

Digital Single Market

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Mobile use up, consumer prices down: Europe's telecoms sector weathering economic downturn, says Commission report

Europe leads the world in mobile phone services with the number of subscriptions in 2008 at 119% of the EU population (up 7 percentage points from 2007), well ahead of the US (87%) and Japan (84%). This is a finding of today's Commission progress report on the single telecoms market. Despite the economic crisis, the EU's telecoms sector (worth about 3% of EU GDP) continued to grow in 2008 with revenues estimated at above €300 billion, up 1.3% compared to 2007 and outperforming the rest of the economy (up by 1% only).

Consumers gain the most from the sector's competitiveness: they pay less while getting better value for money. Average mobile phone bills have fallen from €21.48 to €19.49 in 2008 and 75% of European consumers now have internet connections of 2 megabits per second and above (speeds allowing, for example, TV over internet), thanks to EU action. However, the Commission's report also warns that without better European coordination, the benefits of a single telecoms market could be jeopardised by inconsistent national regulation.

"Europe is THE continent of mobile communications, with more and more people using mobile phones and mobile broadband services. Despite the global economic crisis, European consumers communicate more than ever with their phones and via the Internet. This is good news for a sector that can help Europe defy the downturn," said Viviane Reding, the EU's Telecoms Commissioner. "But we can't rest on our laurels. We must strengthen national regulators' independence. We also need fairer competition between fixed and mobile operators, in view of increasing convergence between fixed and mobile telephony. Finally, we must prevent a bypassing of EU rules that could harm our single market. I am in particular concerned that many national regulators are going their own way on high-speed internet networks. The road to fair competition and investment in these networks does not lie through 27 different solutions mainly favouring national champions, but through open markets, legal certainty and equal chances for all investors and operators."

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