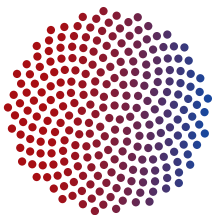# Supporting the Irish telecommunications sector

TELECOMMUNICATIONS
INDUSTRY IRELAND

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Supporting the Irish telecommunications sector

The impact of the crisis on the Irish telecommunications sector
The COVID-19 crisis has shown how vital telecommunications are to keep people connected to each other, their work, educational resources, business needs and entertainment services. The telecommunications networks coped with an average 35% increase in peak traffic during the COVID-19 crisis to date. As a major employer and investor in the Irish economy, with over 25,000 working in the sector and a combined network investment of approximately €3 billion over the past five years by industry players, the telecommunications sector believes that the priorities below are crucial to ensuring that Ireland, rural areas included, is equipped to reopen and reboot strongly in the coming months and years.

Phase 1 Actions to support the Irish telecommunications sector in the next 100 days

1. **Address the digital divide:** Ensure all telecommunications construction activity is rapidly ramped up to pre-crisis levels, all supply chains to reopen and avoid restrictions on the movement of key staff including international contractors.

2. **Launch a campaign to counter disinformation on social media regarding 5G:** Telecoms masts have been subjected to arson attacks, one seriously damaged mast was to improve indoor coverage at Letterkenny Hospital, a major centre for the treatment of COVID-19 patients and COVID-19 test analysis.

3. **Re-establish the Government's Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce:** Improve telecommunications coverage and availability through joined-up government, including local authorities and other stakeholders. Address any obstacles to the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure so that networks are improved, 5G and fibre broadband (National Broadband Plan and other areas) are delivered.

Phase 2 Actions to support the Irish telecommunications sector by end of 2020

1. **Extend the European Electronic Communications Code's transposition deadline to end 2021:** Compliance will require significant IT work by companies. Clarity on important industry code obligations is not yet available. IT departments are under significant pressure responding to the crisis. A more realistic timeframe is required.

2. **Address concerns about 5G to avoid damaging job creation:** 5G will be become essential for business. Relevant agencies including the Environmental Protection Authority to brief all stakeholders on the safety standards. Issue a ministerial circular to local authorities restating national policy on 5G and clarifying their role regarding 5G rollout.

3. **Require all State entities to provide sites from land holdings and buildings under their ownership for assessment:** Ensure all new builds are pre-ducted to accommodate Very High Capacity Networks.

Phase 3 Actions to support the Irish telecommunications sector by 2023

1. **Use upcoming spectrum licensing to encourage investment in mobile networks:** Allocate spectrum fees and receipts from spectrum auctions collected from industry to investment in passive shared rural infrastructure. It should also avoid unnecessary diversion of capital budgets towards fees.

2. **Allocate adequate resources to the National Cybersecurity Centre:** The cybersecurity threat is becoming more sophisticated and dangerous with significantly more harmful activity since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis.

3. **Ensure Ireland can function even under severe disruption and is digitally competitive:** Plan with an appropriate funding model to fully digitise Government and society, to impart digital skills needed for employment and digital inclusion and to use digital tools to enhance SME competitiveness.

Impact of phased action on the Irish telecommunications sector

Central to these priorities is the need for a dedicated Minister for Digital and Communications to lead Ireland's digital agenda. Ireland's digital future is at a crucial junction with a need for Government to implement the priority actions identified above to enhance the telecommunications network, both fixed and mobile. These will help mitigate the economic and social shock of future ongoing disruption caused by the crisis. These actions will underpin the implementation of the Digital Agenda in Ireland. They will facilitate balanced regional development. Increases in remote working will contribute to reduced carbon emissions due to less commuting. Finally, having the necessary infrastructure in place will further increase Ireland's attractiveness to foreign direct investment.

'We believe that the next Taoiseach should appoint a dedicated Digital and Communications Minister given the importance of the sector to the country.'

John Keaney
CEO of SIRO and Chair of Telecommunications Industry Ireland

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