

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001723/24
to the Commission
Elsi Katainen (Renew)
(16 September 2024)**

Subject: Ensuring reliable and fast connections in rural areas and regions bordering Russia

Today, high-speed broadband connectivity is a necessity, even in sparsely populated areas. While better speeds have been introduced and fibre optic cables are reaching many homes, growing regional disparity is a reality. Adequate and reliable connectivity is a necessity for many activities, including business, investment, farming and teleworking.

By way of example, people living in rural areas in Finland are experiencing low speeds and limited connectivity, as 3G networks are being dismantled. The proximity of the Russian border and potential interference with telecommunications networks underlines the need to ensure secure, reliable and fast connections outside urban areas. Support for the construction of fixed networks has been provided through rural development and recovery instrument funds, but this has resulted in broadband largely being built in areas with sufficient population density.

How will the Commission ensure that the Gigabit Society 2025 and Digital Decade 2030 targets can be achieved in sparsely populated areas in the regions bordering Russia, especially with regard to broadband development?

Submitted: 16.9.2024

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Vestager on behalf of the European Commission
(28 October 2024)**

The Commission is committed to ensuring that everyone, everywhere in the EU has access to high-speed connectivity. The targets set in the Digital Decade Policy Programme to connect all EU households to gigabit networks and ensure 5G coverage across all populated areas by 2030 ⁽¹⁾ apply also to the rural areas.

According to the second annual report on the State of the Digital Decade ⁽²⁾, at the end of 2023 very high-capacity networks coverage in the EU's rural areas reached 56% of households, while 5G coverage amounted to 74%. Reaching the targets may require at least a total investment of EUR 200 billion ⁽³⁾, including both private and public funding.

The Commission supports the deployment of digital infrastructures through numerous funds. The Connecting Europe Facility Digital ⁽⁴⁾ with a budget of EUR 2 billion supports, *inter alia*, the deployment of standalone 5G infrastructures for rural communities in sectors like smart farming and border control.

This is in particular important in regions bordering Russia in the specific context of its full-scale invasion on Ukraine. The budget allocated to connectivity under the recovery and resilience facility reaches almost EUR 14 billion ⁽⁵⁾.

With a budget of EUR 2.4 billion the Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite programme ⁽⁶⁾ will also contribute to the coverage of rural areas.

Connectivity is also supported under the cohesion funds, e.g. by the European Regional Development Fund (about EUR 2.3 billion ⁽⁷⁾) and through InvestEU ⁽⁸⁾.

Finally, the White Paper ⁽⁹⁾ adopted in February 2024 presents the challenges and opportunities Europe faces in the rollout of future secure and resilient connectivity networks and proposes several scenarios to improve the EU regulatory and investment frameworks to facilitate the achievement of EU digital objectives.

⁽¹⁾ The Digital Decade Decision (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:4646000>) sets out digital targets grouped into four cardinal points, which were first identified in the Digital Compass Communication as key areas for the digital transformation of the EU: digital skills, digital infrastructures, the digitalisation of businesses and the digitalisation of public services, COM(2021) 118 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0118>

⁽²⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/second-report-state-digital-decade-calls-strengthened-collective-action-propel-eus-digital>

⁽³⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/investment-and-funding-needs-digital-decade-connectivity-targets>

⁽⁴⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/cef-digital>

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

⁽⁶⁾ https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-space/iris2-secure-connectivity_en

⁽⁷⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/available-budget_en

⁽⁸⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/broadband-public-and-private-funds-financing-broadband-deploys>

⁽⁹⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/white-paper-how-master-europes-digital-infrastructure-needs>