



*Independence of Regulators and
Broadband Development Working Group (IRB EWG)*

Of Eastern Partnership Electronic Communications Regulators (EaPeReg)

(Draft)

IRB EWG Report

**on the outcome of the TAIEX workshop on Guidance on institutional and methodological
prerequisites for Eastern Partnership Countries accession to the Digital Economy and Society Index
(DESI)**

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1. Executive Summary

In line with the IRB EWG objectives focussed on the extension of secure and very high-capacity Gigabit broadband networks in EaP, in particular in remote or less densely populated areas, which reflect the EaP resilient digital targets by 2025¹, the IRB EWG of EaPeReg initiated the analysis of As-is-situation meant to reflect broadband network deployment in EaP region.

For the purposes of the above-mentioned analysis, IRB EWG experts, with the support of EU4Digital, initiated a recurrent data collection exercise using DESI connectivity component indicators on mobile and fixed broadband take-up and 5G spectrum to reflect Broadband Coverage in EU MS.

By the time of the organisation of the TAIEX workshop on implementation of DESI, three rounds of data collection have been completed. However, due to significant deviations from one round of data collection to another, that couldn't be reasonably explained by market developments, the provided information did not allow for the conclusions to be drawn.

In order to improve the situation and solve the persisting inconsistencies, the EaP experts in IRB EWG identified a need for a more detailed discussions with a broader audience in EaP, respectively all relevant public authorities engaged in data collection relevant for monitoring of the digital indicators.

In order to be able to organise such an extended workshop, the IRB EWG identified TAIEX instrument as being the most appropriate to engage all relevant authorities in EaP.

Consequently, TAIEX Workshop on DESI was included in the IRB EWG Work Plan for 2023.

During the preparation of the workshop, several questions on DESI implementation were asked by the invited authorities which were way beyond the scope of IRB EWG work otherwise focussing on the broadband coverage questionnaire (part of DESI).

However, the IRB EWG experts identified this workshop as an opportunity to align with other responsible institutions for data collection.

Therefore, the IRB EWG overtook the additional questions and together with the EC, that facilitated the organisation of the workshop, defined its scope so that it could address as many questions as possible.

The workshop has also set a **useful platform** for further discussions with the EaP institutions during the workshop expressed their interest in adopting DESI indicators for measuring their countries digital performance.

¹ Reflected in the EC joint staff working document which sets *"at least 80% of EaP households with access to affordable high-speed internet by 2025 with a particular focus on gender equality, bridging the urban-rural divide, and social inclusiveness"*.

Furthermore, in case of additional questions related to DESI, the workshop will provide an easier access to TAIEX instrument. The EaP countries can refer to the EaP regional workshop on DESI and apply for additional follow-up workshops which can be organised on bilateral level.

2. Introduction

2.a General overview

When it comes to digital transformation, and specifically citizens' access to high speed (broadband) internet, each EaP country is in a different stage of development. Besides, each EaP country has different aspirations and obligations in terms of the EU acquis adoption. Nevertheless, all of them are highly interested in applying the EU best practices and adopting the EU tools able to enhance the digitalisation process of their countries.

In line with IRB EWG Work Plan for 2023, an extensive TAIEX Workshop on **Guidance on institutional and methodological prerequisites for Eastern Partnership Countries accession to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)** was organised in Chisinau, Moldova, from 5 to 7 April 2023.

To ensure a consistent implementation of DESI indicators in EaP, an efficient alignment on the national level and further support for EaP countries will be needed and.

TAIEX workshop organised in Chisinau represented an efficient platform which allowed all relevant parties, including EU4Digital and EC, to take part into discussions. At the same time, it facilitated the necessary alignment among all of them. Besides, the workshop was proved to be a successful platform for IRB EWG visibility. In terms of DESI implementation, it also showed the IRB EWG competences, which are limited to broadband coverage data collection. Nevertheless, these competences were made known for other public authorities in EaP and initiated a successful cooperation them.

Considering that soon after the Workshop the EU4Digital informed about the finalisation of the work on the component related to Digital skills, the IRB EWG shall further analyse the necessity of organising a short follow-up meeting to inform the national relevant authorities about the results. This question will be raised during the next IRB EWG meeting.

2.b. Countries reflection during the Workshop:

Armenia highlighted the importance of DESI implementation especially in areas of digital literacy. Considering that in Armenia only 49% of households have access to high-speed internet, DESI is viewed as an instrument to regularly monitor the situation and understand the needs. As a short-term target, line ministry in Armenia focusses on digitalisation of business and government.

For **Georgia**, it is very important to collect accurate data on subscribers and therefore to implement a validation mechanism. Regarding the accessibility of citizens to high-speed internet, the relevant authorities reported almost 100% which was confirmed by EU4Digital presentation.

Ukraine, as a candidate country to EU strives to develop EU compliant policies in line with the EU Digital Decade and Digital Compass. For this purpose, the quality of data on both sides operators and report collectors is very important. In order to improve the current situation on authorities' ability to collect and validate the data, additional capacity building of relevant authorities will be needed, as well as the EC support in implementation of several electronic tools (IT software) for data collection.

Azerbaijan recently established regulatory authority and it is working on enhancing digital governance. At the same time, Azerbaijan is aiming at achieving 100% coverage with gigabit optical network of all territory of the country. To be able to monitor the progress, the ministry adopted a list of indicators which include DESI relevant indicators. However, due to the lack of experience of the line ministry and newly established regulator staff, Azerbaijan will need further assistance for the implementation of the digital targets and progress monitoring.

Moldova, the same as Georgia, also reported very good percentage of citizens with access to broadband internet. At the same time, Moldova's legal framework is quite well aligned with the EU. Currently, Moldova is working on implementation of the European Electronic Communications Code into national legislation. Currently, they are working on setting a working group of relevant experts in the ministry and the Regulator. Considering the tight deadline and the complexity of the EECC transposition, the technical support of EU MS experts' will be certainly required.

On timely DESI implementation, Moldovan representative suggested finding a mechanism to include the data collected and verified by the EaP relevant authorities in the EC study performed by the EC consultancy companies.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

During the workshop on DESI implementation in EaP the following 3 main topics were addressed:

1. The EU practices of inter-institutional cooperation for the successful implementation of DESI.

On this topic, the main conclusion drawn is the following: **It is preferably that the institution which collects the data is the one which understands its particularities.** However, it is not relevant which institution compiles all the collected information.

2. Inclusion of EaP countries in EU DESI studies.

Since the EU DESI report reflects the Member States' digital progress and helps them in identifying priority action, mirroring the he EU 2030 Digital compass, it was concluded that this question could be addressed when the EaP countries digital policy are aligned with the EU once.

3. Data collection and validation for market analysis purposes, which might require some further support in their implementation by EaP countries:

The following recommendations on how to better collect data from market operators necessary for NRAs to carry out its tasks (market analyses, reporting to other institutions, ensure universal service or implement state aid projects) were presented during the workshop:

1. Define clear and measurable indicators.
2. Ensure the quality and consistency of the data, apply rigorous data cleaning, validation, and verification techniques. This includes identifying and correcting errors, outliers, and missing values, as well as checking for consistency across different data sources and time periods.
3. Get sample data (from operators) on every stage of every project for testing purposes.
4. Involve GIS specialists in a very early development stage (e.g., for broadband coverage data which should be mapped).
5. Engage with operators (including physical meetings), keep close to them (at least with the main operators, which are defining the trends of the whole market), as to identify the data needs and priorities, as well as to ensure the dissemination and utilization of the data. Be transparent with the operators and share information with them.
6. Return to the operators/data provider each time the data is questioning.
7. Set a periodicity for data collection (e.g. once per year).
8. Ensure data confidentiality.