

EU Regions Week: Bridging the digital divide by supporting digital infrastructure for smart and sustainable regions

On the theme of ‘smart and sustainable growth for regions’, this workshop addresses the critical issue of the digital divide, examining its repercussions on social cohesion and overall growth in the European Union.

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The European Broadband Competence Offices Network Support Facility

Regions of Europe face challenges of low dynamism, lack of opportunities, and demographic shifts, including shrinking and ageing populations. This contributes to economic stagnation, a cycle of poverty, and limited well-being, particularly affecting career opportunities for women and access for people with disabilities. Rural and declining areas are notably affected by insufficient access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and digital infrastructure. Despite Cohesion Policy funds aiming to address these disparities, significant regional differences persist, undermining the EU's economic performance and societal cohesion.

The digital divide, particularly in digital resilience, is becoming more pronounced, with a distinct gap between larger urban centers and smaller local public authorities (such as towns and villages). By 2025, while the majority of regional public authorities and larger urban areas are expected to be digitally resilient, smaller municipalities will likely lag behind due to inadequate connectivity infrastructure, such as 5G. This divide is projected to continue into 2030, although improvements are anticipated thanks to investments in broadband and funding for digital transformation.

In this context, this workshop intends to discuss the future direction of EU Cohesion Policy as well as focusing on how to leverage investment in digital infrastructure for resilient and sustainable regions. Additionally, it will take stock of the progress so far and highlight exemplary practices at local and regional level from LORDIMAS.

Location:

Belgium

Brussels

Date

08/10/2024 -

08/10/2024