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E-001489/2024

Answer given by Executive Vice-President Vestager
on behalf of the European Commission
(20.9.2024)

The Commission is committed to ensuring that everyone, everywhere in the EU has access to performing digital infrastructure and fast internet connections. The Digital Decade Policy Programme (DDPP) sets ambitious targets like gigabit connectivity for all EU households and 5G coverage across all populated areas by 2030¹. The White Paper² presents the challenges and opportunities Europe faces in the rollout of future connectivity networks and proposed a series of scenarios to make the EU regulatory and investment frameworks fit to facilitate the achievement of EU digital objectives.

According to the second annual report on the State of the Digital Decade³, which monitors the implementation of the DDPP, very high-capacity networks (VHCN) coverage in the EU's rural areas at the end of 2023 reached 56% of households, while 5G coverage made it to 74%. Reaching the targets may require at least a total investment of EUR 148 billion⁴, including both private and public funding.

The Commission supports the deployment of performing digital infrastructure through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Digital with a budget of EUR 1.7 billion. CEF Digital *inter alia* supports 5G infrastructure for rural communities in sectors like smart farming. In addition, the allocation to digital connectivity under the recovery and resilience facility (RRF) reaches almost EUR 14 billion⁵. In Austria, the RRF provides support for the deployment of performing digital infrastructure and fast internet connections in rural areas through the Austrian federal state aid broadband scheme⁶ approved by the Commission in March 2022. The Commission also supports the implementation of the Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite (IRIS²) programme⁷ with a budget of EUR 2.4 billion, which will also ensure fast internet connections in rural areas, as satellite broadband can bring broadband services with up to 250 Mbps download speeds. Finally, the EU is also leveraging connectivity investments through cohesion funds, e.g. by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (about EUR 2.3 billion⁸) and through InvestEU⁹.

¹ The Digital Decade Decision sets out digital targets grouped into four cardinal points, which were first identified in the Digital Compass Communication (COM/2021/118 final) (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0118>) as key areas for the digital transformation of the EU: digital skills, digital infrastructures, the digitalisation of businesses and the digitalisation of public services.

² <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/white-paper-how-master-europes-digital-infrastructure-needs>

³ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/second-report-state-digital-decade-calls-strengthened-collective-action-propel-eus-digital>

⁴ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/investment-and-funding-needs-digital-decade-connectivity-targets>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/assets/thematic_analysis/scoreboard_thematic_analysis_connectivity.pdf

⁶ 'Broadband Austria 2030' scheme is part of Austria's strategy to address the needs of citizens and businesses in the context of digitalisation and focuses on rural areas first.

⁷ https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-space/iris2-secure-connectivity_en

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/available-budget_en

⁹ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/broadband-public-and-private-funds-financing-broadband-deployments>