

ICT and information society

The information society continues to be a key driver of growth and employment and remains at the heart of the Lisbon strategy. So far it has not been possible to gather regional statistics on this sector, though for the overall picture the data gathered on the national level shall give enough insight in the situation and expected trends, especially for the Slovene part, where almost three quarters of the territory is part of the cooperation programme.

According to the Information Society Benchmarking Report, European Commission, 2005, the percentage of households with the access to the internet by a PC in 2004 was 44 % in Austria and 41 % in Slovenia, while the mobile device access is much higher in Slovenia, 28 %, while in Austria it amounts to 2 %.

Based on the SORS data, the access to and use of the internet in Slovenia is increasing. In the first quarter of 2005, 48 % of Slovene households had access to the internet. The internet was used regularly by 50 % of the citizens in the age group of 10-74. 61 % of households possessed at least one PC, and 71 % of households had at least one mobile phone.

The broadband infrastructure has been rolled out in all member states, and there has been a rapid growth in the number of users. In Austria, the number of subscribers per 100 population in January 2005 was above 10, while in Slovenia it is around 6. In Slovenia, the majority of subscribers use DSL, whereas in Austria approximately half of the users make use of other technologies, too.

Broadband connectivity of enterprises in both countries is quite similar: In the first quarter of 2004, 91 % of large enterprises with 250+ employed had broadband access both in Slovenia and Austria, while on the part of SMEs (10–249 employed) 60 % of the enterprises in Slovenia and 54 % in Austria were connected.

Based on the SORS data, in the first quarter of 2005, 94 % of small enterprises (5-10 employees) as well as 96% of enterprises with 10 or more employees were using the internet. Compared to a relatively high level of internet usage, e-commerce in Slovenia is underdeveloped. 94 % of Slovene enterprises have internet access. 76 % of enterprises that use the internet use it for banking and financial services; a small percentage (6 %) is using the internet to collect orders.

The strengths of Slovenia lie in the high level of the PC and internet use, ICT usage in enterprises and widespread online education. The weaknesses are evident in a relatively low number of computers with internet access at schools and in a low level of e-commerce.

On the other hand, the threats are in the growing digital divide within the EU. All member states are confronted with the challenge of extending the information society to the people with low or no formal education, the unemployed and older people.

In Kärnten, a big broadband initiative covering the entire country will soon be launched: in priority one, it aims to connect all relevant business locations, scientific and research actors and industrial companies, while in priority two all settlements in the country should be integrated. The programme should be implemented in a few years' time, therefore a high level of broadband infrastructure will have been established by then.

However, gaps between the partner regions seem to exist at the border. The next step could be the interconnection of various networks across the border. In this phase, further analyses and co-ordination activities would be necessary in order to obtain a high level of connections with the neighbouring partner areas as well.

To summarise, the general infrastructure is quite favourable, though some gaps can be identified. On the other hand, the opportunities provided by such infrastructure are still not exploited enough.