

Third Contribution to the October - December 2021 Open Consultation of the ITU CWG-Internet

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Summary

We present here elements take from the European Green Party report *Digital technologies in Europe: An environmental life cycle approach*.

Digital technologies have a considerable environmental impact, and this impact is mainly material. 40% of the environmental impacts of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are due to the depletion of metal resources and the use of fossil resources, mainly to manufacture the devices. Digital technologies for European use alone accounts for 40% of the sustainable GHG emissions budget of Europe to stay below 1.5°C. Almost 10% of European electricity consumption is devoted to digital technologies.

Key recommendations include fewer, longer lasting and more sustainable digital devices. To reduce the number of devices, make them multifunctional. Fight all forms of obsolescence by extending the legal duration of software update periods to a minimum of 5 years. Increase reuse rates by moving from proprietary systems to interoperable and open ones and making the right to return compulsory. Incentivise the durability of products, second hand purchases and refurbishment with consumer protection

Contribution

The topic for the October - December 2021 Open Consultation is:

The Environmental Impacts and Benefits of the Internet

- What effects does the Internet have on the environment and vice-versa?
- How can we improve the impact the Internet has on the environment and take advantage of its potential to help address climate-related issues?
- What role should stakeholders play in shaping the environmental impacts and benefits of the Internet?
- What are the policy, regulatory and other relevant matters associated with the environmental impacts and benefits of the Internet?

We present here elements taken from the European Green Party report *Digital technologies in Europe: An environmental life cycle approach*².

A. What effects does the Internet have on the environment and vice-versa?

Digital technologies have a considerable environmental impact, and this impact is mainly material.

- 40% of the environmental impacts of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are due to the depletion of metal resources and the use of fossil resources, mainly to manufacture the devices.

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² <https://www.greens-efa.eu/opinions/2021/12/06/digital-technologies-in-europe/>

- Digital technologies for European use alone accounts for 40% of the sustainable GHG emissions budget of Europe to stay below 1.5°C.
- Almost 10% of European electricity consumption is devoted to digital technologies.

These findings completely deconstruct the belief that the digital world is mainly virtual, “in the clouds”, and ecological by design.

B. How can we improve the impact the Internet has on the environment and take advantage of its potential to help address climate-related issues?

We need fewer, longer lasting, and more sustainable digital devices:

- To reduce the number of devices, make them multifunctional
- Fight all forms of obsolescence by extending the legal duration of software update periods to a minimum of 5 years
- Increase reuse rates by moving from proprietary systems to interoperable and open ones and making the right to return compulsory
- Incentivise the durability of products, second hand purchases and refurbishment with consumer protection

We need to provide European citizens with reliable data on digital responsibility:

- Create a scientific observatory and committee capable of providing consensus and peer-reviewed information to the European Commission on the environmental and health impacts of digital technology
- Obligatory environmental impact assessments for manufacturers and/or distributors of digital products
- Make environmental labelling mandatory for digital products and services
- Regularly quantify the impact of digital technology in Europe and analyse the evolution of the structure of impacts

We need to strengthen the strategic autonomy of the EU on raw materials

- Make Europe the industrial leader in secondary raw materials by establishing efficient recyclability standards and targets
- Ensure the systematic collection of e-waste and prevent illegal pathways to keep the benefit of our valuable resources
- Ban the opening of new raw material mines in Europe

C. What role should stakeholders play in shaping the environmental impacts and benefits of the Internet?

See above.

D. What are the policy, regulatory and other relevant matters associated with the environmental impacts and benefits of the Internet?

See above.
