regulators and the Commission. It promotes best practices and common approaches, while at the same time avoiding inconsistent regulation that could cause distortions in the DSM. This updated legislation puts the National Regulatory Authorities in charge of promoting competition in the provision of electronic communication networks and services, as well as setting out the principles underpinning their operation: independence, impartiality and transparency, and the right of appeal.

On 23 November 2022, Parliament and the Council adopted [Directive \(EU\) 2022/2380](#), introducing a 'common charging solution' for, inter alia, mobile phones, tablets, headphones and portable navigation systems, as of 2024. The same harmonisation will also gradually apply to laptops by 2026. The directive aims to promote technological innovation, oppose market fragmentation and reduce the environmental impact of producing chargers and supports the EU's circular economy strategy.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliament advocates a robust and advanced ICT policy and has been very active in the adoption of legislative acts in this area to increase benefits for consumers and businesses.

Parliament has recalled the need to use the 'digital dividend' spectrum to provide broadband to all EU citizens and has stressed that further action is needed to ensure ubiquitous and high-speed access to broadband, as well as [digital literacy](#)

[and competences for all citizens and consumers](#). It likewise [stresses the importance of security in cyberspace](#) in order to ensure robust protection for privacy and civil liberties for consumers and businesses in a digital environment. At the same time, Parliament strongly promotes technological neutrality, 'net neutrality' and 'net freedoms' for EU citizens.

Parliament systematically consolidates these guarantees through legislation. It plays a key role in removing obstacles within the DSM and modernising EU telecommunications rules that apply to today's digital and data-driven products and services [to increase digital benefits for consumers and businesses](#). Examples include: [Directive 2014/61/EU](#) on measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks and [Regulation \(EU\) No 910/2014](#) on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market to facilitate electronic businesses. In response to the Commission's proposals, Parliament has supported the modernisation of [copyright rules](#) and the updating of EU [audiovisual media services rules](#).

Furthermore, Parliament has successfully finalised the legislative work on data protection with [Directive \(EU\) 2016/680](#) and [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679](#). It has carried out extensive legislative work on the proposals presented as a follow-up to the DSM strategy and its [resolution entitled 'Towards a Digital Single Market Act'](#). Parliament also adopted a [resolution on internet connectivity for growth, competitiveness and cohesion: European gigabit society and 5G](#) backing the timetable for 5G deployment to facilitate connectivity for consumers and businesses.

[A study on new developments in digital services](#) has suggested that advancements towards 6G will be vital for EU businesses and consumers. A new [report](#) revealed that the European connectivity ecosystem – which includes telecommunications services, network equipment, content and applications – was valued at approximately EUR 1 trillion in 2023, representing about 4.7% of the EU's GDP.

For more information on this topic, please see the websites of the Committee on the [Internal Market and Consumer Protection](#) and the Committee on [Industry, Research and Energy](#).

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