



## Broadband now a legal right in Finland

- *Finland has become the first country in the world to make broadband a legal right for all its citizens, entitling them to a one megabit per second broadband connection now, with a 100-Mbit/s connection to become a right by the end of 2015.*

From 1 July 2010, all Finns are entitled to a one megabit per second (Mbit/s) broadband connection. In October 2009, Finland's Ministry of Transport and Communications had announced that the country's Communications Market Act had been amended to include Internet access of 1 Mbit/s as part of the universal service obligations and as a legal right and that the amendment would become effective in the summer of 2010. At least 30 countries worldwide (developed and developing) have included broadband as part of their definition of universal service/access. But Finland is the first to take this one step further by recognizing broadband as a universal legal right.

The amendment entered into force on 1 July 2010, making Finland the first country in the world to enact a law that makes broadband access a "guaranteed right". Broadband access will now be included in basic communication services, such as telephone or postal services. An estimated 95 per cent of Finland's population of around 5.3 million is already online.

Suvi Lindén, Finland's Minister of Communications welcomed the new law: "From now on, a reasonably priced broadband connection will be everyone's basic right in Finland. This is absolutely one of the government's most significant achievements in regional policy and I am proud of it", she said.

The law means that telecommunication operators recognized as universal service providers must be able to provide every permanent residence and business office with access to "a reasonably priced and high-quality connection with a downstream rate of at least 1 Mbit/s". The new service obligation does not apply to summer residences. Early this year,



the Finnish Communications Regulatory Authority (FICORA) designated 26 telecommunication operators across Finland as universal service operators.

FICORA has set up a website ([www.viestintävirasto.fi](http://www.viestintävirasto.fi)) for Finnish consumers to check which geographic areas have been assigned a universal service operator for the provision of broadband subscriptions, which may be implemented via fixed or wireless technology.

FICORA monitors compliance with this new obligation.

### What is reasonable pricing?

FICORA estimates that a reasonable monthly fee for a universal service subscription is EUR 30–40. Telecommunication operators can also charge their customers for installation, but construction expenses must be priced so that residential customers can actually afford a 1 Mbit/s subscription. So a universal service provider cannot automatically charge all construction expenditure to the user — only a reasonable share of it. FICORA steps in if pricing is unreasonable.

### Broadband 2015 project

According to the Finnish government, the one megabit goal broadband connection for all Finns is an intermediary step. The government had already decided to make a 100-Mbit/s broadband connection a legal right by the end of 2015. It has launched a broadband project to connect all Finns, including those living in sparsely-populated areas, to the Internet with fast fibre-optic or cable networks by this target date. FICORA explains that the objective of the project is to ensure that nearly all (more than

99 per cent of the population) permanent places of residence and places of business and public administration are no further than two kilometres from a 100 Mbit/s fibre-optic or cable network.

Telecommunication operators are expected to construct fast connections in densely-populated areas, where there is demand, on market terms. But assistance will be needed to raise population coverage from 95 per cent to 99 per cent in rural areas.

Telecommunication operators will cover at least 34 per cent of the costs. The rest of the costs will be funded by the State (EUR 66 million for the period 2009–2015), municipalities and the European Union's Rural Development Fund (EUR 24.6 million). Support will be given to projects that are not commercially viable.

