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## Digital matters: empowering our society

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Digital transformation started decades ago. Over the years technology has become an inevitable part of our daily lives and its utility to society and economy is undeniable. The experience of the past two years reminded us all that the future is connected. This decade is digital.

### From Targets to Principles for Europe's Digital Decade

Paving the way for inclusive digital transformation has become Europe's trademark. The GDPR was the first signal, but not an isolated one; the DMA and DSA are the necessary follow-ups that are on the radar of all continents as a potential playbook for technology that works for people. And there is more.

Some weeks ago, the European Commission [presented](#) the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade, which intends to become a joint manifesto endorsed also by the European Parliament and member states. The six chapters gravitate around a single pole of power: **people**. From connectivity, sustainability, online safety and security, to inclusion and digital skills, all Europeans will be more empowered when going online. There should be no difference with respect to their offline activities: from rights to privacy and security.

### Telcos advance the Principles

The telecommunications industry is committed to advancing the Principles. More than that: our networks and services are a crucial enabler of such principles. As a matter of fact, the work has already begun on various pillars. Starting with the backbone, telcos have made access to 5G and FTTH networks a key investment priority. The latest figures [show](#) that 5G mobile networks cover 62% of Europe, while FTTH has passed the 50% threshold for the first time.

Thanks to state-of-the-art digital networks, our changing digital habits are swiftly accommodated by resilient networks when both at home and on the go. Compared to the pre-pandemic situation, fixed data traffic surged by 53%, while mobile data traffic witnessed an even more spectacular shift, growing by 90%. While telcos are not at the finish line yet, results start shaping up. What is needed now is a consistent political and regulatory support for the investment efforts that will bring 5G and fibre to all Europeans. This is the kind of policy that – directly and indirectly – will help enable the Principles.

## Beyond connectivity

Contributing to the Principles, telcos go beyond their core activities. If they are to be empowered to use digital networks, all Europeans need to be equipped with the right digital skills. New innovative digital services enter the market and we need to be on top of them. This is why up-skilling and re-skilling are equally important: they mutually reinforce each other.

Together with the European Commission and UNI Europa ICTS, ETNO [embarked](#) on a mission to identify and develop best practices related to digital upskilling, inclusion and diversity to serve as examples for the workforce of the European telecommunications sector. Improving gender diversity and upskilling the ageing workforce were discussed by key experts who have identified and presented the best practices on the market. While the project will draw to a close in 2022, with a final conference, it is already clear that digital upskilling, inclusion and diversity are crucial elements of a modern society.

## Greening digital: from aspirations to results

Society wants to know what the green potential of digital really is. Citizens are curious about the environmental and climate impact of the digital products and services they use, so that they can make informed purchasing decisions. What does this look like in practical terms?

Some indicators are relatively easier to measure than others. Existing data shows that the total CO2 emissions of ETNO members in Europe were 2.77 kTonne in 2020, significantly down from 4.67 kTonne in 2017. Looking forward, data projections [show](#) that a widespread uptake of digital solutions can further reduce CO2 emissions by up to 15%. The main drivers are smart cities and the digitalisation of the transport sector.

Lastly, 5 leading mobile operators have launched the “[Eco Rating Initiative](#)” that ranks the sustainability of mobile phones on 5 criteria: durability, repairability, recyclability, climate efficiency and resource efficiency. The initiative has been embraced by the industry and rolled out in more than 24 European countries.

The momentum for the green and digital transition is now a top political priority. The political will is there, but we still need a common framework for assessing the environmental benefits and net impacts of digitally enabled solutions. This is about to change thanks to the European Green Digital Coalition (EGDC), signed by 76 companies active in Europe.

Earlier this year, the EGDC got a [boost](#) by leading European Associations with a clear objective: get practical about the methodology for measuring the impact of digital technologies. The mission is ambitious: spanning over 2 years, the pilot project aims at delivering the first results already in 2022. The outcome will be a first wide-spread initiative that will show Europeans how digital can help them and other businesses go greener.

### **Achieving the objectives, together**

The European Commission's aspirations have been welcomed by both the European civil society and the industry. They go beyond just individual sectors, geographies and political priorities. They bind us all together aiming at shared principles and values. They show that people truly matter in Europe, inspiring the rest of the world to zoom in and learn from our approach. But the effort to keep the principles alive and the focus on the digital targets is a joint one because in the digital ecosystem we are more interconnected than ever.