

Executive Summary: Formal Complaint by the European Publishers Council against Google LLC and Alphabet Inc. under Article 102 TFEU

Brussels, 10 February 2026

The European Publishers Council (EPC) has submitted a formal complaint to the European Commission alleging that Google LLC and Alphabet Inc. are abusing their dominant position in general search, in breach of Article 102 TFEU, through the deployment of AI Overviews and AI Mode in Google Search.

The complaint demonstrates that Google's integration of generative AI into its dominant search interface represents a structural shift from a referral-based search service to an answer engine that systematically substitutes publishers' original journalistic content. This conduct enables Google to extract and monetise publishers' content without effective control by publishers, and without fair remuneration, while simultaneously displacing traffic, audiences, and revenues that are essential to the sustainability of professional journalism.

Core findings

1. Systematic traffic substitution and disintermediation

AI Overviews and AI Mode provide AI-generated summaries and chatbot-style responses at the top of the search results page, reducing users' need to click through to original sources. Evidence cited in the complaint shows that AI Overviews already appear in more than 40 percent of search results for informational queries, and that their presence is associated with significant reductions in click-through rates. Independent studies referenced in the complaint estimate traffic declines of over 30 percent for affected queries, with some publishers reporting click-through reductions exceeding 50 percent on both desktop and mobile.

AI Mode compounds this effect by offering a links-light or links-free conversational interface embedded directly in Google Search. Internal and third-party evidence cited in the complaint indicates that fewer than 5 percent of queries in such interfaces result in a click to a destination website, meaning that the overwhelming

majority of value generated from publishers' content accrues to Google rather than to the publishers that invested in its creation.

2. Exploitative use of publishers' content for AI training, grounding, and output

The complaint documents how Google relies on publishers' high-quality journalistic content as a critical input for AI training, retrieval augmented generation, and output generation. Professionally produced news and editorial content is particularly valuable to AI systems because it is accurate, current, well-structured, and requires minimal cleaning.

Google's AI-generated outputs reproduce and transform this content into substitutes for the original works. Publishers' content is therefore used not only as an input but also as a competitive replacement, without consent and without compensation.

3. Absence of meaningful opt-out or control

Publishers do not have a realistic way to prevent the use of their content for Google's AI features without suffering severe commercial harm. The complaint explains that technical tools such as robots.txt, meta-tags, and Google-Extended are ineffective or coercive in practice. Opting out of AI use typically entails reduced visibility or complete exclusion from Google Search, which remains the primary gateway to online audiences.

As a result, publishers face an untenable choice between accepting uncompensated AI exploitation or becoming commercially invisible.

4. Unfair trading conditions imposed by an unavoidable trading partner

Because of Google's entrenched dominance in general search, publishers are unavoidable trading partners. The complaint shows that Google leverages this position to impose unfair trading conditions, forcing publishers to provide valuable content for free for AI purposes as the price of remaining indexed and visible.

Uniform application of these conditions does not make them fair. The absence of negotiation, combined with the inability to refuse without disproportionate harm, is a hallmark of exploitative abuse under Article 102 TFEU.

5. Undermining of emerging licensing markets

While other AI providers have entered into licensing agreements with publishers for the use of journalistic content, Google has largely avoided doing so. Instead, it relies on its control of search to secure ongoing access to content without payment, thereby distorting competition and undermining the emergence of a functioning licensing market for AI uses of copyrighted works.

6. Relevance of copyright non-compliance

The complaint identifies systematic breaches of EU copyright law, including publishers' neighbouring right under the DSM Copyright Directive. It explains that the combination of a broad text and data mining exception, weak transparency obligations under the AI Act, and ineffective technical controls has rendered publishers' rights largely illusory in practice. This regulatory non-compliance is presented as a relevant indicator of exploitative abuse under competition law.

7. Structural and irreversible harm

The harm identified is not limited to lost revenue. The complaint shows that once publishers are disintermediated from readers, they lose audience relationships, brand recognition, user data, and subscription conversion opportunities. These losses cannot be remedied through financial compensation alone.

Smaller, regional, and specialist publishers are particularly exposed and are likely to exit the market first, leading to reduced media pluralism, weaker democratic discourse, and a less resilient information ecosystem. Over time, the erosion of professional journalism will also degrade the quality and reliability of AI-generated information services, which depend on a continuous supply of accurate, fact-checked content.

Remedies sought

The EPC calls on the European Commission to adopt remedies capable of restoring competitive conditions, including

- meaningful and enforceable publisher control over the use of their content for AI purposes,
- transparency regarding content usage and the impact of AI features on traffic and revenues, and
- a fair licensing and remuneration framework that reflects the scale and economic value of publishers' content.

Timely intervention is essential. If the practices described are allowed to persist, the complaint concludes that the damage to competition, media pluralism, and democratic discourse will be structural and irreversible, with no ex-post remedy capable of restoring lost competitive conditions.