



3rd Broadband Platform Meeting

Hybrid meeting on Interactio/in JDE 51

Wednesday, 27 October 2021

10.00-12.30

Background Note



Commission for Economic Policy (ECON)

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In 2017, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission jointly launched the Broadband Platform with the aim to help high-speed broadband reach all European regions, including rural and sparsely populated areas where there is not enough market-driven development. Since then, the Platform has been a key instrument in making the voice of local and regional authorities heard through the important added value of the CoR and its members, feeding into the European Commission's policy-making process in this field. The mandate of the Broadband Platform is more important than ever today in view of the twin green and digital transition goals, the ongoing debate on the Digital Decade, digital principles and the challenges posed by Covid-19.

Objectives of the meeting

Following on from the meetings of the Broadband Platform in January and in June, and taking into account the priorities mentioned by the Broadband Platform members, this autumn meeting has been set up jointly with the European Commission DG Connect and will serve to inform Members about the latest EU initiatives concerning digital transformation and connectivity. The meeting will offer time for debate and give Members the possibility to directly inform Commission policy-makers about the situation and (digital) challenges they experience at local and regional level.

The 2030 Policy Programme: "Path to the Digital Decade" and the Digital principles

The proposal for a "Path to the Digital Decade" Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council aims to set concrete digital targets which the EU is expected to achieve by the end of the decade, as first defined in the Digital Compass communication put forward in March 2021. Achieving the ambitious targets set in the Digital Compass requires a joint effort by all Member States and at the Union level, with, where necessary, joined up investments. This item will focus on the presentation of the European Commission proposal and on how local and regional authorities could be actively involved in achieving the Digital Compass targets concerning digital skills, digital transformation of businesses, secure and sustainable digital infrastructures and digitalisation of public services.

Specifically, the new "Path to the Digital Decade" introduces a structured cooperation between the Member States and the European Commission to work collectively towards the agreed objectives, while recognising different starting points among Member States.

The proposed annual cooperation mechanism with Member States will consist of:

- A structured, transparent and shared monitoring system based on the [Digital Economy and Society Index \(DESI\)](#) to measure progress towards each of the 2030 targets, including key performance indicators (KPIs);
- An annual report on the 'State of the Digital Decade', in which the Commission will evaluate progress and provide recommendations for actions;
- Multiannual digital decade strategic roadmaps for each Member State, in which they will outline adopted or planned policies and measures in support of the 2030 targets;
- A structured annual framework to discuss and address areas of insufficient progress through recommendations and joint commitments between the Commission and the Member States;
- A mechanism to support the implementation of multi-country projects.

Moreover, the implementation of the Path to the Digital Decade, including the design of follow-up initiatives, would be supported by discussions in the [online forum](#) dedicated to the Digital Compass. To follow up on the Digital Compass Communication, the Commission is also preparing a Proposal for a Declaration of Digital Principles. This initiative proposes a set of principles that should define the 'European way' for the digital society. The goal is to inform people and provide policymakers and digital operators with a reference for their actions in the digital environment. The Declaration is based on a public consultation led by the European Commission over the last summer and the CoR has conducted a parallel consultation with an enlarged set of digital principles. The results of the CoR consultation will also be discussed at the Broadband Platform meeting.

Questions to explore with the speakers

1. The Path to the Digital Decade will be based on DESI, which is based mainly on national data. How to better reflect different paths to digital transformation at regional level and how to adjust the targets to specific needs of different regions?
2. How could regions and cities be involved in the drawing up, implementation and monitoring of multiannual Digital Decade strategic roadmaps that Member States will have to set up?
3. How could regions, being at the same time managing authorities and beneficiaries of Cohesion policy programmes, be better involved in establishing and in the management of Multi-Country Projects?
4. How will the link between the European semester and the monitoring of the achievement of the digital decade targets be made?

Green Deal – leveraging the potential of digital transformation

Rafał Trzaskowski, CoR Rapporteur on The European Climate Pact

The Union should promote and invest in the necessary digital transformation as the smart use of clean digital technologies can serve as a key enabler for climate action and environmental sustainability. The digital transition and a smarter and greener use of technologies can help make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, a key goal of the European Green Deal. Technology can improve energy and resource efficiency, facilitate the circular economy, lead to a better allocation of resources, reduce emissions, pollution, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. At the same time, the ICT sector must ensure the environmentally sound design and deployment of digital technologies. Europe needs a digital sector that puts sustainability at its heart, ensuring that digital infrastructures and technologies become verifiably more sustainable and energy- and resource efficient.

The [European Climate Pact](#) plays a pivotal role in the full implementation of the European Green Deal. As also underlined in the CoR opinion on the European Climate Act¹, it should serve as an innovative governance tool, to develop ideas, channel field information into the EU decision-making process, improve implementation of EU policies and coordinate action to combat climate change, while simultaneously tackling the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It seeks to create an open and inclusive platform with which to engage citizens and communities in action for our climate and environment. The Climate Pact will focus on spreading awareness and supporting action, in order to connect and collectively develop and implement climate solutions, big and small, including digital.

¹ CoR opinion 1360/2020, rapporteur Rafał Kazimierz Trzaskowski (PL/EPP), adopted on 13 October 2020

The CoR is working with the European Commission to make the European Climate Pact a success. The Green Deal Going Local scheme is a new initiative of the CoR whose aim is to put cities and regions at the core of the European Green Deal and ensure that both the EU's sustainable growth strategy and the COVID-19 recovery plan translate into direct funding for cities and regions and tangible projects for every area.

This item should shed light on how local and regional authorities can foster digital transformation and how digital transformation fits with the Green Deal objectives.

Questions to explore with the speakers

1. Regions and cities are in the forefront in fighting the consequences of climate change and, in the meantime, are the first to implement local solutions to mitigate its effects. How could regions use technology and digital tools to leverage the green transition? Are there any concrete examples from the ground that could be replicated?
2. The CoR has launched its Green Deal Going Local scheme in order to put cities and regions at the core of the European Green Deal and implementing the European Climate Pact at regional and local levels. How can regions and their representatives be actively engaged in the green and digital transition and how are digital solutions contributing to the Green Deal objectives?
3. How can local politicians become even more politically active in fostering the twin green and digital transitions? What tools are currently at their disposal?

Recovery and Resilience Plans funding Connectivity and 5G Communities

Guido Acchioni and **Eric Gaudillat**, Investment in High Capacity Networks, European Commission

The EU recovery strategy from the pandemic is most commonly known as the Next Generation EU (NGEU). The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) represents the biggest part of its EUR 750 billion budget, totalling EUR 672.5 billion to be spent between 2021 and 2023. To access this funding, Member States must submit National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs), based on the six Next Generation EU priority areas and following the NGEU Regulation requirements. These plans are then assessed and discussed with the European Commission. The Council of the EU takes the final decision, on the recommendation of the European Commission, on whether or not to approve these plans. In the past months, Member States have been sending their NRRPs to the European Commission. By 15 October, the Commission had received 26 recovery and resilience plans. It will continue to engage with the Dutch authorities to help it deliver a high quality plan. To date, the Commission has already adopted positive assessments of 22 plans (19 of which have also been formally approved by the Council) and its assessment of the Swedish, Polish, Hungarian and Bulgarian plans remains ongoing.

Digital transition counts among the priority areas for the NRRPs. The RRF supports longer-term reform and investments, notably in digital technologies, with a lasting impact on the productivity and resilience of the economy of the Union. The table below² shows the needs of Member States when it comes to

² Deloitte LLP Report *The contribution of National Recovery and Resilience Plans to achieving Europe's Digital Decade ambition* - 21 June 2021; see <https://www.vodafone.com/sites/default/files/2021-06/deloitte-llp-europe-digital-decade-rrf-gap-analysis.pdf>, accessed on 21 October 2021.

reaching the objectives of the 2030 Digital Decade. It demonstrates how much the situation varies from one Member State to another.

In order to support these policy objectives and to close the gaps, the EU has dedicated 20% of funding from the Next Generation EU budget to digitalisation. Next Generation EU includes a budget to support an infrastructure capable of delivering fixed and wireless gigabit services including investments for 5G and 6G through the mechanism of the 5G Communities.

The presentation will provide an overview of the Member States' RRF commitments to the EU targets and the 5G objectives, in particular where the involvement of local and regional authorities is absolutely critical.

Gap in percentage points between current level and 2030 target level

	Infrastructure	Skills		Businesses		Public Services
Country	VHCN	Basic Digital Skills	ICT Specialists (as a % of population)	Basic Digital Intensity	Cloud Computing	Online Service Completion
2030 TARGET	100%	80%	4.5%	90%	75%	100%
Denmark	93%	70%	2.7%	85%	41%	99%
Luxembourg	92%	65%	3.0%	66%	16%	90%
Spain	89%	57%	1.5%	64%	16%	96%
Latvia	88%	43%	1.7%	46%	11%	96%
Portugal	83%	52%	1.9%	59%	16%	99%
Romania	68%	31%	1.0%	31%	7%	70%
Belgium	66%	61%	2.1%	74%	31%	88%
Slovenia	66%	55%	2.0%	54%	17%	91%
Lithuania	61%	56%	1.6%	71%	17%	96%
Poland	60%	44%	1.5%	38%	7%	87%
Slovakia	47%	54%	1.9%	51%	14%	85%
France	44%	57%	1.8%	57%	15%	93%
Croatia	43%	53%	1.5%	54%	22%	73%
Hungary	43%	49%	1.7%	42%	11%	87%
Germany	33%	70%	2.4%	67%	12%	90%
Italy	30%	42%	1.4%	58%	15%	92%
Czechia	29%	62%	2.1%	74%	16%	82%
Austria	14%	66%	2.2%	69%	11%	97%
Cyprus	10%	45%	1.4%	63%	14%	79%
Greece	7%	51%	0.7%	32%	7%	84%



Source: DESI, DII and Eurostat data for latest available year (2019 for Basic Digital Intensity and 2020 for all other metrics).

VHCN= Very High Capacity Networks

Questions to explore with the speakers

1. How are the separate targets for broadband internet and for 5G included in the Member States' plans?
2. What is the Commission's assessment of the Member States' plans – are they ambitious enough and can they realistically deliver the targets set for the 2030 Digital Decade?
3. How can local and regional authorities get involved in the roll-out of these plans?

5G developments and the security dimension

Wide Hogenhout, Cybersecurity and Digital Privacy, European Commission

5G is the critical new generation network technology that will enable innovation and support the digital transformation. 5G provides virtually universal, ultra-high bandwidth, and low latency "connectivity" not only to individual users but also to connected objects (see a Commission video on 5G at <https://youtu.be/fa-PnaJHGDO>).

5G targets in the digital decade



5G will play a key role in reaching one of the cardinal points targeted by the digital compass: secure and performant-sustainable digital infrastructure. The Commission proposes to raise the level of ambition at EU level regarding the deployment of 5G infrastructures. It aims to ensure that all European households are covered by a Gigabit network by 2030, with all populated areas covered by 5G. The strategy also aims to deploy a minimum of 10,000 climate neutral, highly secure, edge nodes³ within the same period.

5G technology and standards will evolve over the next few years as deployment advances. Research and Innovation (R&I) initiatives on 6G technologies are now starting around the world, with the first products and infrastructures expected for the end of this decade.

6G systems will move us from Gigabit to Terabit capacities and sub-millisecond response times. This will enable new applications such as real-time automation or extended reality sensing (“Internet of Senses”), collecting data for a digital twin of the physical world. In Europe, a [first set of 6G projects](#) worth EUR 60 million were launched under the 5G-PPP.

³ An edge node is a computer that acts as an end user portal (or “gateway”) for communication with other nodes in cluster computing, where components of a software system are shared among multiple computers.

While operators are largely responsible for the secure rollout of 5G, and Member States are in charge of national security, network security is an issue of strategic importance for the entire EU. A coordinated approach based on robust security measures at national and EU level will help Europe to remain one of the leading regions in 5G deployment. This presentation will discuss how this can be achieved.

In its opinion on [A strategy for Europe's digital future and a strategy for data](#) (Rapporteur Mark Weinmeister EPP/DE; 12-14 October 2020), the Committee of the Regions

- stresses the social and economic importance of the fifth generation of mobile communications (5G) and calls for awareness-raising based on transparent assessment of the technologies, in order to ensure that citizens fully understand the benefits and disadvantages of the infrastructure – including studies of the ecological and health effects – rather than becoming victims of fake news;
- underlines the need for a comprehensive approach to boosting the security and resilience of 5G networks and points out that a joint approach in the EU is effective and that a common European minimum safety standard generates overall positive results;
- acknowledges the approach adopted to implementing the toolbox with a view to ensuring a diverse, forward-looking 5G supply chain and avoiding a lock-in effect;
- calls on Member States to follow the EU toolbox for secure 5G networks to ensure Europe's cybersecurity and protect Europe's geo-political interests against the threat of surveillance and espionage related to the deployment of 5G networks using technology from third countries.

Questions to explore with the speakers

1. How does the European Commission see the involvement of local and regional authorities in this effort?
2. What are the bottlenecks in 5G deployment at local level? What concerns are there and how can these be addressed?

Digital Innovation Hubs in support of digital transformation

Anne-Marie Sassen, Acting Head of Unit for Digital Transformation of Industrial Ecosystems, European Commission

The digital transformation of the economy is key for Europe to remain competitive internationally. Companies and public sector organisations need to integrate digital technologies into their business processes, products, and services to fully benefit from the efficiency gains and innovation they may bring, while remaining environmentally sustainable and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In particular, the smart use of data can be a powerful lever to drive growth, create new jobs and open up new business models and innovation opportunities. Four years after the launch of the Digitising European Industry Strategy and the eGovernment Action Plan, the European economy has made significant progress. **The level of digitalisation however remains uneven, depending on the sector, country and size of the company: only 20% of SMEs in the EU are highly digitised.** A similar pattern is observed for the adoption of eGovernment, where **the overall adoption of eGovernment**

services is 53%, with some countries reaching more than 75% and other countries still below 30%. European Digital Innovation Hubs have a key role to play to address these gaps.

Under the new Digital Europe Programme, the EU will support the creation of a European network of co-funded digital innovation hubs (EDIHs), with one hub per region (as a proxy), that will work towards the digital transformation of industry and of public services in coordination with territorial stakeholders such as local and regional authorities, SME associations and others. The European Commission is about to launch a call for European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs).

By providing access to technical expertise and experimentation as well as the possibility to 'test before invest', EDIHs help companies improve business/production processes, products, or services using digital technologies. They also provide innovation services, such as financing advice, training, and skills development that are needed for a successful digital transformation. Environmental issues are also taken into account, in particular with regard to energy consumption and low carbon emissions.

For the public sector, the EDIHs focus on interoperability solutions. Interoperability of European public services concerns all levels of administration: Union, national, regional and local. The Digital Europe Programme foresees to deploy the so-called "Transformation Platform Ecosystem", which includes the European Digital Service Infrastructures and building blocks (eID, eInvoicing, eDelivery, eSignature, context broker, etc.), interoperability solutions (eHealth patient summary and ePrescription), as well as the Open Data Platform, which can serve both the public and the private sector.

An overview of candidate EDIHs per Member State is available [here](#) .

The recent CoR study ['The state of digital transformation at regional level and COVID-19 induced changes to economy and business models, and their consequences for regions'](#) showcases some good practice examples of Digital Innovation Hubs cooperating with local and regional authorities (pages 61-72).

Questions to explore with the speakers

1. What will be different in the EDIHs compared to the existing Digital Innovation Hubs?
2. How can my region benefit from the EDIH network and services?
3. How can I get involved as a representative of a local or regional authority?

Current CoR initiatives on Digital Europe

As part of the twin transformation on green and digital, digital policy is a key priority for the Committee of the Regions (CoR). The CoR is promoting the principle of digital cohesion as an important additional dimension to the traditional concept of economic, social and territorial cohesion defined in the EU Treaties. In order to carry this goal forward, the CoR works on the four areas of the Digital Compass/Digital Decade – secure and sustainable digital infrastructure, IT skills, digitalization of public services and digital transformation of businesses.

As such, the CoR has just published the study and survey [The state of digital transformation at regional level and COVID-19 induced changes to economy and business models, and their consequences for regions](#) which analyses changing business models, in particular with regard to small and medium-sized enterprises, as a result of the pandemic, and on how local and regional authorities can support businesses in their recovery. The study includes case studies on successful cooperation between businesses and local and regional authorities from eight European regions, which can inspire other regions. The survey aims to reflect on the perceptions of regions, cities and/or chambers of commerce on the situation and needs of small and medium-sized enterprises with regard to digital transformation and to collect evidence on the challenges that business and local and regional authorities are facing. The survey was run in cooperation with Eurochambres.

On 12 October, the CoR published the 2021 [Barometer report](#) on the State of the Regions and Cities with a chapter on the digital transition at local and regional levels. The chapter examines some of the existing and developing digital divides at subnational level and illustrates the differences between those LRAs that are already leveraging the full potential of digital transformation in order to help businesses to grow and innovate as well as to serve their citizens, and those not yet fully digitalised. It also sheds light on the particular role that LRAs play in supporting SMEs, in particular given recent changes to the economy and business models due to COVID-19, and presents some good examples from EU regions. Lastly, it highlights the need to establish regional indicators for measuring digital transformation with a view to future decision-making.

The CoR has also recently adopted an [opinion on the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act](#), and an opinion on [the European Digital Identity](#) showcasing the interest that the LRAs attribute to digital matters. The opinion on the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act highlights the strong local and regional dimension of the DSA and DMA proposals. Digital services influence citizens' everyday life and some of the sectors in which certain platforms are active, such as housing and tourist accommodation, urban transport and delivery of public services, are regulated at local and regional level. The opinion emphasises the need for a regulatory approach which enables innovation, Europe's competitiveness and fair competition. In its opinion on the European Digital Identity, the CoR backs the idea of a European Digital Identity Wallet, enabling citizens to prove their identity, including while on the move, so they can access online public administration services, swap digital documents or just attest personal identity attributes.

Regarding the measuring of digital transformation, the CoR is currently working with the European Commission and ESPON on a measuring framework for digital transformation of cities as part of the Join Boost Sustain initiative. Interested cities are welcome to join: [Join us in building the European way of Digital Transformation for 300 million Europeans | Living in EU \(living-in.eu\)](#) .

The CoR also was actively engaged in two workshops i in the European Week of Regions and Cities on : [Smaller and Medium-sized Cities - Challenges and solutions to scaling up the digital transformation - 11WS21426](#) and the [European Digital Innovation Hubs \(EDIHs\) and the digital transition of regions 12WS21653](#).

On 17 November a workshop on the Digital Decade and the Digital Principles will be organized within the framework of the CoR-led [Young Elected Politicians network](#).