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Spectrum, inclusion and sustainability: why WRC-23 matters

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One of the most important international conferences for mobile connectivity is happening again this autumn: the World Radiocommunication Conference 2023 (WRC-23). On this occasion, Dubai will host representatives from member states and industry to discuss Radio Regulations, in other words, the international governance of the use of radio spectrum.

No spectrum, no connectivity

If you wonder how it is possible to make video calls to your family or colleagues living thousands of kilometers away, to listen to your favourite podcast on the tube or to use navigation apps to find a restaurant, the answer is SPECTRUM. Radio spectrum is the lifeblood of mobile communications.

The range of spectrum frequencies used for mobile communications have different features in terms of technical capacity and coverage. This means you will need different radio frequency bands depending on your location and on your capacity needs:

- ❖ High bands: very high-speed connectivity for hot-spots and fixed wireless access
- ❖ Mid bands: high-speed connectivity covering urban and sub-urban areas
- ❖ Low bands: good nationwide connectivity covering also sparsely populated areas and reaching "deep-indoor"



WRC-23, the opportunity to achieve the Digital targets 2030

This invisible natural resource is also scarce, so it is important we use it in the most efficient way possible. In order to achieve this, we need common rules to coordinate the use of spectrum at EU and global level.

In the EU, we have ambitious Digital Decade targets setting a goal for gigabit capable networks for all and 5G everywhere by 2030 to enable the digital transformation of our businesses and public services and to bridge the digital divide. A healthy telecom market and stimulation of private investment in our infrastructures are a prerequisite to achieve these targets and investment-friendly spectrum policy is an essential part of the equation.

On an international level, this year's WRC-23 will take important decisions on spectrum which will play out over the next decade. WRC-23 has a key role on enabling regulatory clarity for future spectrum availability in low and mid-bands, which are critical especially in regions such as Europe, with high adaptation rate of mobile services and also large sparsely populated areas. Ensuring that the connectivity needs of the future are covered, the European telecom industry urges the Council of the European Union to take a firm decision on two specific agenda items: "Upper 6 GHz", part of (agenda item 1.2) and "UHF band" (agenda item 1.5).

Agenda item 1.2: Securing future options for advanced 5G services with additional spectrum in the 6 GHz band

Today, in Europe, there is no sufficient mid-band spectrum to meet future connectivity demands. Capable of delivering both coverage and capacity for mobile networks across cities, the "Upper 6GHz" band will be essential for Europe's economic and societal ambitions including the development of smart cities or industries of tomorrow. Additional spectrum for advanced 5G services is also important for effective mobile site planning, which has a direct impact on the consumption of energy and equipment, and hence on sustainability.

The European telecom industry is asking for the IMT identification of the upper 6 GHz, as we believe, it will allow the market and the mobile technology ecosystem to flourish and contribute towards our digital policy goals.

Agenda item 1.5: Securing future options for better mobile quality in rural areas by opening the band 470-694 MHz for Mobile Services

With the growing demand for mobile broadband services in rural areas, the UHF band is of outmost importance to support the reduction of the digital divide in sparsely populated areas and provide better access to digital healthcare, education, and media services. It will also support the other usage scenarios such as automated driving thanks to a strengthened nationwide network. **The European mobile operators believe that a primary mobile allocation at WRC-23 would be the most efficient decision to help bridge the urban-rural digital divide in future.**

Delaying the decision until 2031, as suggested by the Radio Spectrum Policy Group (group of Member States and members of the European Commission), would be missed opportunity to support European harmonization towards future use the band and to roll-out nationwide networks in a timely manner.

It is important to note that the decisions taken at the WRC-23 do not pre-empt any European decision on the future usage of these bands and would allow Europe to decide flexibly when and how to introduce mobile services in these bands, according to the results of the intended review process in the EU.

We need to act today, at the Council of the European Union, at WRC-23 to build the Digital Europe of 2030 – a greener, inclusive, and innovative Europe.