



DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

▪ SECTOR SUMMARY

The Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans and SEE 2020 strategy aim to unlock access to a digital economy in the Western Balkans by integrating the region into the pan-European digital market. This requires future-proof digitisation strategies, an updated regulatory environment, improved broadband infrastructure, as well as access and digital literacy. Digital infrastructure and broadband are part of the digital integration pillar of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the

Western Balkans (MAP-REA). In response, the WBIF adopted digital infrastructure as an additional eligible sector at the 17th WBIF Steering Committee meeting held in December 2017 in Frankfurt. Various WBIF stakeholders with relevant digital expertise have been consulted since then, including DG CONNECT developing this new sector under WBIF in line with the European Commission's policies and strategies and beneficiaries' needs.

▪ WBIF PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

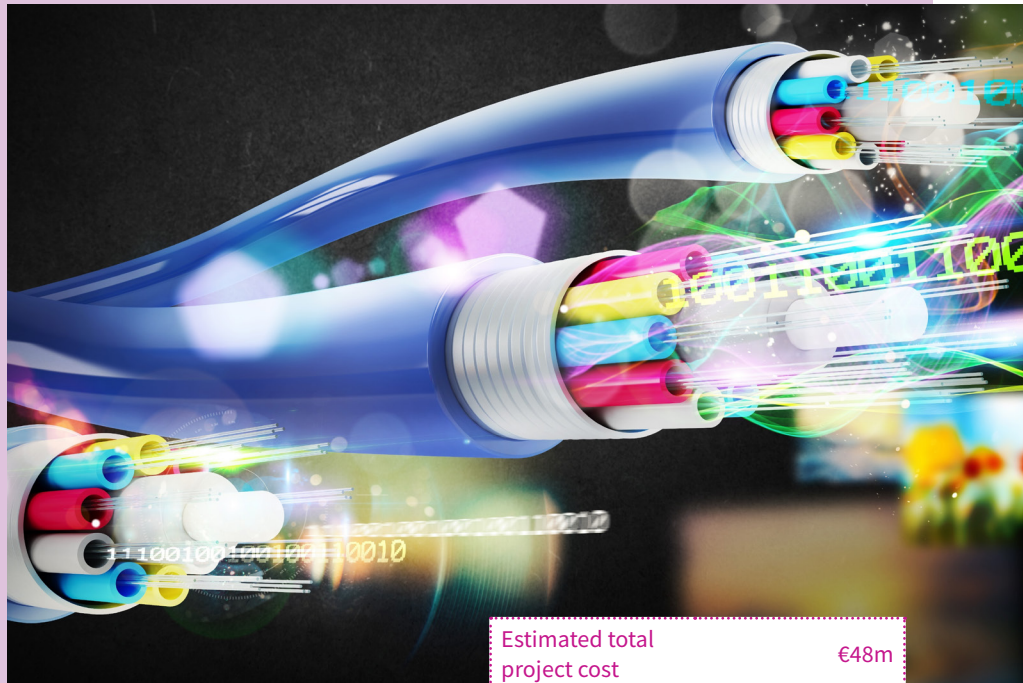
At the 18th WBIF Steering Committee meeting in June 2018 in Paris, the first digital project was approved. The WBIF supports the deployment of digital infrastructures (including broadband connectivity) in the region through technical assistance for the preparation of investment projects. Projects in the sector will focus on 'white zones' and rural areas as well as support the digital connectivity of educational, healthcare, municipal and governmental institutions.

Regional Broadband Infrastructure Development in Albania



Higher penetration rates and improved access to the internet are essential to enable a digital transition in the Albanian economy. The penetration rate of fixed broadband has reached 10%, the lowest in the region, and covers only 30% of households, with a significant urban-rural divide - 15% average in urban areas and 1% in rural areas.

The current bandwidth speed in fixed and mobile networks is less than 30 Mbps. Building on the results of a pre-feasibility study developed under the UNDP in 2017, the WBIF allocated a €0.5 million grant in June 2018 for the next stage of the project - feasibility study and development plan for efficient and smart investments in broadband infrastructure across the country.



ICT investments covered by the project will ensure better internet connection for schools, hospitals, public institutions, local administrations and households.

Estimated total project cost	€48m
WBIF grant	€0.5m (TA)
Estimated loan	€24m (EIB)
Expected completion	End of 2024