

press release

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Hera, increasingly smart payments: agreement with UniCredit for 6 million digital accounts

The agreement with UniCredit, the first of its kind in Italy, will make available a "virtual" IBAN to each of the multi-utility's customers, thus greatly facilitating payments and increasing cost efficiency. For Hera, the initiative is part of its overall service digitalisation process, to provide more payment options for customers and to respond to an increasingly "connected" and demanding clientele.

Increasingly "smart" digital payments. This is the objective that the Hera Group has set itself to continue to improve and facilitate its relationship with its customers. An multi-faceted and challenging process for which the multi-utility has signed a cooperation agreement with UniCredit to develop a "Virtual Account" service, which will promote a significant simplification of payments and of the related book-keeping.

Under this agreement, the bank has generated 6 million dedicated "virtual" IBANs that Hera – the first company in Italy to do so on a large scale – will make available to each customer, in their bill or invoice. As a result, customers will be able to pay conveniently from their online bank account, without waiting in queues, and with an automatic and unambiguous acknowledgement of the payment. UniCredit will then credit the multi-utility's account with all incoming transfers, regardless of their type, and send the company a statement of the transactions carried out.

In addition to the "virtual" IBAN system, Hera is developing additional mobile payment methods for its customers, such as digital wallets, to make transactions increasingly easy, straightforward and user-friendly. Hera has thus consolidated its position as one of the most focused and innovative companies in adopting advanced digitalisation solutions, also aimed at constantly improving the customer experience.

The initiative belongs to its more extensive process of digitalising infrastructures and services that the Hera Group initiated some time ago, with the goal, among others, of identifying and responding to the needs of an increasingly "connected" and demanding clientele. The process supports the objectives of the UN Agenda for 2030, and is also entirely consistent with the European Union's strategy on the creation of a digital single market based on three pillars: improving access to digital goods and services for consumers and businesses, creating an environment conducive to the development of digital networks and services, and maximising the growth potential of the digital economy.

"Innovation is one of the five strategic pillars on which Hera Group's business plan is based", explained **Stefano Venier**, Hera's Managing Director. "In 2017 alone we invested 78 million euro in projects designed to

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spread digitalisation, in areas such as smart cities, data analytics, business intelligence, Utility 4.0, circular economy and customer experience. We are already the most digital utility company among the 13 examined in a survey by Utilitatis, but that's not enough. The service sector is constantly evolving and every day has to deal with an audience of digital natives who come to market with new paradigms and consumption patterns. Transactions and value chains are increasingly shifting to smart channels and this is why agreements such as the one signed with UniCredit are crucial to making a qualitative leap, and responding to the demands of our customers".

"We are very pleased to have brought a product innovation such as Virtual Account to the market with Hera for the first time on such a large scale, as a solution that streamlines the payment reconciliation process for companies, so they can reap tangible advantages in one of the key aspects of their treasury operations," commented **Luca Corsini**, Head of Global Transaction Banking at UniCredit. "The agreement with Hera – he continued – is the result of a consolidated relationship with the company, under which we have recently been at its side for the first green loan signed by an Italian company, and it is a concrete demonstration of UniCredit's ability to seize the potential offered by digitalisation, to offer customers effective solutions to a broad range of payment requirements.