

Statement by the European EcoForum (Anke Stock)

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has both highlighted and increased the importance of digital means of communication, with virtual meetings such as this one becoming the new normal. Even as physical meetings become possible once again, it is likely that more meetings will be held virtually than would have been the case before. This is due to software improvements and the greater familiarity with doing things virtually.

- While this would bring gains for the environment in terms of avoided travel, the **digital sector itself has a very substantial environmental footprint** (notably through energy consumption and resource extraction). Thus, the greater use of these technologies increases the urgency of addressing and reducing that footprint e.g. by setting requirements on IT product durability. (Example: an [EEB/Coolproducts publication](#) last year notes that extending the life of all smartphones in the EU by one year would be the equivalent of taking one million cars off the road.)
- The rise of using digital means has also increased the need to **guarantee access and safety**. Access does not only mean the concerns about provision with internet access to remote areas and technical means, it also contains capacity building in order to guarantee gender and intergenerational equality. In regards to safety it is privacy rights that can potentially be infringed by the use of track-and-trace software. Just as we need to ensure transparency around information that should be public, we need to defend the right of privacy around information that should be private. Online security is an issue for environmental defenders, in particular also for female env defenders, since they risk heightened forms of violence.