

Digital Day 2021: Europe to reinforce internet connectivity with global partners

At Digital Day 2021, 25 Member States, as well as Iceland and Norway, committed to reinforcing internet connectivity between Europe and its partners in Africa, Asia, the European neighbourhood, the Western Balkans and Latin America, by signing the Declaration on “European Data Gateways as a key element of the EU’s Digital Decade”.



The Member States and the Commission will align their efforts to support the entry points for international internet traffic in Europe, or the European Data Gateways. Improving infrastructure that links Europe with these regions will allow Europe to offer more data services. At the same time, Europe’s partners can benefit from secure data processing thanks to the EU’s strong data protection standards.

Internet connectivity between EU and global partners: key for the Digital Decade

The Commission’s Digital Decade targets include strengthening Europe’s global partnerships and aims to set up a Digital Connectivity fund to boost strategic investment in international connectivity networks. Reinforcing connections between Europe and its global partners will promote European norms and standards and help shape global solutions.

In order to improve international connectivity, Member States and the Commission commit to:

- strengthen international partnerships for connectivity

- offer EU data storage and processing services to partners outside of Europe
- improve submarine cable networks
- establish satellite connectivity
- ensure safe and secure connectivity networks

Better infrastructure and partnerships for global connectivity

In the 'Data Gateways' declaration, Member States commit to aligning their national initiatives to focus on strengthening international connectivity. For example, Member States can use the Recovery and Resilience Facility to design EU domestic networks taking into account the international strategy. In addition, Member States commit to working closely with the industry, civil society and development institutions to promote stronger EU engagement in international digital partnerships.

At the same time, Member States called on the Commission to support international connectivity objectives. The Commission should review the current capacities and needs of international connectivity, as well as future forecasts. Particularly, the Commission should conduct a mapping of available connectivity infrastructures (terrestrial, submarine and space) outside of Europe, as well as develop a better understanding of data flows between Europe and other parts of the world.

Widespread and strong internet connections: the role of submarine cables and satellite networks

Submarine cables are essential in order to sustain the exponential increase in internet traffic. For one, internet traffic across the Atlantic is doubling every two years. New, secure submarine cable infrastructures can serve growing data flows of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Member States and the Commission will improve the managing of different communication networks and infrastructure, while ensuring to strengthen cybersecurity.

Satellites provide an important role in linking the EU and the rest of the world. Space-based connectivity can complement submarine cable networks to ensure Europe stays connected at all times, to extend connectivity in areas with insufficient coverage or none at all, as well as to provide additional cybersecurity. The Member States will work with the Commission to design and develop a Space-based Secure Connectivity initiative. Europe is home to a world-leading satellite industry, which could create a global satellite broadband network.

Signatory countries of the Declaration

The EU Member State signatories include: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. Iceland and Norway also signed the declaration.

Background

Europe's digital sovereignty and global competitiveness depend on strong and secure internal and external connectivity networks. Both dimensions will be vital for realising the objectives of Europe's Digital Decade. Within Europe, resilient connectivity is the pillar of a successful digital transformation. The Commission has also been working closely with Member States to improve connectivity within the

EU, particularly to roll out advanced networks, such as fibre and 5G, such as through the developments following the Recommendation on the Connectivity Toolbox. Meanwhile, the ELLalink submarine cable system, co-financed by the EU, and becoming operational in the coming months, will strengthen the EU-Atlantic Data Gateway Platform connecting Europe to Latin America.

Data Gateways Declaration

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