

EU's USB-C proposal thrusts Apple into international regulatory showdown

Article

The news: The **European Commission** took its strongest action yet to pressure electronics makers into standardizing USB-C charging ports with a new **proposal** directly attacking

Apple's iPhone fleet.

- The new rules (which are expected to pass an EU parliamentary vote) would apply to a wide assortment of electronic devices and would give manufacturers 24 months to comply. It would also force manufacturers to make fast charging interoperable and let consumers buy devices unbundled from a charger.
- Supporters argue USB-C standardization will be a boon for consumer convenience and could significantly reduce electronic waste by letting users reuse chargers for multiple devices.
- **Disposed and unused charging cables generate around 11,000 tonnes of waste per year** on the continent, **according to** data compiled by the EU, with the average European **owning about three mobile phone chargers.**

How we got here: The European Commission attempted similar standardization efforts regarding micro-USB in 2014 and 2018, but those efforts failed in part due to design issues that caused the chargers to break prematurely.

- USB-C solves many of the problems that plagued previous chargers and has already seen rapid adoption among device-makers. **Sixty-eight percent of new smartphones** released by **Huawei, LG, Samsung, and Xiaomi** used USB-C in 2019, up from 45% a year prior, **according to** data compiled by the Digital Europe and Mobile & Wireless Forum.

The problem: The new rules all but name Apple's iPhone as their primary target due to the company's stubborn unwillingness to transition away from its proprietary lightning cable.

- Apple rebuffed the proposals, saying the standard would stifle innovation. The rules could also cut into the sizable accessories ecosystem Apple regulates under its Made for iPhone (MiFi) program.
- Apple also claimed that efforts to box out its Lightning cable would itself cause "an unprecedented volume of electronic waste."

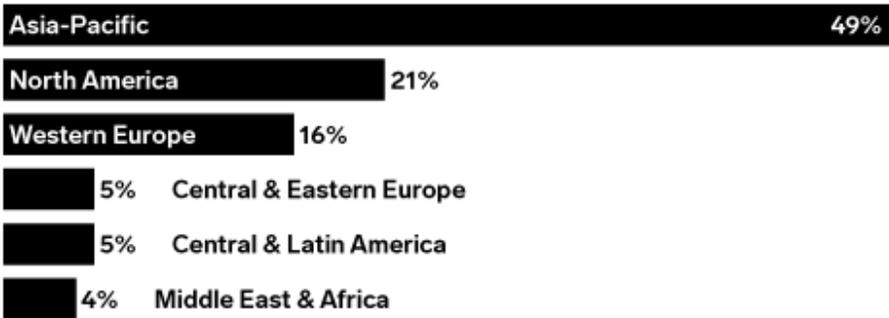
The opportunity: Though Apple would likely have no choice but to adopt USB-C if the proposal passes, there's also a possibility it could buck the trend altogether and ship new iPhones without any charging port, relying instead on wireless charging.

- This move would echo Apple's decision to remove the headphone jack from its phones, but unlike wireless headphones, wireless charging tech still **leaves** much to be desired.

The takeaway: If the EU's proposal passes, it will likely force Apple to switch to standardize USB-C for all iPhones, even those sold outside the EU, underscoring the power regulators in one region have to affect corporations' decisions internationally.

Installed Base Share of Wireless Charging-Enabled Smartphones Worldwide, by Region, 2021

% of total



Source: Strategy Analytics, "One Billion Smartphones Have Wireless Charging" as cited in press release, June 29, 2021

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