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Background Information

Workshop

“Towards Inclusive Online Provision of Public Services in European Cities and Regions”

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Prague

Prague City Hall, Mariánské nám. 2, Prague,
meeting room of Prague City Assembly

EUROPEAN POLICY BACKGROUND

As a follow-up of the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, the promotion of social inclusion was incorporated as intrinsic element of the overall strategic objective of the European Union, i.e. the well-known Lisbon agenda: “Becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. e-Inclusion is one of the dimensions of overall inclusion and cohesion policies. In the meaning of the European Commission, e-Inclusion means a twofold approach :

- Preventing digital exclusion, i.e. to prevent that disadvantaged people and disadvantaged groups could be left behind in the development of the information society. Digital exclusion may result from a lack of digital literacy, from economic or technical barriers to Internet access, or from a lack of capabilities to use efficiently the new services and facilities linked to information and communication technologies. Literacy, access and use are three key words in policies preventing e-exclusion.
- Exploiting new digital opportunities for a better inclusion of socially disadvantaged people

or groups, or less-favoured areas. Digital opportunities refer to the distribution and circulation of knowledge resources, the potential of new information and communication services, new job opportunities and better access to employment, and, more traditionally as regards to ICT, overcoming barriers of distance or mobility.

In particular, the last update of the Action Plan "eEurope 2005: an information society for all" announced an action on e-inclusion (*COM(2004) 380*): 'e-inclusion priorities should be reassessed on the basis of a thorough analysis of the background to e-inclusion, laying out a series of specific and realisable targets. ... More coherent, strategic and integrated approaches should be developed, ensuring ... cohesion and growth goals set in the Lisbon strategy'. In the same line, the Commission Communication "Challenges for the European Information Society beyond 2005" (*COM(2004) 757*) indicated in its section on eInclusion and citizenship that: 'the policies known as "eInclusion" aim at ensuring equal access to and the availability of ICT services for all, at an affordable cost. The importance of such policies increases as ICT (information and communication technologies) permeate society. ... These policies are an absolute necessity, yet they are complex to implement... the increasing cultural diversity, including at regional level, augments the urgency to address new digital divides'. The communication highlights the need to step up research and investment in information and communication technologies (ICT), and to promote their take-up throughout the economy. ICT should be more closely tailored to citizens' needs and expectations, to enable them to participate more readily in socially fulfilling and culturally creative virtual communities. The Commission communication identifies a number of challenges that will remain relevant for Europe's future Information Society policy, such as electronic inclusion and citizenship, content and services, public services, skills and work, ICT as a key industry sector, interoperability, trust and dependability and ICT for business processes.

Only recently and as part of the process of revising the Lisbon Strategy, it was agreed that the Member States will have to define their national programmes using the early guidance provided by the EC on the Commission's expectations on the content, form and timing of the programmes. Both, eInclusion and user orientation in online public service provision will constitute important elements of these and it can be expected that self-standing reporting for these will be carried out in a streamlined way (*cf. Next steps in implementing the revised Lisbon strategy - Information Note From President Barroso in agreement with Vice-President Verheugen and Commissioners Almunia and Špidla, 29/04/2005*).

The new programme and action plan currently under development and called i2010 (European Information society in 2010) will probably become operational later in 2005. i2010 is the eEurope 2005 successor and an initiative which will provide an integrated approach to information society and audio-visual policies in the EU, covering regulation, research, and deployment and promoting cultural diversity. The European Commission wants it to look for fast and visible results, building on the optimistic outlook for ICT industries and markets. It should encourage fast growth built around the convergence at the levels of networks, services and devices. Its objective will be to ensure that Europe's citizens, businesses and governments make the best use of ICTs in order to improve industrial competitiveness, support growth and the creation of jobs and to help address key societal challenges.

eInclusion and user orientation in online public services will constitute topics of i2010 as outlined in the European Commission's view of the challenges that need to be addressed in a European Information Society strategy up to 2010 which are set out in the Commission communication on "Challenges for Europe's Information Society beyond 2005: Starting point for a new EU strategy", adopted on 19 November 2004. According to the EC, these policies are an absolute necessity, yet they are complex to implement and require a substantial research effort. In particular, the local dimension needs to receive more attention in this context. As highlighted by the High Level Group "Employment and Social Dimension of the Information Society" in its recent report: "People live in physical locations and communities. Social capital, the glue that holds societies together through shared norms, values, culture, habits and practices, trust and understanding, is created or built at the local level." This points to the particular importance of regional and local actors for the formulation and implementation of policy strategies directed towards inclusive online services provision.

WORKSHOP RATIONALE

Online provision of both public and commercial services to citizens is gaining in momentum. This does also apply to services related to health, government/public administration and lifelong learning - all of which are of prime importance for policy-making at the regional and local level in Europe. In service domains which are of such public interest, service providers are obliged to cater for the entire population, and not just for those who are able and willing to exploit online media for their purposes. However, available evidence points towards considerable disparities in access and usage of ICTs (information and communication technologies) in general, and online services in particular. Most alarmingly, it seems to be those groups of citizens who could in principle benefit most from ICTs who are in reality making least use of them in their daily lives.

Against this background, this workshop aims at supporting a key policy goal in relation to the so called Information Society - that of ensuring that every citizen has the opportunity to participate in and benefit from online services. Both at the EU-level and in the Member States, policies have started to address this goal - e.g. under the heading of eInclusion and/or eAccessibility - and together cover a wide range of potentially at-risk groups, a wide range of issues and potential barriers, and a wide range of possible actions and instruments. There is an urgent need for joining up stakeholders from different actor levels in order to arrive at a consolidated view on how best to achieve truly inclusive online services and in order to exchange practical knowledge and experiences across the Union.

Both policy formulation and implementation is suffering from a lack of insight into the character and structure of eExclusion, and from lacking knowledge exchange about the potentials provided by online media to support particularly those who could most benefit from improved service provision in areas of public interests such as health, education and public administration. Reflecting recent evidence, adequate strategies would need to address not only disparities in online access but also in the utilisation of online media as well as related impacts with respect to social exclusion/cohesion. In particular, strategies addressing users and non-users according to their individual "proximity"

towards online services adoption can rarely be found yet. Arguably, providing access to ICTs alone can help reduce inequalities only for those citizens who are otherwise well prepared and well motivated to take advantage of online services. However, a large share of non-users are lacking not only access, but also competence and motivation for becoming involved as users of online public services.

Against this background, the workshop will offer the opportunity to discuss realistic strategies for the development and implementation of fully inclusive online services, i.e. services that actually reach the entire population. Further, it will enable to share practical knowledge and experiences gained in relation to inclusive online service provision on a European scale. This will be enabled by the presentation of evidence from latest research from the eUser but also the [eInclusion@EU](#) project.

The eUSER project has conducted a unique, multi-country survey of users and non-users of public online services, covering their behaviour, needs, requirements, preferences and attitudes. The survey results will enable the project to construct robust typologies of users and non-users according to their proximity towards uptake of online public services. eUSER will also test common assumptions about advantages of and barriers to the uptake of eGovernment, eLearning and eHealth services. In addition, the project has identified a series of good practice examples in user-oriented online public services provision in the domains of eHealth, eLearning and eGovernment in all European Member States. Some of these good practices will be presented at the workshop.

The eInclusion@EU project provides scientific support to a key policy objective - that of ensuring that every citizen has the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the Information. Through a network of national correspondents, it collates evidence on eInclusion/eAccessibility policies and practice pursued in the European Member States, Switzerland and Bulgaria.

DESCRIPTION

The workshop is organised by the eUser project which is an ongoing IST project in the 6th Framework Programme designed as support activity to the European Commission, the IST programme at large and individual IST projects and lead by empirica GmbH (Germany), together with EURO CITIES Knowledge Society Forum (EKSF) - Telecities. Its aim is to provide an evidence-based support for the design and delivery of user-centred online public services.

A further project, the IST project [eInclusion@EU](#) has been involved in the preparation of the workshop. [eInclusion@EU](#) is a coordination action initiating dialogue, collating knowledge and assisting policymakers to realise an Information Society in Europe accessible to and beneficial for all citizens.

The support and active participation of the European Regional Information Society Association (ERIS@), Cities on the Internet and the project INTEL CITIES has been achieved to mobilise as large as possible a number of regions, cities and municipalities to participate in the event.

The EUROCITIES Knowledge Society Forum - Telecities will host the workshop. EUROCITIES is the network of major European cities. Founded in 1986, the network brings together the local governments of more than 120 large cities in over 30 European countries. EUROCITIES provides a platform for its member cities to share knowledge and ideas, to exchange experiences, to analyse common problems and develop innovative solutions, through a wide range of Forums, Working Groups, Projects, activities and events.

ERIS@ is well-known to aim at promoting sustainable economic, social and/or cultural development of member regions with explicit reference to the emerging Information Society. The brief of ERIS@ includes for instance the creation of a common platform for the exchange of experience, know-how and projects among the regions, and the conduction of work shops is one of the means by which this is going to be achieved. In order to extend the reach of the event towards municipalities, cooperation with TeleCities/EuroCities, the Integrated Project INTELCITIES, and the "Cities on the Internet" Association has been ensured.

INTELCITIES (Intelligent Cities) is a research and technological development project to pool advanced knowledge and experience of electronic government, planning systems and citizen participation from across Europe. "Cities on Internet" Association [COI] is an organisation created in 1997, gathering Polish experts in the area of eGovernment, working in local and regional administrations as well as in companies of the ICT industry. The core mission of the organisation is to support public administration, both central and local, in the process of their transformation toward modern eGovernment solutions.

The Commission's Policy Link initiative - which aims at linking information society projects from the IST programme to European policies - has already confirmed its support of the workshop.

The focus of the discussion will lie on possible policy approaches and strategies for user orientation and inclusiveness of existing and new-to-be-developed services in the public and public-private domain in a variety of areas including eGovernment, eHealth and eLearning.

The topic will be addressed by different presentations with a special focus on European good practice examples followed by discussions and debate and concluded with a expert panel and plenary discussion of European experts and practitioners in this field.

Envisaged participants

In most European countries, policy-making on the provision of online services in the areas health, government/ public administration and lifelong learning takes place mainly at the regional/local level rather than the national level. Consequently, the target audience of the workshop are decision makers, experts and practitioners involved in the design, execution and evaluation of Information Society policies at the local/regional level. In particular, policy-makers and administrative decision makers in the three areas healthcare, government/ public administration and lifelong learning are addressed. In addition, experts and practitioners involved in related policy-making at the national and EU level are to be invited, too.

OBJECTIVES

Intended achievements

The workshop will bring together different stakeholder groupings and engage them in an evidence-based debate on user issues in online public service provision and how these can best be incorporated in appropriate inclusion strategies. Policy intervention and research requirements for the key challenges for the wider implementation of inclusive online service provision, knowledge gaps and research requirements and priorities for policy intervention at regional and European level will be discussed. The overall objective is to positively contribute to an improvement of inclusion in European societies through useful, usable and accessible, i.e. user oriented eServices and appropriate policy approaches successfully combating social exclusion in Europe and improving user orientation in online public services.

Projected impact

The workshop and the debate will contribute to the achievement of the benefits potentially associated with online services provision in areas of public interest such as improved quality and outreach of services, particularly in relation to those population groups that have not yet been reached to a sufficient extent. In this sense, the outcomes of the workshop will support key stakeholders at the national, regional and municipal level in developing and implementing online services that are appropriate, useful, useable and fully accessible for and by all citizens.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Municipal/regional networks
- European municipalities and regions
- European Commission
- IST Programme stakeholders
- IST project coordinators and partners
- Government officials and national policy makers
- Administrative decision makers
- European research community
- Online service providers and industry
- User representatives