

EU Support to Broadband in Mountain Regions

Mountain areas suffer from low connectivity

The last Digital Economy and Society Index, known as DESI, shows that rural connectivity is on the rise but still far below the average European access of 76% of households. This compares to the **40% of households in rural areas**. There are no specific data for mountain areas, but in many cases these areas cumulate the difficulties of remoteness, low population density and difficult terrain for rolling-out broadband.

Connectivity matters

The digital gap creates a growing divide between mountain areas and cities. This is particularly worrying, as **connectivity could be a very powerful tool to actually overcome some of the disadvantages of remoteness and low population density and maintain the attractiveness of mountain areas for their inhabitants and visitors.**

Indeed many public and social services in Member States depend directly on population numbers, such as health centres, schools, postal services, etc. Through connectivity many of these services can possibly be better delivered in underserved areas. It is therefore paramount that good access to fast and reliable Internet is developed for the benefit of mountain areas.

At the Euromontana Conference of 7 June 2017 in Brussels [on Cohesion Policy in Mountain Areas](#) several examples were shown of how connectivity can help to overcome the challenges in these areas, notably in the healthcare sector.

For private sector activity, connectivity is just as important as for public and social services. Tourism is a key sector in most mountain areas, and modern tourism is highly digitalised. Most tourists will decide on trips based on internet searches, and will expect to make their bookings through the Internet. Many hotels and B&Bs in mountain areas suffer from bad connectivity, which makes it more difficult to maintaining their on-line offer attractive and up-to date.

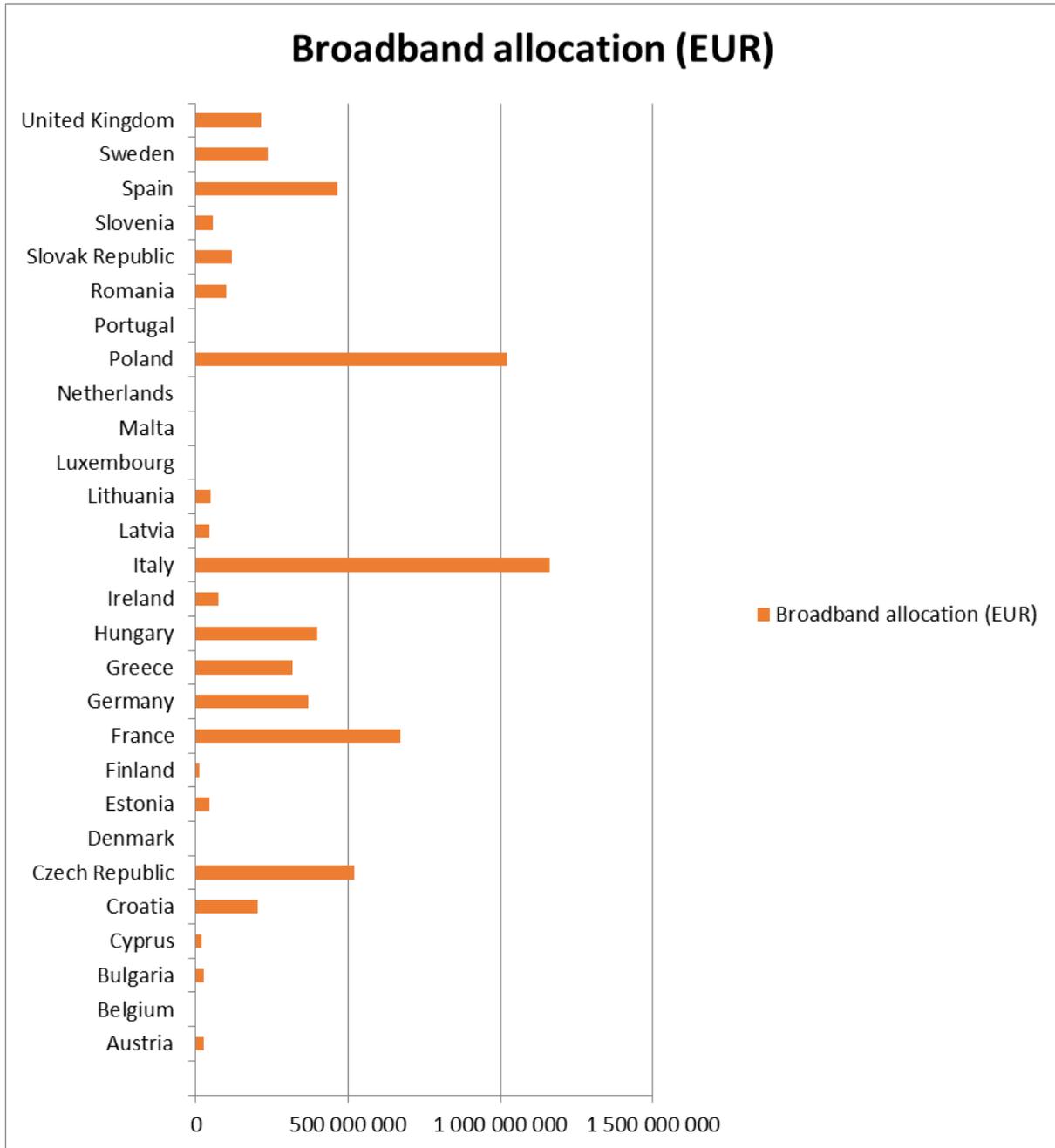
Finally, farming increasingly requires connectivity to remain competitive and /or to facilitate pluri-activity or to monitor herds in grazing land.

EU policies to promote connectivity

The European Commission is well aware of the challenges faced by remote areas in attracting private operators' investment for broadband. In order to compensate for this market failure several policy tools have been developed, such as:

a) The Structural and Investment Funds

The EU has allocated over Euro 6 billion under Structural and Investment Funds to develop connectivity by 2020. The majority of these funds target underserved rural and peripheral areas.



You can find more detail on investment plans under each [country's NGA plan](#).

b) LEADER

The LEADER programme promotes local innovation throughout rural areas of Europe. Initiatives are coordinated by the Local Action Groups (LAGs). In several countries citizens have taken their fate into their own hands, and started developing citizen run networks. The LEADER network and the LAGs can be catalysts to help develop such networks.

c) Cost Reduction Directive

The main cost for broadband deployment is not the cables and the routers, but the infrastructure costs of digging, setting up poles, getting access rights, etc. In order to mitigate these deployment costs, the EU has developed a policy of co-deploying infrastructure.

Therefore if in a mountain area a road or water pipes need to be worked on, the construction company should be encouraged to allow the deployment of fibre optic cables at the same time. This will greatly decrease the cost of deployment, and make access in remote areas more cost efficient.

Many countries, such as Portugal, have created infrastructure atlases. These are on-line data bases where the municipalities can advertise every time they plan road works. This will allow telecom operators to be aware and co-deploy fibre optic cables in ducts, while the roads or sidewalks are already opened.

This policy of co-deployment is encouraged by the EU under the Cost Reduction Directive.

d) BCO Network

Many regions in Europe are faced with the same challenges of addressing underinvestment in broadband access. In order to create a single point of contact and make information on regulations and financial programmes more accessible, most Member States have set up a **Broadband Competence Office (BCO)**.

In addition the European Commission has set up a **Support Facility** to work with the network of national and regional BCOs.

Through this set of support measures the **EU strives to guarantee universal access to fast internet for all European citizens.**

For more information, please contact:

You can contact the Broadband Competence Office Support Facility at info@broadbandeurope.eu and find more information [here](#).