2. ENHANCING ACCESS TO AND, USE AND QUALITY OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)

What does the EU want to achieve?

- By 2013 broadband access for all
- By 2020 access for all to much higher speeds (30MBps or above)
- By 2020: 50% households or more with connections > 100 Mbps

How?

The European Commission has proposed to spend almost **€9.2 billion from 2014 to 2020 on pan-European projects to give EU citizens and businesses access to high-speed broadband networks** and the services that run on them. The funding, part of the proposed **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)**, would include equity and debt instruments and grants. It would complement private investment and public money at local, regional and national levels and EU Structural or Cohesion Funds. At least €7 billion would be available for investment in **high-speed broadband infrastructure**. With regard to ERDF and EAFRD, the proposed funding would take the form of support to **infrastructure development, application development and helping the uptake of ICT**.

A **Smart Specialisation Strategy is also a precondition to funding ICT-related actions** via Structural Funds. This strategy should include a 'digital growth section' stipulating budgeting and prioritisation of measures; an analysis concerning the balancing of support for the demand and supply of ICT; measurable targets for the outcomes of actions on digital literacy, skills, e-inclusion, e-accessibility, and e-health aligned with existing national or regional strategies in those fields; and an assessment of the needs for reinforced ICT capacity-building.

How can mountains contribute?

ICTs have the greatest capacity to **bring growth where growth is limited by distances and limited accessibility to people and markets**. Euromontana argues that the roll-out of ICT should happen primarily in most remote territories where these ICT will shrink distances. Indeed, the digital divide can often be found in mountain areas, where access to broadband is insufficient or even inexistent. The challenge is therefore to implement innovative solutions that allow mountain people and businesses to benefit from the advantages linked to good ICT infrastructure to the same degree as those living in lowland or urban areas. With good connectivity, mountains will become more welcoming places to work, live and create businesses for all those looking for a better quality of life.

What do they need in order to contribute?

- Infrastructures bringing **connectivity to the same level of quality as in the lowlands**, using adapted and the most cost-efficient technologies: these infrastructures must come at a reasonable price for mountain people, and investment must be mutualised and carefully thought of, especially installing fiber optic cables at the same time as other work.
- **Training in the uptake of ICT** by people and businesses.
- Support to the **development of applications**, in all economic sectors, that fit their specific context, including specific applications for the agricultural sector.

How to deliver the digital growth priority in mountain areas?

- **Support the development of Broadband infrastructures in mountain areas** : i.e. *« roll-out of open, affordable and future-proof Next Generation Access Infrastructures (NGA) that are accessible to all in under-served areas and in the economic centres of the less developed regions ».* In the initial Commission proposals, infrastructure development could be supported by the Connecting Europe Facility for larger projects, ERDF in less developed regions, and EAFRD in all regions. This means that infrastructure development in the under-served parts of most developed regions could be supported only via EAFRD. **Euromontana advocates that this needs to be changed!**

- **Develop e-Government and e-trade applications in mountain areas** i.e. *« enhancing innovation, the modernisation of public administrations and access to these services by citizens, including marginalised groups and people with disabilities»:*
  - o Provision of e-services in sparsely populated areas through: e-appointments with officials from local authorities, improving relations with administrations, e-voting, e-ordering of goods distributed via an integrated multi-functional transport, delivery of medicine by post etc…
    - ▪ In [Boticas](#) (Portugal), the county created a 'travelling office' consisting of 3 connected and equipped vehicles that visit all the villages of the municipality once a week.
  - o The INTERREG IT-CH project PTA – [Piattaforma Tecnologica Alpina](#) (Alpine Technological Platform), led by Lombardy (Italy), promotes integrated ideas for enhanced access to open-source shared ICT in the mountains, overcoming incompatibilities in network infrastructures.

- **Support development of ICT applications that contribute to meeting future societal challenges and opportunities in mountain areas** such as:
  - o **E-health**, answering specific needs of ageing populations with limited access to medical support in remote areas: many good practices have been collected by the INTERREG IVC projects [IMMODI](#) and Regional Telemedicine Forum ([RTF](#))
  - o **Improving mobility** via smart transport organisation, such as transport on-demand in sparsely populated areas using remote ordering or car sharing groups.
  - o **e-learning,** diversifying the education supply for young mountain people and working-age people looking for training or professional development, like the [telecenter](#) in Gorski Kotar hosted by the Business Incubator Skrad – PINS (Croatia).
  - o **Smart grids for energy efficiency,** allowing, for example, optimum use of renewable energy facilities and energy storage.
  - o **Smart applications for rural tourism** allowing on-line booking, combination of services, experience sharing, virtual tours, tourism product optimisation etc…: the INTERREG IVC project [DANTE](#) is collecting practices (see also [I-SPEED](#)).

- **investment in the large-scale uptake of ICT-based innovations** within and between regions to address key societal challenges, through targeted uptake :
  - o **Look at [Cybersudoe best practices relevant to mountain areas](#)!**

- **ICT applications for competitiveness and traceability of mountain food products:**
  - o **Applications for marketing of mountain foods**: In Scotland, Macbeths of Forres, "[the Scottish on-line butcher](#)" produces high quality Scotch Beef and markets it on-line.

More information on ICT and mountain areas:
[Euromontana thematic page on ICT](#) - [Cybersudoe good practices relevant to mountain areas](#)
European Mountain ICT Forum: [www.emict-forum.eu](#)