

Government initiatives have aimed to reduce the digital divide that still exists between urban and rural communities. The Return Happiness to the Thai People program, launched in early 2016 by the then-Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) and the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), aimed to affordably provide broadband internet via wireless and fixed-line access points in rural areas. Several requirements in the contract were not met, even though the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES) and the government-owned TOT Public Company Limited had installed Wi-Fi hotspots in 24,700 villages¹⁴. The MDES explained to TOT in February 2020 that it had three months to fix the issues or danger of having the contract transferred to the private sector. The NBTC had expanded the program coverage to 3,920 border communities and 15,732 additional rural villages, with the new work being finished by March 2020. The program also entails hiring and training individuals who would collaborate with villagers to improve their ICT (information and communication technology) skills.