

Connectivity: key to revitalising rural areas

The Commission published a Communication on the 'Long term vision for rural areas' by 2040, noting connectivity as a key element in revitalising local communities.



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The Commission's communication on 'The Long term vision for rural areas' outlines the Commission's plan to make Europe's rural communities better connected and more sustainable by 2040. Fast and reliable connectivity means better opportunities. Better internet connections open doors to online business opportunities. Reliable and fast connections can unleash new innovations in crop harvesting. Stable connectivity can keep families and bring people back to the countryside thanks to enabling remote working, telemedicine, online services and innovations in agriculture.

In preparation of the Communication, the Commission sought views from European citizens and businesses on the challenges and opportunities for rural areas. In June 2021, the Commission published the results of the Eurobarometer on rural areas. In the survey, 26% of Europeans said that digital infrastructure, such as broadband and internet access, is a key need that should be addressed in rural areas. Similarly, 93% of respondents to the consultation on the 'Long term vision for rural areas' believe that over the next 20 years, the attractiveness of rural areas will depend on the available digital connectivity. 94% said that it will depend on the availability of basic and eServices.

Europe's countryside is at the heart of our agricultural production, our deep-rooted traditions and rich natural resources. Yet rural areas all across Europe continue to lag behind when it comes to fast and quality broadband coverage. For remote communities, such a challenge translates into a lack services and widespread unemployment. Currently, only 60% of EU rural households have high-speed internet

access, compared to the EU's total average of 86%. Only 48% of rural residents have at least basic digital skills, compared to 62% of the urban population. Reliable connections are a necessary element in revitalising remote villages by enriching the pool of available resources, as well as attracting new businesses, families and visitors.

Digital for rural areas

The Commission is making sure to target the challenges and potentials of Europe's countryside in its ambitions for a digitally enabled future. To improve connectivity, Member States can use the Recovery and Resilience Facility, 20% of which should be dedicated to the digital transition, to timely roll out very-high capacity networks. The Commission has also been working closely with Member States who developed a Connectivity toolbox identifying a set of measures which are most efficient in improving the rollout of fast networks.

The Commission's proposed Connecting Europe Facility, or CEF, is pending final agreement by co-legislators to support investment in digital infrastructure networks, alongside transport and energy. In particular, the funding programme would see €2 billion invested to develop connectivity across the EU, including in remote and rural areas.

More so, a network of Broadband Competence Offices (BCOs) is set up across Europe to inform citizens, businesses and public authorities about the opportunities to develop and deploy broadband in their regions. They offer information about investment sources, project partners and broadband coverage.

Stable and fast connectivity would enable innovative solutions in agriculture. The Commission has been funding innovations in agriculture, developing and facilitating the sharing of data to optimise the use of resources and testing new IoT applications in farming.

More information

Long-term vision for rural areas: for stronger, connected, resilient, prosperous EU rural areas (press release with link to Commission Communication, Q&A and factsheet)

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Improving connectivity and access

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