

Social Partners call for a bolder Digital Networks Act to strengthen the European connectivity ecosystem

Brussels, 16 June 2026 – Connectivity underpins the European way of life. It is the backbone of the European industry – from SMEs to manufacturing, from transports to agriculture, enabling millions of jobs, as well as provision of public services and democratic participation.

European connectivity providers and their workforce are undergoing a monumental transformation as they build European leadership in critical infrastructures, such as 5G, FTTH, and future 6G networks. Already today, European operators are also part of the AI infrastructure and are taking bold actions to expand Europe's sovereign data capacity and cloud.

European consumers enjoy high-quality and innovative connectivity services at low prices by global standards: social partners are proud of this achievement. However, when it comes to digital policy, Europeans should be seen as citizens and workers, not only as consumers. While affordability remains an important aspect, we jointly call on policymakers to urgently act to grow the European connectivity ecosystem, by prioritising quality investment, expanded innovation and increased competitiveness. The Digital Networks Act should help build the basis for a new, positive social contract in the European connectivity ecosystem, one based on investment and innovation to the benefit of all.

Today, the ability of our sector to invest and grow is severely hampered. In 2024, CapEx in European telecoms continued decreasing, to €64.6bn in 2024 compared to €65.8bn in 2023.¹ Connect Europe members provide employment to over a million people in Europe in the ecosystem. Heavy competition in the fragmented European market and low returns on investment are forcing operators to entrust an increasing number of tasks to external providers with the risk of losing internal expertise, rather than offer direct, more stable employment opportunities. In 2024, the number of staff directly employed by Connect Europe members fell by 4.1%.² A truly single European market for connectivity and measures fostering investment would support more sustainable employment across the value chain and promote quality jobs across the Member States.

As European social partners, we share the conviction that it is high time for an ambitious Digital Networks Act (DNA) that creates conditions for unlocking investment, building a truly single market for connectivity, and ensures that workers, consumers and society benefit from digital transition.

We call on the co-legislators to secure truly harmonised EU rules that boost European technological sovereignty, innovation and growth, and quality jobs in a fairer European digital ecosystem based on infrastructure competition and fair rules for all market participants.

Our joint asks:

¹ Connect Europe & Analysys Mason (2026) State of Digital Communications 2026.

² Connect Europe & Analysys Mason (2026) State of Digital Communications 2026.

- **Strengthen European connectivity sector as a foundational layer of European technological sovereignty:** Europe's technological sovereignty depends on innovative, resilient, secure and high-quality connectivity networks and services as the backbone and the only European-owned layer of the European digital ecosystem. The DNA must strengthen Europe's capacity to invest in future-proof connectivity, safeguard strategic infrastructure, and ensure that digital value creation supports quality jobs, skills and social dialogue across the sector.
- **Keep the Connectivity Sector Healthy and Make the DNA an Investment-Conducive Framework for Europe:** The DNA must improve the investment conditions for the transition to fibre, 5G/6G deployment, network innovation and investment in human capital. We call on the European parliament and the Council to support the Commission's proposal on spectrum auctions. While these measures effectively stimulate investment in mobile infrastructure, the draft DNA provisions aimed at accelerating fixed FTTH rollout (currently reaching 77.2% of European households and requiring substantial increase in investment to prevent 41.8 million Europeans being unserved by 2030³) currently fall short from the ambition announced. We are also jointly concerned about the broader societal impact of a top-down transition from copper to fibre, particularly if it is implemented without sufficient flexibility to reflect local market conditions, consumer needs, as well as workforce impacts. The transition to full fibre should be enabled through investment, voluntary take-up and workable migration conditions, not through rigid switch-off obligations that risk reducing consumer choice instead of accelerating FTTH adoption.
- **Build a Genuine Single European Market for Connectivity through Harmonisation and Simplification:** Today, users, SMEs and telecom operators themselves still face significant market and regulatory fragmentation. The sector is still subject to overlapping horizontal and sector-specific regulations, often compounded by additional national rules. Preserving strong consumers protection and safeguarding public interest is compatible with harmonising, simplifying and removing redundant and outdated sector-specific rules where horizontal legislation already provides similar levels of protection (e.g. streamline overlapping obligations by relying on horizontal rules (EU Consumer Rights Directive, General Data Protection Regulation ...)).⁴ A truly integrated single market and simpler, streamlined regulation can strengthen European operators and support sustaining and creating quality jobs and career opportunities in all Member States.
- **Guarantee fair competition and promote social fairness:** The DNA should tackle regulatory asymmetries between European telecom operators and big tech platforms. The objective, as also recognised by Mario Draghi, should be to achieve a level-playing field. As social partners, we underline the importance of the consistent application of same rules and principles to same services across the ecosystem. We should aim for a fairer digital ecosystem in which the workers and the companies who work on the roll-out of physical digital networks are adequately remunerated.

³ Connect Europe & Analysys Mason (2026) State of Digital Communications 2026.

⁴ Arthur D. Little (2025) A Simplification Agenda for European Telecoms, 2025.

- **Involve social partners in the modernisation and implementation of telecom regulation:** We should listen to the workers' perspective, as Europeans are not only consumers but also citizens. We call on decision makers to underline the importance of strong and meaningful social dialogue in the development and implementation of the DNA, as well as other relevant forthcoming legislation. Social partners have a fundamental role in accompanying the digital transition. As digital network infrastructures evolve, the active involvement of social partners is essential to ensure that innovation, investment, and competitiveness go hand in hand with quality employment, as outlined in the Quality Jobs Roadmap.

Connect Europe and UNI Europa call on the decision-makers to make the DNA right and recognise people not only as consumers of digital services, but also as workers and citizens who depend on high-quality connectivity networks and services.

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