

Cities, villages and regions strengthen cooperation with the European Commission to bridge the digital divide in Europe



The 2021 Broadband Platform kick-off meeting underlined that digitalisation and digital connectivity must be a top priority for local communities in their recovery from the pandemic.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission pursue their common effort to help digital transformation and high-speed broadband reach all European territories, including rural and sparsely populated areas.

The members of the Broadband Platform, a policy dialogue initiative between the European Commission and the CoR, meet twice a year to address issues that hamper the connectivity of underserved areas. The 2021 kick-off meeting, that took place in a fully virtual mode today, served as an occasion for the [13 members](#) of the CoR and the European Commission to take stock of the big transformations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and to define the work programme for this year. □

[Michael Murphy](#) (IE/EPP), head of the CoR's Irish delegation, chair of the commission for Economic policy and of the Broadband Platform, opened the meeting by highlighting that *"It is difficult to imagine a more timely context for such a meeting than the one we have these days. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic we have all seen an accelerated digitalisation in our daily lives. Digital technology has become imperative to ensure continuity in our working and private lives, be it through teleworking, home-schooling, e-commerce, e-health, e-government, digital democracy or digital entertainment. As a result, local and regional authorities are challenged to make connectivity and digital transformation work for citizens. We are concerned with closing the gaps in connectivity where they exist and with making use of opportunities that digital technology offers for rural areas"*.

Ricardo Castanheira, Counsellor for Digital and Telecom of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, Anthony Whelan, Digital Policy Adviser to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and Directors from the European Commission joined participants to discuss the EU policy strategy and the funding available for connectivity policy and digital transformation. Investments in the digital transformation will be one of the main pillars of the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#), the EUR 672.5 billion instrument designed to support EU countries in carrying out reforms and investing in the EU's common priorities, also known as the Recovery Fund.

As outlined by the [EU Annual regional and local Barometer](#) published in October, the prominent role of digital technology in COVID-19 resilience and response has highlighted shortcomings in digital infrastructure and digital literacy, and has made the digital divide between cities and regions ever more pronounced.

Background:

In 2017, [the Committee of the Regions 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 policymaking process.

In October, the CoR adopted the opinion [A Strategy for Europe's Digital future and A Strategy for Data](#), drafted by [Mark Weinmeister](#) (DE/EPP) Secretary of State for European Affairs of the Land of Hesse, which recognizes the central role of digital transformation in the EU's response to COVID-19. Please find the press release [here](#).

The European Committee of the Regions 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 can find more information [here](#).

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