

ANEC reply to European Commission consultation on Inception Impact Assessments on Common chargers for mobile telephones and other compatible devices (Ares(2018)6473169)

For many years, ANEC – the European consumer voice in standardisation – and other consumer organisations have been calling on manufacturers to provide a common external power supply for mobile phones and other devices. The present plethora of chargers – both within brands and among brands - represents unnecessary costs to the consumer in their direct (or implied) purchase, and to the environment in the extraction of the raw materials for their construction and in their disposal.

We therefore support the regulatory option aiming at making common charging solutions mandatory, whether under pursuant Article 3(3)(a) of the Radio Equipment Directive 2014/53/EU or a different legal basis. We think the scope of the legislation should be charging solutions for mobile phones and other devices such as tablets, digital cameras, notebooks etc.

We think that choice between different technical scenarios will depend on the timing of the regulatory action. Bearing in mind that legislation (delegated regulation or directive) takes time to be discussed and adopted, we think that scenario 2 (Plug charger with detachable cable and USB Type C socket on plug charger) is the most appropriate. This would allow the possibility to handle higher current which is necessary for fast charging. USB Type C is also easier to use for people with dexterity impairments and in general reduces the risk of mishandling and thus damages. However, we do not support the use of adaptors or proprietary sockets, because they are a barrier and cost for consumers.

As indicated by the Commission, wireless charging systems should also be considered as already now many smartphones are using the Qi standard for charging. It is therefore important to avoid any fragmentation in this area as well.

Should the regulatory action be rapid, we think that scenario 1 should be taken into account as it reflects the present market offer.

The legislation to be adopted should foresee for strong market surveillance to be carried out in order to take out from the market dangerous products. This would be possible with New Approach/New Legislative Framework based legislation. It should not be forgotten that at the moment many unsafe chargers are available on the market.

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The legislation to be adopted should also foresee for consumers to be able to chose to buy or not a new charger when buying a new device and to be informed about the charging performance/speed in order to be able to make such a choice.

The charging speed is a key factor and fragmentation is already happening as several open and proprietary solutions are present on the market (eg: Quickcharge 2 Quickcharge 3 or Power Delivery for smartphones). The legislation to be adopted should addressed this point as well and ensure that consumers are informed about it. Lack of interoperability and lack of information result in consumer detriment.

We do not support (and we never did) the voluntary approach because we do not think that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concluded in 2009 between the Commission and most mobile phones manufacturers through which they committed voluntarily to use one type of charger (Micro-USB connector technology) was a success. As compliance was also possible through an adaptor, consumers were facing extra costs. Consumers did not gain economically from this situation and the MoU objectives were only partially met as the problem of unsafe chargers on the market had not been addressed. Indeed, RAPEX notifications show a high number of universal chargers (especially cheap ones) to be unsafe.

Since then we have been calling the Commission to take action and make common chargers mandatory for mobile phones and other devices. Only legislation can deliver safety, economic and environmental benefits in the interest of consumers and the environment.

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About ANEC

ANEC is the European consumer voice in standardisation, defending consumer interests in the processes of technical standardisation and the use of standards, as well as related legislation and public policies.

ANEC was established in 1995 as an international non-profit association under Belgian law and is open to the representation of national consumer organisations in 34 countries.

ANEC is funded by the European Union and EFTA, with national consumer organisations contributing in kind. Its Secretariat is based in Brussels.