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Digital Agenda: global tech sector measures its carbon footprint

The European Commission is working with 27 of the world's leading tech companies and associations to measure their carbon footprint arising from the production, transport and sales of ICT goods, networks and services. According to a study published today, 10 measurement tools and standards pilot-tested by the organisations are comparable. The aim is to have a common measurement framework in order to get a clearer picture, and eventually a reduction, of CO₂ emissions.

[Estimates](#) show that every minute of the day, 48 hours of new video content is uploaded onto YouTube, 700,000 Facebook users share content, Google receives over 2 million search queries and 200 million emails are sent, not to mention tweets, blogs, etc. Given that a single search query may produce from a few tenths of a gram to a few grams of CO₂ emissions depending on the type of energy used to power the relevant devices, CO₂ emissions in this regard can be substantial. Currently calculations of these emissions, notably from industry, vary significantly and are highly dependent on the different methods used.

European Commission Vice-President for the Digital Agenda Neelie Kroes said: *"Transparency in measuring the ICTs' environmental effect will empower all of us, citizens, public and private organisations, to make greener choices when we buy or use digital technologies."*

ICT products and services are currently responsible for 8 to 10% of the EU's electricity consumption and up to 4% of its carbon emissions. Measuring the environmental effect of the ICT-sector in a transparent way is essential in helping to use global energy resources sustainably.

The pilot-testing involved 18 tests of 10 international standards, provided by international standard bodies and organisations, such as ITU (International Telecommunication Union) and ETSI (European Telecommunications Standards Institute). These were tested by the following ICT companies and associations over a period of 10 months (from December 2011 to September 2012): Alcatel-Lucent, AMD, AUO, BT, Cisco, Dassault Systèmes, Dell, EECA-ESIA, Ericsson, GSMA, Hitachi, HP, Huawei, Intel, Lenovo, NEC, Nokia, Nokia Siemens Networks, Orange, Sagemcom, SAP, Telecom Italia, Telefónica and TeliaSonera. Three of the participants involved chose to remain anonymous.

The next step in this European Commission initiative is to get the ICT and relevant industries to put these methods into everyday use. In the coming months, the Commission will consult with stakeholders and the industry on how best to achieve this.

Background

Several international standardisation organisations and industry bodies have established a variety of methods to measure and quantify the ICT sector's footprint. However, these are, for the most part, not comparable since they are based on different premises that are little known outside these organisations. That is why, 4 years ago, the European Commission published a [Recommendation on mobilising ICT to facilitate the transition to an energy-efficient, low-carbon economy](#) calling on the ICT industry to develop a framework to measure its energy and carbon performance and adopt common methodologies. This led to the [ICT footprint initiative](#).

Assessing whether the ICT sector has adopted common measurement methods for the sector's own energy performance and carbon emissions is one of the targets of the Digital Agenda for Europe (see [IP/10/581](#), [MEMO/10/199](#) and [MEMO/10/200](#)).

Useful links

[Report on "Pilot Testing on Methodologies for Energy Consumption and Carbon Footprint of the ICT-sector"](#)

[Recommendation on mobilising ICT to facilitate the transition to an energy-efficient, low-carbon economy](#)

[What the Digital Agenda does for the environment](#)

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