Summary of a Survey on the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative "A Digital Agenda for Europe"

Executive Summary

**These conclusions are based on the file note "Final Report: Assessment of the "A Digital Agenda for Europe" Flagship Initiative" written by Vienna University of Economics and Business, Research Institute for Managing Sustainability (RIMAS) (Zoran Rušnov and Norma Schönherr).
They do not represent the official views of the Committee of the Regions.**

More information on the European Union and the Committee of the Regions is available on the internet through http://www.europa.eu and http://www.cor.europa.eu respectively.

Basic Information

In the second quarter of 2013, the Committee of the Regions (CoR), through its Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform, conducted a survey on the state of play of the Europe 2020 strategy's flagship initiative "**Digital Agenda for Europe**"[1] from the viewpoint of Local and Regional Authorities. This report summarises the received 31 responses from 13 EU member states (Figure 1). The findings will be presented at the CoR conference on 2nd July 2013.
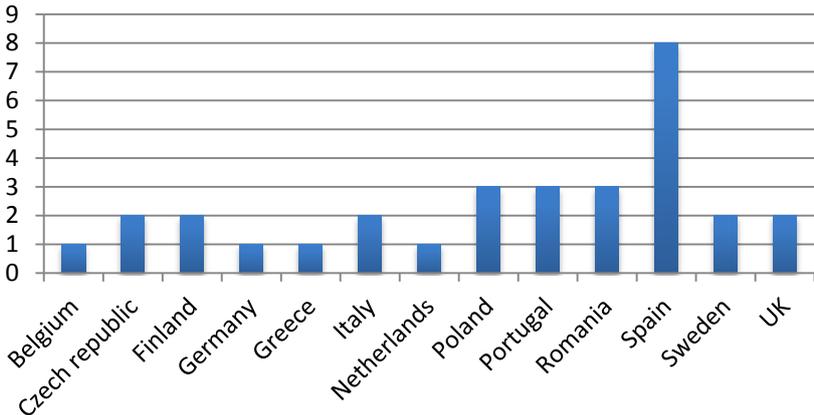

Figure 1: The number of responses received by EU Member State

The majority of responses were provided by regional authorities (42%), followed by cities (26%), provinces (13%), others (7%), associations of cities and regions (9%), and counties (3%) as depicted in Figure 2. Thirteen of the responding authorities are members of the Committee of the Region's Monitoring Platform for the Europe 2020 Strategy.
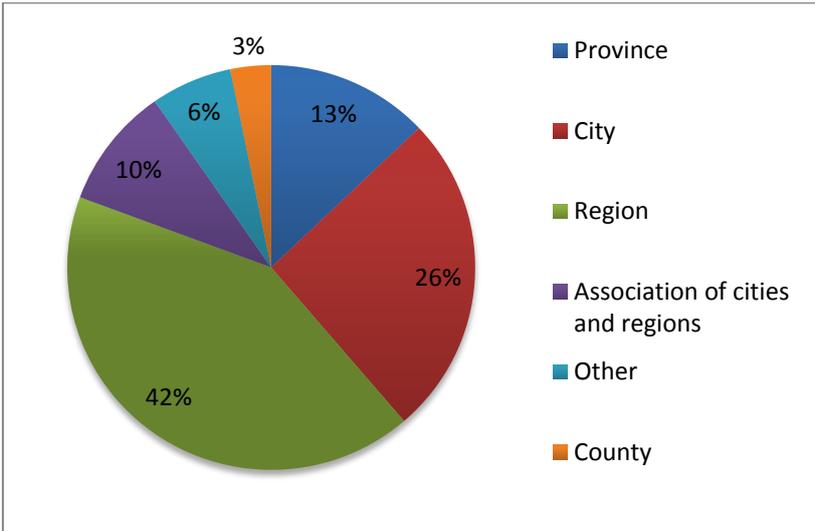

Figure 2: Survey responses by type of authority

---

[1] The survey was open between 23 March and 27 May 2013; the questionnaire and basic background can be found at: https://portal.cor.europa.eu/europe2020/MonitoringFlagships/Pages/Digital-Agenda-for-Europe.aspx.

Conclusions

The survey was based on 14 questions clustered in four sections. The following conclusions can be drawn from the answers received on these questions:

Current policy challenges and responses at regional and local level

- A majority **(70%)** of the respondents are working on **developing a faster and more affordable access** through next generation networks to be able to provide universal access, especially **in rural areas**. Additionally, 45% of the respondents reported **a lack of interoperability** when it comes to the establishment of E-governance, interconnecting different branches of the government as well as providing online services to citizens. Regions are facing **challenges** in the **area of computer skills** and digital literacy, which mainly constitutes a problem for the elderly and middle aged.

Relevance of the Flagship Initiative

- Out of the seven pillars of the Digital Agenda of Europe, the survey respondents identify **enhancing digital literacy, skills and inclusion (74%)** and **fast and ultra-fast internet access (67%) as the most relevant aims**. However, providing fast internet access is often hard to achieve due to **insufficient investment in the infrastructure**. **Research and Innovation (61%)**, perceived as boosting competitiveness of the EU, and **ICT-enabled benefits for EU society (54%)** are also relevant to the regions that have participated in this survey.

- 55% of the responses report that **ICT-enabled benefits for the EU society are mostly included in their policy programmes; as well as the aspect of providing fast and ultra-fast internet access** (45%). This highlights the need to establish a proper infrastructure in order to be able to provide the population and businesses with sufficiently fast internet access and eliminate digital exclusion.

- 58% of the contributors to the survey have worked or are currently **working on a digital agenda** functioning as a blueprint for implementing measures, for instance on promoting broadband access in their respective region. Furthermore, 52% the respondents state that they are currently **working on improving interoperability and e-government** by developing new applications that are dealing with e services.

- **The Connecting Europe Facility** is deemed to be the **most relevant transformative action** for more than half of the respondents (58%), illustrating a tendency towards boosting public digital service infrastructures. A **broadband regulatory environment** and sufficient funding is relevant to 55% of the respondents as a transformative action. Nevertheless, 26% of the received replies report that they are experiencing difficulties in accelerating cloud computing due to cuts in budgets. Furthermore, developing public digital services, broadband regulatory environments and the Connecting Europe Facility are perceived to be difficult to achieve by 22% of the respondents, due to a lack of guidance by the EU.

- Overall, the respondents rate the **definition of goals, the aspect of innovation and keeping the EU on the competitive edge as well as the creation of an information society as the strong points** of the Digital Agenda for Europe 2020. On the negative side, the survey respondents **complain about too little guidance by the EU** on how to implement the objectives set by the Digital Agenda as well as **insufficient funding** which results in digital exclusion of rural areas. Therefore, 48% of the respondents recommend **specific changes** to the Digital Agenda, asking inter alia **for more guidance on concrete actions as well as simplified procedural requirements and clear solutions on next generation networks.**

Are your countries' policies relevant to your city or region?

- 54% of the participants in the survey are **satisfied with the response of their National Reform Programme** (NRP) to their local/ regional needs in the policy areas covered by the Digital Agenda for Europe. The 23% of the respondents stating that their National Reform Programme is not adequately addressing local/regional needs attribute this to the fact that respective national programmes do not include aspects of the Digital Agenda.

- 51% of the respondents report having had the **opportunity to contribute to the drafting of their NRP**, mostly in the form of submitting consultative opinions or participating in working groups.

Policy funding issues

- When it comes to the sources of funding 68% of the Local/ Regional Authorities state that they are using both **regional and EU funds for financial support**. The remaining 32% of respondents report **either EU funds or national/ regional funds** to be the main source of financing. A further two thirds (64%) of those responding highlighted that their pursued goals were jeopardized by the growing fiscal consolidation. Consequences appear in the form of a slowdown of project implementation and an increase in digital exclusion, especially in remote areas.

- The proposed cut in the budget for digital infrastructure and services under the Connecting Europe Facility, from 9.2 billion to 1 billion euro will result in even **harsher conditions for European Regional and Local Authorities** in the accomplishment of the goals set by the Digital Agenda for Europe.

- 60% of the respondents report on **being involved in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement** by participation in working groups or submitting an advisory opinion or comment.

- In general it can be said that the change of the focus of the updated agenda **from network expansion**, hence broadening of internet access over the whole European Union**, to facilitated framework conditions and e-governance** will make it **even harder for digitally deprived regions** to be equipped with the necessary ICT infrastructure and equipment in order **to keep up with the rest of the EU**.