

All-island Free Internet Connectivity

#NoOneLeftBehind



TO: Philip Jansen, CEO British Telecom
Marc Allera, CEO EE
Mairead Meyer, Director Openreach (NI)
Shay Walsh, MD BT Ireland
Lutz Schüler, CEO Virgin Media
Tony Hanway, CEO Virgin Media Ireland
Mark Evans, CEO Telefónica UK (O2)
Nick Read, CEO Vodafone UK
Anne O'Leary, CEO Vodafone Ireland
David Rey, CEO Sky WiFi
Stephen van Rooyen, CEO Sky UK and Ireland
David Dyson, CEO Three
Robert Finnegan, CEO Three Ireland
Colm Piercy, CEO Digiweb
Carolann Lennon, CEO Eir
Matt Sanford, CEO Pure Telecom
Mark Kellett, CEO Magnet Networks

Dear telecommunications CEOs,

The world has been fundamentally changed by the coronavirus outbreak.

Whole countries, including our own have entered lockdown.

Different levels of government have enacted emergency policies providing homes for the homeless and essential provisions for some of those in most need.

Families and communities are adhering to historically unprecedented social distancing guidelines as a universal act of love towards their neighbours and the most vulnerable in our society.

Non-essential industry has been brought to a halt to protect workers and the general public.

Essential workers risk their health, and their lives daily, by continuing to selflessly perform work which has been undervalued and subjected to callous austerity measures which have weakened our public services and ability to respond effectively to the current crisis.

At this time we all need to put our shoulder to the wheel and make available what resources we have to ensure that, together, we overcome this crisis and build infrastructure, public services and communities which are prepared to face future challenges.

One thing which has become evident is the absolute necessity of internet connectivity - a lifeline for social existence.

To adhere to social distancing, an accessible and reliable internet connection is required for people to access all other rights: to keep informed of guidance on how to keep themselves safe, work, engage with state authorities, receive and spend money, communicate with family and friends, meet new people, care for the elderly, access mental health care, participate in education, collaborate, entertain and play.

Internet connectivity is as important as the freedom of movement; it is a right, not a privilege to be granted dependent on income or status. Neither should rural areas be disadvantaged.

Considered as such, we are calling on you – as industry leaders who have both contributed to our society and profited greatly from the privatisation of telecommunications, government assistance and the public's custom - to take immediate measures to remove all barriers to internet connectivity as expeditiously as possible.

This is doable.

In the Republic of Ireland the Central Statistics Office estimates that 9% of households are without internet access. In Northern Ireland, according to the OFCOM Connected Nations (2019) report, it is estimated that 20,000 homes cannot access a decent fixed broadband service. While medium term action is required to develop infrastructure to secure ultra-fast connectivity, immediate measures can be introduced by you to open up connectivity. The infrastructure largely exists, and where it does not immediate measures can be taken quickly:

- O2 already offers free WiFi hotspots to the general public where available
- Eir boasts 100,000 restricted WiFi hotspots which operate by tapping into domestic wifi hubs paid for by the public. Similarly, BT FON also uses household/domestic bandwidth which is already paid for by its customers, to provide BT-FON WiFi hotspot connectivity limited to paying customers. Virgin Media and Sky WiFi have similar hotspots in place which could be opened up now to give universal access
- Eir have removed all data limits for customers during the crisis to enable personal devices to be used as wifi hotspots for home connectivity
- Across the island, everyone is able to request a decent connection from BT (NI) or Eir (ROI) through the broadband Universal Service Obligation, however existing costs can be prohibitive for families.

We are calling on you, in the public interest, to work swiftly with Dáil Éireann and the Northern Ireland Executive to immediately open up all hotspots cost-free and to waive the prohibitive charges for households who are unable to access decent broadband connection.

You can lead an industry wide approach to opening access and guaranteeing an adequate, minimum level of internet connectivity to everyone. Broadband infrastructure needs to continue to be improved through fibre connections and the development of white space technology, but hotspot access and ending prohibitive charges are things you could do today.

#NoOneLeftBehind respectfully requests a considered response by Thursday 30th April at 12pm.

Signed by

Community and Voluntary Groups

Adam Turkington

Aideen Gilmore

Alicia Toal – Voice of Young People in Care

Andrew McCracken, CEO Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Angus Lambkin – Consultant Humanitarian Planning for Emergencies

Annette Curley, Mental Health Charity Support Worker Galway

Ann Godfrey

Anne McVicker, Director Women's Resource and Development Agency

Barry Murray, Turas na nDaoine

Bernadette McAliskey, Director South Tyrone Empowerment Programme

Brian Mac Domhnaill, National Federation of Group Water Schemes Monaghan

Charlie Fisher, Development Trust NI
Cherif Labreche, CEO New Communities Partnership
Chloe O'Malley, Community Activist Louisburgh Co. Mayo
Ciaran McClean, Chair Save Our Sperrins
Ciarán O'Brien, Belfast Housing Action
Claudia Belloni, Co-ordinator Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre & North Belfast Friendship Club
Colum Benstead, Senior Social Worker, Childrens Safeguarding
Conchur O'Muadaigh, Bainisteoir Abhcóideachta Conradh Na Gaeilge
Collette O'Regan, LGBT Ireland
Deirdre Garvey, CEO The Wheel
Dermot Devlin, My Way Access
Dermot Nelson, Addiction Services, Co. Cavan
Denise Charlton, Denise Charlton Associates
Denise Wright
Desy Jones, Counsellor
Ed Peterson, Chairperson Forthspring Inter Community Group
Ellen McNally
Emerge Counselling Services, Lisburn
Emma Cassidy, Public Interest Litigation Support (PILS) Project
End Deportations Belfast
Etain O'Kane, Therapy Belfast
Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh, Stiúrthóir, Glór na Móna
Felicity Mckee, Disability Rights Campaigner
Frankie Quinn, Co-ordinator Éalú
Gerard McCartan, Chairperson Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR)
Grian Ní Dhaimhín, Student Renters Group
Hugh Brennan, Director Ó Cualann Housing
James Orr, Director Friends of the Earth NI
John Dunbar, Chair Alternative A5 Alliance
John O'Doherty, Director The Rainbow Project
John Peacock, National Secretary YMCA Ireland
Josh O'Dowd, Sean Óg Le Cheile
Karen McGuigan, Suicide, Talking, Education, Prevention, Support (STEPS)
Kate Clifford, Director Rural Community Network
Kerry Melville, Belfast Food Network
Kyle Heffernan, Council for the Homeless Belfast
Laura Wright
Lilian Seenoi, Director North West Migrants Forum
Nicola Browne
Nigel McKinney
Mairtín Mac Gabhann, Cathaoirleach Loachra Loch Lao
Mary Ryan, CEO MACS Supporting Young People
Manus Maguire, Director Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum
Markets Development Association
Margaret O'Riada, Director Galway Travellers Movement
Margaret Walker, West Belfast Suicide Awareness
Oyedamola Bolajoko, Project Co-ordinator Sawa Womens Space
Padraig Bennett, Community Worker Co. Meath

Pádraic Mac Coitir
Pádraig Ó Tiarnaigh, Gníomhaí Teanga Gaelphobal Ard Mhacha Theas
Patrick Yu, Executive Director Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality
Pat Finucane Centre
Pilib Ó Ruanaí, TACA
Phillip McTaggart, Mindskills
Rachel Mullen
Rachel Powell, Women's Resource and Development Agency
Rebekah McCabe
Ryan Doherty, Homeplus NI
Ryan McKinney
Refugees Welcome NI
Richard Higginson, Loveworks
Rory Doherty, Quaker Service NI
Sara Connolly, Homeless Services, Tallaght, Dublin
Sara Ferrigan, Clare Public Participation Network
Sarah Mason, CEO Women's Aid Federation NI
Sister Maureen Lalley, CEO Tochar Valley Rural Community Network Mayo
Stephanie Leonard, Founder Act Build Change
Stephanie Mitchell, Director Belfast Friendship Club
Stephen Wood, Co-ordinator Tools for Solidarity
Stevie Nolan, Trademark
Susan McCrory, Director Falls Women's Centre
Suzanne O'Brien Participation Officer EPIC – Empowering People in Care
The Lantern Intercultural Centre

Trade Unions

Caoimhín MacColaim, INTO Northern Committee Rep
Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary of INTO
John Boyle, INTO General Secretary
Kevin Daly, INTO Northern Chairperson
Mary Magner, INTO President
Niall McCarroll, Derry Trade Unions Council and UNISON Community and Voluntary Branch
Taryn Trainor, Unite the Union
UNISON NI

Academics

Dr. Brian Kelly, School of History, QUB
Dr Brigitte Anton
Professor Colin Harvey
Dr. Deena Haydon
Dr. Elizabeth McArdle
Goretti Horgan
Dr. Ionnis Tsioulakis
Professor John Barry
Professor John Pinkerton
Dr. Maria Pentaraki
Dr. Paula McFadden
Dr. Siobhan McAllister

Arts and Entertainment

Alan Braniff, Belfast Grime Man
Anne Devlin, Playwright
Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, Stiúrthóir An Chultúrlann
Charlotte Dryden, Oh Yeah Centre
Colin Murphy, Comedian
Colum Sands, DJ and folk artist
Connor Kerr and Rebecca Clough, Another World Belfast
Daniel Jewesbury, Artist
Denis O'Hearn, Author
Declan McLaughlin, Singer/Songwriter
Damien Dempsey, Singer/Songwriter
Finn Kennedy – Theatre-Maker
Gareth Moore, Artist
Joby Fox, Singer/Songwriter
John Connors, Actor/Playwright/Director
Maria McManus, Poet
Mimi Turtle, CEO Strand Arts Centre
Niamh Flanagan, Director Theatre NI
Oliver Martin, Artcetera
Paula McFettridge, Artistic Director Kabosh Theatre
Peter O'Neill, Director Imagine Belfast
Robin Wilson, Author and Campaigner
Ruth Carr, Poet
Simon Magill, Creative Director The MAC
Sarah Clancy, Poet
Tim Brannigan, Writer
Vincent Higgins, Playwright/Actor

Education

Ashleigh Galway, Principal Currie Primary School
Bronagh McVeigh, Principal St Vincent de Paul Primary School
Emer Hughes, Principal Our Lady's Primary School
Emma Clarke, Acting Principal Wheatfield Primary and Nursery
Máire Uí Éigeartaigh, Príomhoide Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin
Pádraig Mac Cathail, Oideachasóir, Coláiste Feirste
Siobhan McQuaid, Principal Holy Family Primary School

Media

Adam Ramsay, Open Democracy
Chris Donnelly, commentator
Craig Dwyer, For A Change
Daithí McKay - commentator
John Gibbons, Retired Producer
Marilyn Hyndman, NV Media Trust
Sean Murray Film Maker
Trevor Birney, Below the Radar, Fine Point Films, Meon Ellie, and The Detail
Tyler McNally, The Last Round

Youth

Barry Fegan, Clonard Monastery Youth Centre
Carmel O Connor, Talk About Youth Project Dublin
Eddie Burns Youth Leader in Charge St Malachys Youth Centre
Israel E Nogie, Diverse Youth NI
Mary Field, CEO Northern Ireland Youth Work Alliance
Niall Enright, Manager Upper Springfield Youth Team
Paddy Mooney, Director Include Youth
Philip Glennon, Head of Operations Northern Ireland Youth Forum
Sean Madden, Holy Family Youth Centre
Shane Whelehan, Director Ardoyne Youth Enterprise
Siobhan McKinley, Quakers Teen Project Belfast
Sinead Keane, BeLong To Youth Services
Start 360 - Stephen Barr
Steph O Rourke, Springboard Opportunities – Director of Springboard Angila Chada
Thomas Turley, Ardoyne Youth Club

Sports

Árd Éoin GAC
Joe Gormley, Cliftonville Football Club Player
Mick Conlan, Boxer and Intercontinental Title Holder
Paddy Barnes, Ex-Pro Boxer and Olympic Medallist

Religious

Adam McCormick, Site Pastor Christian Fellowship Church Sign Language
Alister and Ruth Wallace, Site Pastor Christian Fellowship Church Antrim
Andrew Gibson, Site Pastor Christian Fellowship Church Holywood
Rev Brian Anderson, Superintendent East Belfast Mission
Rev David Campton, Superintendent East Belfast Mission
Rev Ivan Steen for Windsor Presbyterian Church, Belfast
David Smith, Head of Northern Ireland Evangelical Alliance
Garath Baxter, Missions Pastor Christian Fellowship Church East Belfast
Laura Bell, Site Pastor Christian Fellowship Church South
Fr. Martin Magill
Owen Crane, Senior Pastor Christian Fellowship Church East Belfast
Thomas and Leanne Todd, Site Pastor Christian Fellowship Church Inner East

Legal

Ciaran Moynagh, Director Phoenix Law Human Rights Lawyers LTD
Daniel Holder, Deputy Director Committee for the Administration of Justice
Paddy Kelly, Director Children's Law Centre

Other

Emma Bricknell, Made in Belfast
John Dennehy, Founder ZARTIS