

AER draft response to consultation: Consumer Agenda 2025-2030 and action plan on consumers in the Single Market

European radio plays a vital role in providing consumers with trusted¹ information, entertainment, cultural content, and emergency alerts, all free at the point of use.

Advertising is the financial backbone of commercial radio, enabling it to remain free and accessible to millions of listeners. However, commercial radio faces increasing competition for advertising revenue from global digital platforms that dominate online ad markets. To sustain a diverse and vibrant radio sector, the Consumer Agenda must ensure fair competition by avoiding excessive advertising restrictions on commercial radio and addressing the dominance of big tech in digital advertising ecosystems.

Yet, in the digital environment, radio faces growing challenges from global platforms that control distribution and increasingly use manipulative design practices - such as default settings that disadvantage radio and virtual assistants self-preferencing their own radio-like services - to steer consumer choices.

The Consumer Agenda 2025–2030 must ensure that consumer protection rules apply proportionately: strong obligations for gatekeepers that shape digital consumer journeys, and lighter obligations for radio broadcasters already bound by strict regulation at both national and European level.

Safeguarding the access, findability and interoperability of radio across connected devices – like smartphones and smart speakers – and connected cars, is critical to preserving consumer choice, road safety, universal access to information and, ultimately, media plurality and social cohesion.

Consistency with the existing European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA), as well as the upcoming revision of the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC) and proposal for a Digital Networks Act (DNA) will ensure that consumer protection, fair competition and media pluralism reinforce each other.

A forward-looking framework that protects radio's access, findability and prominence will benefit both consumers and Europe's diverse media ecosystem.

As the European association representing commercial radios, AER welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the European Commission's call for evidence on the Consumer Agenda 2025-2030 and action plan on consumers in the Single Market.

¹ Radio has consistently ranked as the most trusted form of media in the EU for over a decade, according to Eurobarometer surveys by the European Commission. Latest [Standard Eurobarometer 102 - Autumn 2024](#)

Listeners are consumers too, and their freedom to access trusted, pluralistic, and free-to-air radio is increasingly shaped by digital platforms and devices that act as unavoidable gateways to their content and services.

We believe the Consumer Agenda should take into account the unique risks and needs of the radio sector, where global gatekeepers control access and consumer choice, while broadcasters remain subject to strict EU and national rules.

The importance of advertising for commercial radio viability

A fair approach to consumer protection relies on well-informed consumers who make autonomous decisions among diverse options. The European consumer protection framework already offers robust safeguards without impeding economic sustainability. **For commercial radio, funded nearly entirely by advertising, advertising restrictions and bans, or mandatory warning messages risk undermining the economic foundation that keeps free-to-air programming diverse and accessible to millions.** Advertising rules are already strict at the EU and national level, complemented by effective self-regulation. Imposing further burdens would hinder radio's ability to create content, innovate, and offer quality free programming.

The advertising ecosystem is currently unbalanced. While commercial radio relies heavily on advertising revenue, big techs dominate advertising exchanges and control the key digital marketplaces and technologies where ads are bought and placed programmatically. This dominance gives them substantial influence over how advertising budgets are allocated and which publishers receive revenue. In contrast, commercial radio lacks comparable access and control within these digital advertising ecosystems. This creates an uneven playing field that limits commercial radio's ability to compete fairly, weakens its financial position, and threatens media pluralism.

To ensure consumers retain genuine choice and autonomy, and to foster a sustainable media environment, excessive regulatory burdens on commercial radio must be avoided. Instead, policy should focus on creating fair, competitive market conditions that level the playing field between commercial broadcasters and big tech platforms.

Ensuring digital fairness for consumers

Streaming services, app stores, smart speakers and virtual assistants increasingly design interfaces that steer listeners toward their own services, monetised content, or subscriptions, while deprioritising free-to-air radio. The forthcoming Digital Fairness Act will help fill gaps in consumer protection against dark patterns and manipulative design. **For radio, it is essential that platform-level obligations apply to gatekeepers rather than disproportionately to radio broadcasters.** Obligations must prevent self-preferencing, ensure fair findability, and preserve consumer freedom to choose trusted radio services.

This approach should be fully consistent with the proper implementation of the Digital Markets Act, to prevent harmful and anti-competitive practices by gatekeepers and ensure interoperability, **and with Article 20 of the European Media Freedom Act,** which safeguards the findability and prominence of media services in user interfaces. Together, these instruments must guarantee fair treatment of radio, secure fair findability and preserve consumer freedom to choose trusted media services.

Levelling the playing field for competitiveness

Asymmetric regulation continues to undermine the advertising-driven business model of commercial radio, threatening its long-term viability. The Consumer Agenda promises to reduce burdens on SMEs while upholding consumer protection, and this principle should be applied to the radio sector. Global platforms that design consumer interfaces should comply with strong obligations, while lighter, proportionate obligations should apply to commercial radio broadcasters already bound by strict rules.

Strengthening enforcement for fair competition and ensuring consistency across legislative instruments

Commercial radio broadcasters are tightly regulated, both at national and EU level, yet global platforms remain difficult to reach with existing enforcement tools. Stronger enforcement against global gatekeepers that control and intermediate access to content, advertising and data, is essential to secure fair competition and a level playing field between radio broadcasters and big tech platforms.

The **Consumer Agenda should be fully aligned with other key pieces of EU legislation**, including the **EMFA (Art. 20 on user interfaces)**, the **DMA (gatekeeper obligations)**, and forthcoming **EECC revision/Digital Networks Act**, to avoid contradictions and ensure coherent rules. Virtual assistants, now unavoidable gateways to radio, should be designated as gatekeepers under the DMA, with obligations for interoperability and non-discriminatory access. Car accessibility must also be safeguarded: all new vehicles should include FM, DAB+ and hybrid receivers, with easy findability via a dedicated radio button.

A coherent approach is the only way to avoid contradictory obligations and effectively protect consumer choice, media pluralism, and radio's essential role in mobility, road safety, and emergency communication.

Recognising radio's role in the green transition

In the context of the EU's green transition, there is a risk that policy may over-prioritise platform-led digital distribution, overlooking the **unique low-carbon profile of broadcast radio**. The Consumer Agenda will promote sustainable consumer choices, and here radio deserves recognition as the most energy-efficient form among media. It delivers universal access at a very low environmental cost, unlike data-intensive streaming models.

Protecting vulnerable consumers

As cars and home devices become increasingly digitised, older and vulnerable groups risk losing simple, free access to radio if it is hidden behind apps or locked into subscription-based services. The Consumer Agenda has rightly placed emphasis on protecting children, elderly people, and persons with disabilities. To support this goal, radio must remain universally accessible across FM, DAB+ and IP - hybrid distribution. It should also be easy to find, for example, through a prominently placed "radio button" in cars and devices, and guaranteed to remain free-to-air to safeguard vulnerable listeners.

Conclusion

AER supports the Consumer Agenda 2025–2030’s objectives of fairness, sustainability, and protection in the digital age. To deliver on these, **EU policy must ensure platform accountability, protect universal and free access to radio, and maintain proportional obligations so that commercial radio broadcasters can remain competitive and continue serving consumers with trusted, pluralistic content.**

The Consumer Agenda 2025–2030 should place listeners at the heart of digital fairness:

- Protecting consumer autonomy against manipulative design and harmful practices,
- Guaranteeing universal, free, and prominent access to radio,
- Ensuring proportionate obligations for stringently regulated radio broadcasters,
- Strengthening enforcement against global gatekeepers,
- Protecting the advertising revenue model by avoiding excessive restrictions and ensuring fair competition with dominant big techs.

By doing so, the consumer agenda will not only **enhance consumer protection by safeguarding universal access to trusted radio** but also **reinforce media pluralism, sustainability, and resilience** across Europe’s audio landscape.

About AER

[AER - the Association of European Radios](#), is the voice of commercial radios in Brussels. It is the trade body representing and defending the interests of thousands of private/commercial radio stations across Europe.

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