

The Broadband Platform discusses ways to improve digital cohesion in Europe



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The Covid-19 pandemic and the worsening geopolitical context caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine have shown how important technology and digital tools are to help citizens to adapt to challenging circumstances and to provide them with the latest information and key support. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and European Commission highlighted in their 4th Broadband Platform meeting that digitalisation is key to close digital gaps in access and use of digital services, thus promoting cohesion in Europe.

Michael Murphy (IE/EPP), Mayor of Clonmel Borough District, Chair of the CoR's Commission for Economic Policy (ECON) and of the Broadband Platform, said: " Today nearly all aspects of work and private life are concerned by digital transformation, and those who have no access to digital will be missing opportunities and lose out in the long run. In addition to that, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown that our societies need to be digitally resilient. Only a society without gaps in the access to and use of latest technology can provide its citizens with the latest information as well as key support tools for those in need, such as those provided through digital platforms. We need to make sure that citizens have equal access to digital technologies and the digital way of life. "

The digital divide may jeopardise the achievement of the digital decade goals set for 2030, and hamper the cohesion in the EU. During the meeting, Gaetano Armao (IT/EPP), Vice-President of the Region of Sicily and CoR's rapporteur of the opinion on digital cohesion, examined the causes and challenges of the digital divide for cities and regions. The CoR is seeking to add the digital dimension to the definition of economic, social and territorial cohesion recognised by the EU Treaties. In the era of connectivity, urban and rural areas are still lacking high technological networks and citizens often have insufficient digital skills. For this reason, it is crucial to develop a clear

understanding of the digital concept for regions that are less developed in order for them to catch up with the rapid digital transformation.

The rapporteur Armao, stated: " The acceleration of digitalization during the COVID-19 pandemic did not guarantee improved access and use of e-services. In terms of connectivity and digital infrastructure, rural areas are still lagging. The gap between individuals living in cities and urban areas increased, especially in the provision of digital public services. "

His opinion is scheduled to be discussed and voted by the ECON Commission on 8 July, and then by the CoR Plenary in October.

Members of the Broadband Platform also discussed that public authorities in particular should be increasingly involved in the European Commission's 5G Smart Community approach. The strategy aims to provide unprecedented opportunities for local communities to accelerate the deployment of 5G connectivity and enable their citizens and businesses to reap its benefits for services of general interest. In addition, digital global gateways and backbone connectivity, which play an essential role in ensuring very high capacity and performance of digital connectivity across the Union, are necessary for the EU to ensure the competitive availability, reliability and resilience of these vital infrastructures.

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. The full list of CoR members can be found [here](#) .

The European Committee of the Regions is part of the Join Boost Sustain initiative. Interested cities can find more information [here](#).

On 12 May, members of the ECON Commission will discuss and vote the draft opinion on the EU Data Act prepared by the Chair of the Kerava City Council Anne Karjalainen (FI/PES), and have a first exchange of views on the draft opinion "European Chips Act to

strengthen the European semiconductor ecosystem", of which is rapporteur Thomas Schmidt (DE/EPP), Minister for Regional Development of the Free State of Saxony. More information on the meeting can be found [here](#).

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