

Joint communications statement October 14th, 2024

Strengthening European Digital Gateways with Polar Connect

In line with the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union focusing on international digital connectivity, Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and NORDUnet have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support the Polar Connect initiative aiming at safeguarding European digital sovereignty. This agreement aims to achieve secure and resilient connectivity across the Arctic to Asia and North America, in favour of research, development, innovation and education.

In our modern digital society, more than 97% of the internet traffic flows via submarine cables. However, the routes used by those cables have become insecure in the current geopolitical context.

It is time to investigate possibilities for alternative routes and *Polar Connect* will use a new cable route through the Arctic, where Europe and Asia can directly interconnect using a resilient, secure, and sovereign infrastructure, key to Europe's digital autonomy.

Valter Nordh, NORDUnet CEO, is very proud to share that “NORDUnet and the Nordic National Research and Education Networks have identified and created an innovative vision for such a resilient system¹, promoting the new critical infrastructure *Polar Connect*, planned to be equipped with sensing technology, adding value to Europe's excellence in science and enhancing the security of the cables.”

FCT, through the digital services unit FCCN, and NORDUnet have a long history of collaboration extending back to the early days of research & education networking in Europe and the set-up of the GÉANT network. They both recognize the strategic importance and asset of a strong, sustainable, and resilient international footprint for Europe and they are committed to advancing the digital Global Gateways - technological infrastructures that facilitate the flow of digital information, represented by systems that promote connectivity between different continents.

João Nuno Ferreira, General Coordinator of FCCN, FCT digital services, stresses that “*Polar Connect* is a digital Global Gateways initiative complementary to Ellalink, and FCT supports Polar Connect as it is highly strategic and will offer Europe access to a resilient and sovereign direct link to East-Asia, enabling new opportunities in terms of communications and research collaboration”.

¹ <https://polarconnect.net/Vision2030>

About NORDUnet

NORDUnet is a collaboration between the National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) of the five Nordic countries, i.e., Denmark (DeiC), Finland (FUNET/CSC), Iceland (RHnet), Norway (Sikt), and Sweden (Sunet). NORDUnet operates a world-class data network, based on dark fiber and spectrum sharing, together with support for e-infrastructures, including media services like videoconferencing and lecture capturing & playback. More than 400 research & education institutions in the Nordics, with over 1.2 million users, are connected via the Nordic NREN networks, enabling scientists, educators, and students to work and share knowledge globally. NORDUnet is an active participant in the European NREN collaboration GÉANT and is a founding father of intercontinental NREN collaborations such as the Advanced North Atlantic (ANA) and AsiaPacific Europe Ring (AER) systems that are part of the Global Research and Education Network (GREN). In 2020, NORDUnet celebrated 40 years of Nordic NREN collaboration.

<https://nordu.net/>

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About FCT digital services

FCT, through its digital services (FCCN), provides high-speed Internet connectivity and IT services for the Portuguese higher education and research system. These digital services are part of a research infrastructure - the RCTS Network - Science, Technology and Society Network and are accessible to all member organizations. This network is transversal to all areas of knowledge and covers the entire national territory. It ensures collaboration between the organizations' users through a single institutional account. Every day, more than 600,000 students, researchers, and staff rely on this national education network and its digital services.

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