

The Shared Rural Network (United Kingdom)

Good practice: Improving Internet access and use through public-private partnerships

Relevant DFI commitment: Promote affordable, inclusive, and reliable access to the Internet for individuals and businesses where they need it and support efforts to close digital divides worldwide to ensure all people can benefit from the digital transformation.

Type of initiative: Public-Private Partnership

Stakeholder Group: Government and Private Sector

Launch/adoption: 2020 - Now

Goals

The UK's Shared Rural Network (SRN) aims to improve mobile coverage and boost connectivity across the United Kingdom, particularly in rural areas. Its primary goal is to enhance mobile network coverage in the currently underserved regions, including partial not-spots (areas with coverage from some but not all operators) and total not-spots (areas with no coverage at all).

Description

The Shared Rural Network is a collaborative initiative jointly funded by the UK Government and the country's four major mobile network operators. The project focuses on three main areas: addressing partial not-spots, tackling total not-spots, and implementing Extended Area Service masts. This comprehensive approach ensures that the program addresses rural communities' various connectivity challenges. The initiative involves sharing existing infrastructure among operators and constructing new masts to extend coverage to previously unserved areas. Regular progress updates, such as the [one published in September 2024](#), provide transparency on the advancements made across these different aspects of the program.

The SRN has substantially improved outdoor 4G mobile coverage across the UK. 4G coverage from at least one operator has increased from 91% at the start of the SRN programme to 94.9%. 4G geographic coverage from all four mobile operators has increased to 78%, up from 66% in 2020. Between March 2020, when the SRN started, and April 2024, over 4,000 square kilometres, equivalent in size to the Cairngorms National Park, have received 4G coverage for the first time. In addition, 15,000 square kilometres across the UK – almost the size of Northern Ireland – went from having partial coverage to getting coverage from all four mobile network operators.

Disclaimer: This note was prepared by the GIFI team to illustrate certain good practices contributing to the implementation of the commitments contained in the Declaration on the Future of the Internet. The information provided in this note is based on the official documents and sources originating from donors or implementors and has not been verified for accuracy. Please see sources in the Internet Accountability Compass for additional information. The content of this note does not represent the views of the European Union or any of its bodies or agencies.