



# OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

## Radio equipment

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2014/53/EU on the harmonisation of the laws of the Member States relating to the making available on the market of radio equipment  
[COM(2021) 547 final – 2021/0291 (COD)]

INT/966

Rapporteur: **Christophe LEFÈVRE**

[www.eesc.europa.eu](http://www.eesc.europa.eu)

EN

Referral	Council of the European Union, 30/09/2021 European Parliament, 04/10/2021
Legal basis	Article 114 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	Single Market, Production and Consumption
Adopted in section	18/11/2021
Adopted at plenary	08/12/2021
Plenary session No	565
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	231/0/6

## 1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) takes note of the Commission's proposal to act swiftly to impose the USB-C standard: a consistent and uniform standard for chargers for mobile phones and similar devices.
- 1.2 Since 2009 and, more recently, since 2014, the voluntary initiatives have not fully met the EU's policy objectives of reducing electronic waste (e-waste), increasing consumer convenience and avoiding fragmentation of the charging devices market. In 2018, discarded chargers were estimated to be responsible for 11 000 tonnes of e-waste.
- 1.3 The European Parliament passed a resolution in January 2020<sup>1</sup> with the aim of drafting more binding legislation, which the EESC fully endorses.
- 1.4 The EESC fully supports the European Commission's draft directive, which was requested by the European Parliament.
- 1.5 The EESC would like to go further than the Commission's proposal by recommending that this obligation for chargers for mobile phones and similar devices be extended to all radio, electronic, connected and rechargeable devices, and also to chargers for laptops: the aim is also to enable users to recharge a mobile device with a 65W USB-C-type computer charger instead of a 2.1W charger, and to avoid users having to carry several different chargers when on the move.
- 1.6 The EESC notes that low-power (2.1W) USB sockets for charging mobile devices are increasingly being made available to users with or without cables in buses, aeroplanes, shopping centres, conference rooms and other public spaces. These are not always sufficiently powerful, however, to charge some of the devices covered by the directive.
- 1.7 In order to facilitate fast charging and to encourage users to share USB-C cables on short journeys or for a short period of time, the EESC proposes recommending that, in future, such locations be equipped with ultra-fast chargers. This would meet one of the needs expressed in one of the European Commission's surveys.
- 1.8 The EESC notes that batteries can have a shorter life span than the rest of the device. It recommends that batteries for use in computers, tablets or mobile phones adhere to the same standards, so that they can be replaced rather than having to buy a whole new device if the battery malfunctions prematurely.
- 1.9 The EESC wishes to emphasise the responsibility of manufacturers of electronic devices when it comes to sustainable development by calling on them to ensure that the cost of replacing the battery remains low, and that technical feasibility discourages users from replacing the whole electronic device when only the battery needs to be replaced.

---

<sup>1</sup> [European Parliament Resolution of 30 January 2020 \(2019/2983\(RSP\)\), OJ C 331, 17.8.2021, p. 2.](#)

- 1.10 The EESC calls on the Commission to recommend that manufacturers do not try to circumvent the legislation by changing the voltage or amperage, which would result in the brand's charger having to be used, thereby undermining the aims of the directive.
- 1.11 The EESC recommends that the Commission and the European Parliament launch a major public information campaign as soon as the legislative process is completed, to ensure that consumers are informed and to encourage them to only purchase devices with a USB-C interface in future.

## 2. **Background**

- 2.1 Since 2009, the Commission has been seeking to limit the fragmentation of the market for charging interfaces for mobile phones and similar devices. However, these initiatives only led to voluntary schemes<sup>2</sup> that are not legally binding and thus do not ensure consistent and uniform application.
- 2.2 Recent voluntary initiatives do not fully meet Union policy objectives to reduce electronic waste (e-waste), improve consumer convenience and avoid fragmentation of the charging devices market.
- 2.3 The absence of harmonisation in this area may lead to substantial differences between Member States' laws, regulations, administrative provisions and practices regarding the interoperability of mobile phones and similar categories or classes of radio equipment with their chargers, and the supply of radio equipment without chargers.
- 2.4 As a result, EU action is required to promote a common degree of interoperability and the provision of information relating to the charging characteristics of radio equipment to end-users.
- 2.5 In January 2020, the European Parliament adopted a resolution<sup>3</sup> calling for the urgent adoption of a standard for a common charger for mobile phones in order to avoid further internal market fragmentation.
- 2.6 It is estimated that mobile phone chargers were responsible for around 11 000 tonnes of e-waste in 2018 and that the associated life-cycle emissions were around 600 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e.
- 2.7 The EU is committed to boosting the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy through the introduction of initiatives such as Directive 2012/19/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>4</sup> and more recently through the introduction of the European Green Deal. This Directive aims to reduce the e-waste generated by the sale of radio equipment and to reduce the extraction of raw materials and the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions generated by the production, transportation and disposal of chargers, thereby promoting a circular economy.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/2417/attachments/1/translations>.

<sup>3</sup> [OJ C 331, 17.8.2021, p. 2.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [OJ L 197, 24.7.2012, p. 38.](#)

- 2.8 The proposal aims to introduce suitable requirements in Directive 2014/53/EU<sup>5</sup> regarding the charging communication protocols, the charging interface (i.e. the charging receptacle) of certain categories or classes of radio equipment, as well as the information to be provided to end-users regarding the charging characteristics of those categories or classes of radio equipment.
- 2.9 The proposal requires mobiles phones and similar radio devices, (such as tablets, digital cameras, headphones and headsets, hand-held videogame consoles and portable speakers), if they can be charged via wired charging, to be fitted with the USB Type-C receptacle and, if they also require charging at voltages higher than 5 volts or currents higher than 3 amperes or powers higher than 15 watts, to incorporate the USB Power Delivery charging communication protocol.
- 2.10 The Commission could adopt delegated acts to make it possible in future, if needed, to address any additional type of charging technologies other than wired charging.

### 3. **General comments**

- 3.1 The EESC notes that, over the past 12 years, the Commission has managed to harmonise standards for phone chargers, thereby meeting the requirements of sustainability and reducing hard-to-recycle waste.
- 3.2 The EESC notes that the lack of a universal charger means that a phone charger and a power/data cable are systematically sold with each device, whereas the consumer could have the option of buying just the device itself.
- 3.3 The EESC fully endorses the European Commission's draft directive, which was requested by the European Parliament.
- 3.4 The sale of specific chargers clearly represents a significant share of manufacturers' revenues, especially those of mobile phone manufacturers. It will have to be ensured that these same manufacturers do not regularly change electronic standards (such as voltage level, power requirements, etc.) making it easier for them to systematically sell their own brand of charger, or even the data transfer cable, which could be universal, when they could allow a previously purchased charger to be reused. This would undermine effective implementation, which is aimed at reducing e-waste tonnage.
- 3.5 The EESC recommends that the Commission and the European Parliament launch a major public information campaign as soon as the legislative process is completed, to ensure that consumers are informed and to encourage them to only purchase devices with a USB-C interface in future.

---

<sup>5</sup> [OJ L 153, 22.5.2014, p. 62.](#)

#### 4. **Specific comments**

- 4.1 The EESC recommends that the industry facilitate the ultra-fast charging of mobile phones with powerful chargers, such as a simple laptop charger with a 65W USB-C output, instead of a 2.1W output.
- 4.2 The EESC notes that dedicated USB sockets for mobile phone charging are increasingly being made available to users, with or without cables, in buses, aeroplanes, shopping centres, conference rooms and other public spaces. By default, these are low-current sockets (2.1W), and this power is already insufficient to charge some of the devices covered by the directive. In order to facilitate fast charging and to encourage users to share USB-C cables on short journeys or for a short period of time, the EESC proposes recommending that, in future, such locations be equipped with ultra-fast chargers. This would meet one of the needs expressed in one of the European Commission's surveys.
- 4.3 The EESC therefore recommends that this requirement for a single USB-C charger for mobile phones should also apply to laptops, even if the charging and power level needs to be electronically adapted. It is both for economic reasons and to avoid users having to carry numerous chargers when on the move that the obligation provided for by the directive should also be extended to laptops, unless there is a technological constraint, which would have to be justified.
- 4.4 The EESC notes that batteries can have a shorter life span than the rest of the device. It recommends that batteries for use in computers, tablets or mobile phones should adhere to the same standards, so that they can be easily and inexpensively replaced rather than having to buy a whole new device if the battery malfunctions prematurely. The EESC would like to emphasise the responsibility of manufacturers of electronic devices where the environment and sustainable development are concerned.

Brussels, 8 December 2021

Christa SCHWENG

The president of the European Economic and Social Committee

---