

The European Union's Digital Single Market Strategy

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A Summary
EDDIE Consortium

As a digitally empowered European Union is one of the European Commission's six political priorities, the European Union's Digital Single Market Strategy focuses on meeting the requirements of the digital age and removing unnecessary regulatory barriers. In order to facilitate the transition from individual national markets to a single EU market, this strategy aims for key targets related to access, environment, and economy and society. According to the estimates, the implementation of planned steps would contribute to economic growth, boosting jobs, competition, investment, and innovation with 415 billion euros/year.

The Digital Single Market Strategy - adopted on 6 May 2015 – seeks to unify the digital markets of EU countries by focusing on three key areas, considered as pillars. These pillars are Access, Environment, and Economy and Society.

Initiatives within the first pillar, Access, aim to provide “better access for consumers and businesses to digital goods and services across Europe” (EU4Digital 2022). E-commerce is now easier and safer within the EU due to regulations regarding cross-border parcel deliveries, geo-blocking, online consumer rights and VAT. The rules about cross-border parcel delivery, issued in 2018, require price transparency with clear and easily comparable price information from parcel delivery companies. In addition, even though there is no price limit for delivery services, national regulatory authorities monitor tariffs and investigate the unreasonably high ones. To end unjustified geo-blocking, the Commission announced new rules stating that no online consumer can be discriminated due to their nationality or place of residence or forced to pay with a debit or credit card issued in a specific country. As for consumer rights, new rules, issued in 2020, allow the removal of identified scam sites and social media accounts, and permit data gathering about rogue online traders. In order to make further improvements in these areas, the Commission has also adopted the Digital Services Act, which together with the Digital Markets Act, seeks to provide even more accessibility, transparency and innovation. (European Commission 2020b)

Initiatives within the second pillar, Environment, focus on “creating the right conditions and a level playing field for digital networks and innovative services to flourish” (EU4Digital 2022). Four aspects are considered here: (1) technology that works for people; (2) a fair and competitive digital economy; (3) an open, democratic, and sustainable digital society and (4) Europe as a digital player. The first aspect - technology that works for people, seeks to develop, deploy and uptake “technology that makes a real difference to people's daily lives. A strong and competitive economy that masters and shapes technology in a way that respects European values” (European Commission 2020c). The European Commission seeks to improve the digital skills of the workforce, consumers, and students through various initiatives while looking into digital inclusion, connectivity, AI, cloud-computing, blockchain, high-performance computing, quantum technologies, 5G, Internet of Things, cybersecurity, photonics and electronics. The second aspect - a fair and competitive digital economy - aims for “[a] frictionless single market, where companies of all sizes and in any sector can compete on equal terms, and can develop, market and use digital technologies, products and services at a scale that boosts their productivity and global competitiveness, and consumers can be confident that their rights are respected” (European Commission 2021a). The European Commission seeks to achieve this by the regulation of e-commerce, online platforms, data collection and copyright, as well

as through initiatives, such as Digitising European Industry, Start-up Europe and The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI). The third aspect - an open, democratic, and sustainable digital society, seeks to create and maintain “[a] trustworthy environment in which citizens are empowered in how they act and interact, and of the data they provide both online and offline” (European Commission 2021b) by tackling issues such as disinformation, media and digital culture, trust and e-privacy, eHealth and eGovernment, Smart Cities, Safer Internet and Women in ICT. The fourth aspect, Europe as a global digital player, focuses on the European Union’s commitment on “setting global standards for emerging technologies and [staying] the most open region for trade and investment in the world, provided that anyone who comes to do business here accepts and respects our rules” (European Commission 2021c).

Initiatives within the third pillar, Economy and Society, focus on “maximising the growth potential of the digital economy” (EU4Digital 2022). The EU Commission seeks to maximize growth (1) by facilitating the free flow of non-personal data within the Member states and its IT systems as well as through a European Cloud Initiative “covering certification, switching of cloud service providers and a research cloud” (European Commission 2019), (2) by defining priorities for standards and interoperability in critical areas such as health, transport, planning and energy, and (3) by supporting “an inclusive digital society ...where citizens have the right skills to seize the opportunities of the digital world and boost their chance of getting a job” (European Commission 2019).

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