



EU COHESION POLICY 2014-2020

Targeting Investments on Key Growth Priorities

The new Cohesion Policy means regions and Member States must target EU investments on four key areas for economic growth and job creation:

- Research and Innovation
- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy

Priority: Enhancing access to, use and quality of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Why invest in ICT?

- Web-connected companies achieve higher revenue growth and create more jobs than their offline competitors.
- Effective use of ICT increases workplace productivity, and therefore competitiveness.
- Improving access to quality ICT, especially in remote areas, can increase the quality of life of individuals by facilitating access to services, such as e-health.

How has Cohesion Policy supported ICT in 2007-2013?

So far reporting by Member States has shown:

- Around €14.6 billion of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was invested in ICT.
- Over €4.7 million more EU citizens now have broadband coverage thanks to Cohesion Policy investments. This contributes to the realisation of the EU's Digital Agenda, one of the seven flagship initiatives of the 'Europe 2020 Strategy'.
- The European Social Fund has enabled people to use ICT better, to match more effectively people's skills to employers' needs, and particularly to ensure that older workers have appropriate ICT skills.

Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 will further support EU ICT goals by:

- Investing in ICT infrastructure in all regions, especially in remote and rural areas and in less developed regions.
- Increasing access to high-speed broadband (especially the so-called “Next Generation Networks”) to boost the productivity of companies and allow individuals in remote regions to work from home or to benefit from e-health solutions.
- Investing in developing and upgrading ICT tools, such as e-infrastructures for research and innovation, cloud computing, information security and internet safety.
- Continuing the shift towards the innovative uses of ICT by firms, citizens and public administrations, such as the electronic provision of health services (eHealth), public sector procedures (eGovernment), SMEs (eLearning, eBusiness etc.), coordinating the efficient use of resources in urban areas (Smart Cities) and preserving cultural heritage through digitalisation.
- Strengthening digital literacy, e-learning, e-inclusion, e-skills and related entrepreneurial skills.

A new strategic approach

- Under the reformed Cohesion Policy, national and regional authorities will be required to develop strategies for digital growth, as an element within their broader research and innovation strategies, in order to receive funding for investments in ICT products and services.
- Each Member State planning to use Cohesion Policy Funds for broadband investments will also have to develop a Next Generation Network Plan identifying the areas where public intervention is necessary to provide broadband access.
- A substantial share of the SME support from the ERDF will be allocated to start-ups and new business models operating in the ICT sector.