



# The BCO Network Support Facility

2017

Supporting the  
European Network of  
Broadband  
Competence  
Offices



*“Digital transformation is a source of paramount opportunities for people, and helps address the major challenges of today: safety, health, poverty, inequality, growth, and climate change.”*

**Mariya Gabriel**  
**European Commissioner**  
**for Digital Economy and Society**



*“Fast and reliable broadband is already transforming the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, particularly in urban areas. Rural areas must not be left behind. They have a central role to play in smart, sustainable economies.”*

**Phil Hogan**  
**European Commissioner**  
**for Agriculture and Rural**  
**Development**



*“Cohesion policy is an important contributor to the EU Digital Agenda. This means that regional and local authorities will be able to implement projects that correspond best to people’s needs, with investments in broadband deployment and online public services.”*

**Corina Crețu**  
**European Commissioner**  
**for Regional Policy**

## The BCO Network Support Facility



**connects**  
**Broadband Competence**  
**Offices:**  
the national and regional  
authorities in charge of digital  
development and broadband  
deployment across Europe



**shares knowledge**  
**and builds capacity:**  
to better equip and support  
European BCOs  
in achieving the 2020  
Digital Single Market goals

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# PART I

## The BCO initiative

# Welcome and introduction



In closing the first year of the European BCO Network and Support Facility, we celebrate a year of growth and exploration, of sharing knowledge and making connections.

It has been an action-packed year, growing the Network from an idea and a seed of 15 BCOs at the start of 2017, to a Network of 27 national BCOs, and over 50 regional offices.

In our first year working together to create this European network, we reached out to national, regional and local authorities in all Member States; project promoters; and technology and policy experts.

We came together on challenges and solutions during working group meetings and training days; we shared tools and resources; we interviewed people from across the European Union to bring good practice experiences to the fore; and we put European BCOs and broadband support in the limelight.

Drawing on each other's strengths, we have built a valuable resource that will continue to support the achievement of the Digital Single Market 2020 goals across the European Union, for all citizens, with due attention to rural areas and other regions lagging behind.

The contributions of the Network's members to the discussions and training agenda throughout the year have been essential to an enriching knowledge-exchange programme, tailored to the needs and on-the-ground experiences of the Network.

The official public launch of the BCO Network and Support Facility, during the European Commission's annual Broadband Days, is a celebration of our first year working together towards our common goals.

Jan Dröge  
BCO Network  
Support Facility Director

# The need for a European Broadband Competence Offices Network and Support Facility

## PART I *The BCO initiative*

### Overcoming barriers to the Digital Single Market

The Digital Single Market is one of the top political priorities of the European Commission for 2014-2020. It has the potential to unleash growth, competition, investment and innovation, while creating new sources of employment.

A digital transformation is needed, and its full economic and social benefits will only be achieved if there is **widespread deployment and uptake of very high capacity networks throughout the European Union**, in both urban and rural areas.

Latest figures show that Next Generation Access (NGA) coverage for European citizens stands at 76%, however, citizens in rural areas have connectivity of only 40%. This shows that a digital gap remains in the EU. Various tools and interventions have been planned by Member States and the EU to address this issue.



### Driving deployment at national and regional level: **the European Broadband Competence Offices**

In November 2015, Commissioners Hogan, Crețu and Oettinger called for the establishment of a European network of Broadband Competence Offices.

Member States were invited to **reinforce their capacity to plan and implement broadband measures** with the setting up of a network of Broadband Competence Offices (BCOs) tailored to the national, regional and local circumstances.

### Supporting and connecting the European Broadband Competence Offices: **the BCO Network Support Facility**

The Broadband Competence Offices Support Facility was launched by the European Commission in January 2017 as a dedicated office to support the Network of BCOs and contribute to the achievement of the EU Digital Agenda targets on broadband roll-out.

The BCOs Support Facility provides information and guidance to national and regional stakeholders in charge of broadband deployment, and promotes the establishment of BCOs across the EU.

The BCOs Support Facility works with the Directorates General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI); Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT); Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO); and Competition (DG COMP).

# 2017 objectives

# Building and supporting a community

# PART II The first year

In its first year of operations, the objectives set out for the BCOs Support Facility by the European Commission were to:

Identify and qualify the current public designated BCOs in each Member State

Promote the creation of new BCOs at national and regional level, depending on the Member States' institutional context

Develop and disseminate knowledge, including the exchange of current good practices

Identify potential multipliers involved in the implementation of broadband plans in Europe

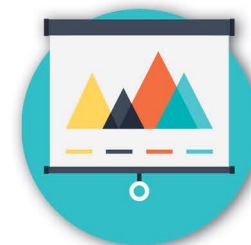
In the project's early days, the BCOs Support Facility focused on identifying the network and its needs, and developing a tailored programme of activities and resources to address them.

Connecting BCOs across Europe in a network is an on-going process of relationship-building and responding to the needs raised by BCOs operating and serving communities in a range of circumstances, yet with many challenges in common.

Over the course of 2017, the BCOs Support Facility reached out and connected with **27 national BCOs**, and **over 50 regional offices**.

In conversation with this nascent community, the BCOs Support Facility and European Commission identified **four focus areas** where greater awareness, clarity and support would strengthen the BCOs in their delivery of the Digital Single Market goals.

## FOCUS AREAS



### FUNDING



### PLANNING



### POLICY



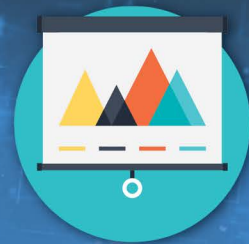
### GOOD PRACTICE

The emphasis throughout the resulting programme has been on **connecting and building the community, sharing knowledge and building capacity**, and being a bridge for BCOs to experts and the European Commission.

In order for the Network's members to exchange experiences of challenges and solutions, to seek support and find resources, and to engage with peers and the European Commission, the online BCO Network forum was created.

# Connecting, sharing knowledge, building capacity

Our focus areas, activities and resources, and channels



FUNDING



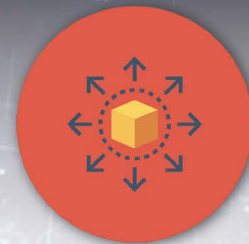
PLANNING



POLICY



GOOD PRACTICE



INTRODUCTORY AND OUTREACH MATERIALS



TRAINING, NETWORKING AND OUTREACH EVENTS



VIDEO INTERVIEWS



TOOLS AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING RESOURCES

BCO NETWORK MEMBER RELATIONS



OUTREACH ACTIVITIES AND MULTIPLIERS



BCO NETWORK FORUM



EUROPEAN COMMISSION DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET WEBSITE



BCO SUPPORT FACILITY YOUTUBE PLAYLIST



BROADBAND EUROPE AND DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET NEWSLETTERS



BROADBAND EUROPE TWITTER ACCOUNT #BCONETWORK



EUROPEAN BROADBAND AWARDS

# COMMUNITY-BUILDING

## Activities and resources



BCO Network:  
over 80 BCOs  
at **national** and  
**regional** level

BCO Network forum:  
105 members

20 Networking events  
reaching over 2,100  
people:  
thematic groups, field  
visits, training and  
networking days,  
outreach events

24 European broadband  
projects interviewed  
to highlight and exchange  
good practices and  
innovative solutions

9 Introductory and  
outreach publications  
and videos produced

+ daily engagement  
via BCO Network  
communication channels



# COMMUNITY-BUILDING and KNOWLEDGE-SHARING

## The BCO Network forum

One of the objectives of the BCO Network is to empower and strengthen its members through creating direct interactions between them. The BCO Network forum was created with the aim of facilitating these exchanges.

Exclusively for BCOs and with the support of European Commission representatives from DG CNECT, REGIO, AGRI and COMP, the BCO Network forum is an online community for **networking, news and resources**.

Designed to facilitate **dialogue** and engagement on challenges, solutions, opportunities and tools, the forum is the BCO Network's principal **knowledge-sharing platform and repository**.



The BCO Network forum is the **information and activity hub** of the Network, featuring:

**training materials**

information on **EU funding and resources**

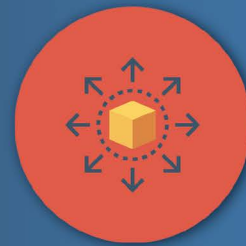
thematic **discussion groups**

**video interviews** on good practices, policy and thematic topics

**introductory videos and publications**

EU and third-party **events and articles**





# COMMUNITY-BUILDING

## Outreach events and materials

The BCOs Support Facility participates in a variety of conferences, workshops and seminars in order to increase the awareness and understanding of a wider audience regarding:

- the BCO Network
- the different broadband support activities of the EU
- good practices from the Member States

We worked with other European Commission networks such as the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the European Innovation Partnership (EIP); associations such as Euromontana and the European Agricultural Machinery Association (CEMA); and organisations such as the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (UN IGF), in order to explain and showcase to their membership the activities undertaken and supported by the European Commission in the area of broadband.

**Our outreach missions allowed us to reach over 2000 people outside of the core network in 2017.**

### 2017 Rural Summit

23 March, Eindhoven, Netherlands

### BCO Slovakia workshop

23 March, Bratislava, Slovakia

### ENRD Workshop on Improving LEADER Implementation

1 June, Brussels, Belgium

### European Digital Internet Governance Conference

6 June, Tallinn, Estonia

### Cohesion policy in mountain areas

7 June, Brussels, Belgium

### BCO Portugal and Portuguese Digital Agenda Monitoring Committee

22 June, Lisbon, Portugal

### European Week of Regions and Cities

11 October, Brussels, Belgium

### Agri-Innovation Summit 2017

12 October, Lisbon, Portugal

### CEMA Summit 2017: CEMA Economic Forum

12 October, Brussels, Belgium

### Broadband World Forum

24-26 October, Berlin, Germany

### European Regional Internet Development Dialogue 2017

7 November, Brussels, Belgium

### Internet Governance Forum 2017

18-21 December, Geneva, Switzerland

challenges facing rural regions | economic growth, sustainability, ageing and depopulation | State aid | GBER | white area mapping | European Network for Regional Development (ENRD) | LEADER and demand aggregation | connecting LAGs to their BCOs | under-serviced areas | community-led networks | broadband project bottlenecks | the need for exchange of best practice | cohesion policy | mountain areas | Interreg funding | crossborder Operational Programmes | service and demand mapping | EAFRD and ERDF | Rural Development Programmes and Horizon 2020 | innovation and digitisation opportunities for agriculture and rural economies | Rural Development Programmes | future proofing networks | Next Generation Networks | Internet of Things | Common Agricultural Policy

One of the BCOs Support Facility's objectives is to support the establishment of new BCOs and regional offices across Europe, and to inform the wider public about the role of BCOs, and the support available from the EU.

To this end, the BCOs Support Facility created and shared a series of articles, brochures and videos to introduce:

- the project
- the concept and functions of Broadband Competence Offices
- the role, objectives and offerings of the BCOs Support Facility
- good practice examples from across the EU
- EU funding and support for broadband, with an emphasis on rural and mountain areas

# KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

## Activities and resources



43 different **national** BCOs and **regional** offices engaged and exchanged knowledge at 6 training events on funding, planning, policy and good practices, gathering over 200 participants

105 BCO Network forum members accessed resources

43 presentations and reports from training days, thematic groups and field visits were shared

23 country-specific factsheets and a synthetic dashboard on EU funding for broadband were created

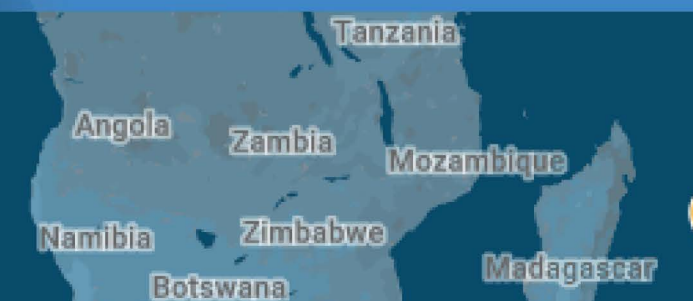
Over 50 publications and videos on good practices, EU funding and policy, and broadband-related areas were produced

5 online discussion groups were created

Information on EU resources was shared



With a view to empowering BCOs, the Support Facility developed a series of resources capturing good practices from around the EU, expert insights, and updated funding information.



# KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

## Video interview series



In order to promote the exchange of good practices, as well as innovative ways to overcome challenges, the BCOs Support Facility interviewed broadband project promoters across Europe.

These ranged from BCOs and national and regional authorities to rural cooperatives and private companies. Interviews with European Commission representatives and experts explored policy and broadband-related topics.



Rural | EU funding | local action group (LAG) | community | fibre | FTTH | under-served areas | public services | mapping tools | demand aggregation | voucher schemes | efficient investment | broadband infrastructure | fixed and mobile | cable | technology | SMEs | Digital Single Market targets | State aid | General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) | cost reduction | digital divide | competition | cohesion | public and private investment | e-services | digital and precision farming | sustainability | satellite | smart villages | quality of life | Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) | research and innovation | regional development | European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) | social innovation | WIFI4EU | telecommunications | Next Generation Access (NGA) | European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) | LEADER | European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) | European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

# KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

## Training and networking events

Key to the BCOs Support Facility's goal of sharing knowledge and building capacity are its training and networking events.

In the form of training days, thematic group meetings and field visits, these events combine presentations, discussions and networking between national and regional BCO delegates, experts and representatives of the European Commission.

With a focus on the key areas of funding, planning, policy and good practices, the content of each training event was determined in consultation with the BCO Network during the initial phase of the project in order to best match members' needs.





# KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

## Training and networking events

### THEMATIC GROUPS

The first thematic groups of the BCO Network met over two consecutive days in May 2017. These brought together representatives principally from national Broadband Competences Offices with a two-fold objective. Firstly, to reinforce the idea of a coordinated European approach to the challenges faced when pursuing the implementation of the 2020 connectivity objectives. Secondly, to discuss elements of broadband policy common to all the network. Three topics were discussed: broadband and infrastructure mapping; the impact and effectiveness of the Cost Reduction Directive; and the WIFI4EU initiative.

Based on the findings of the European Commission mapping study of broadband services in Europe, launched in 2016, the BCO representatives discussed the main challenges that may hamper the roll-out of NGA networks in

Europe, notably the different methodologies used in the identification of white areas, and how the choices of how mapping is done impact the planning of future investments. A follow-up of this discussion is planned for 2018, when the experts in charge of the study will share their latest findings with the BCO Network.

The preliminary findings of a study on the impact of the Cost Reduction Directive (CRD) were shared in the second session of the thematic group meeting. A very interesting discussion ensued, as the Directive is already being tested in some Member States, exploring how co-deployment of broadband with other infrastructures can lead to faster and/or cheaper roll-out. As some of the Member States present at the meeting had not yet experienced its practical impact, the discussion was useful in

understanding how the application of the Directive can be a valuable instrument in achieving better connectivity.

The European Commission then presented the WIFI4EU initiative, which at the time of the meeting was still in its preliminary phase. The initiative aims to support the installation of free public Wi-Fi hotspots in local communities across the EU. This subject will be revisited in 2018, when the initiative is foreseen to be implemented by European municipalities. The BCO Network is expected to play a role as multipliers and first points of contact to stakeholders in their respective constituencies.

The thematic groups concluded with the presentation of two successful examples of demand aggregation by two members of the Network: the UK BCO, which had implemented a voucher scheme to bring

connectivity to under-serviced citizens; and the Danish BCO, which presented the synergies between community-led initiatives and their national broadband fund.

As part of these thematic groups, the BCO Network delegates had the opportunity to visit two different enterprises in the north of France: a fibre manufacturer and the largest French fibre roll-out project. The field trip not only allowed BCO delegates to experience in person how connectivity is being realised in specific projects, but it also allowed them to engage informally with their peers.

A further two thematic groups are foreseen for 2018, where both national and regional BCO Network delegates will be invited to discuss how best to achieve the connectivity objectives set for 2020.





# KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

## Training and networking events

### STATE AID TRAINING DAY

The State Aid training day, held in Brussels in June, opened the 2017 round of training devoted to strengthening the technical capacity of the European Broadband Competence Offices.

The EU Broadband Guidelines offer stability and legal certainty for broadband investment, encouraging the rapid roll-out of broadband infrastructure with public funds, and minimising the risk of crowding out private investment and creating monopolies. The combination of public and private funding may contribute to the acceleration of NGA roll-out, but when doing so, public authorities must be clear on the State aid implications.

The correct application of State aid rules is essential for the functioning of the Single Market and, ultimately, for quality investments.

The training was designed to equip BCOs to better take State aid elements into account when planning future interventions. The objective was for future support schemes planned by the BCOs to be implemented in a resourceful and effective manner, while being compliant with EU requirements.

European experts and Commission officials presented different State aid characteristics and answered questions from the participants. Practical aspects were also discussed following the presentation of some examples currently being implemented at national and regional level.

### BLENDED FINANCE TRAINING DAY

The aim of the Blended Finance training day, organised in Paris in September, was to show the BCO Network how the public funding that they are currently using for broadband deployment can have a higher impact if combined with private

funding, blending various financing instruments, such as grants, equity and loans. This is a policy objective shared by the European Structural and Investment Funds, but little implemented in the broadband sector so far. Two BCOs from the French regions of Brittany and Alsace presented examples where such approaches were implemented.

A presentation given by the European Commission concerned the requirements to bear in mind when planning blended financing interventions, including potential State aid implications. This aspect must be carefully considered by public authorities when planning the use of blended finance for broadband projects.

### TECHNOLOGY NEUTRALITY TRAINING DAY

The BCO Network had identified a need to bring further clarity with regard to the technology choices available on the

market, and the impact of various technologies on project planning, future access by users, prices, and wholesale access, among others.

The Technology Neutrality training day, held in Madrid in October, addressed two main components.

One was a pure exploration of the fixed and wireless technologies available, followed by a technical discussion with industry.

The second was a detailed discussion between public authorities and the European Commission on the State aid implications of such technology choices, and, most importantly, how technologies can be combined in order to reach all citizens, especially in the most remote areas. For this latter aspect, presentations were given by the European Commission and three regions with different approaches to using technology to reach their constituents.



# 2018

## Looking ahead



Dear Reader,

As may be seen from this overview of our activities, this first year has certainly been full of the energy of new beginnings, new encounters, new ideas and shared challenges.

We are grateful for the commitment of the BCO Network members and for all the inputs they have provided over the past year. With regard to 2018, the BCO Network has shared with us the challenges and areas where they consider support could be needed. It is based on this feedback and on the experience gathered during this first year of collaboration that we will develop our programme for the coming year.

2018 will also bring its own set of developments that will affect all those involved in broadband planning. To name just a few:

- The first review of the EU's multi-annual financial framework
- The mid-term review of the Structural and Investment Funds
- The roll-out of the new NGA plans
- The implementation of the WIFI4EU initiative

We will continue to grow the Network and further develop the resources and activities we began in 2017, notably the sharing of good practices, the reinforcing of the Network's capacity in specific fields, and the gathering together of the Network members to reinforce effective European action towards universal connectivity.

The BCO Network members will continue to be the cornerstone of all these activities, both as direct beneficiaries of the initiative, but also as key drivers of where the journey will take us.

Jan Dröge  
*BCO Network Support Facility Director*



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