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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING PAPER

e-Inclusion

The Information Society's potential for social inclusion in Europe

[with the support of the High Level Group
"Employment and Social Dimension of the Information Society" (ESDIS)]

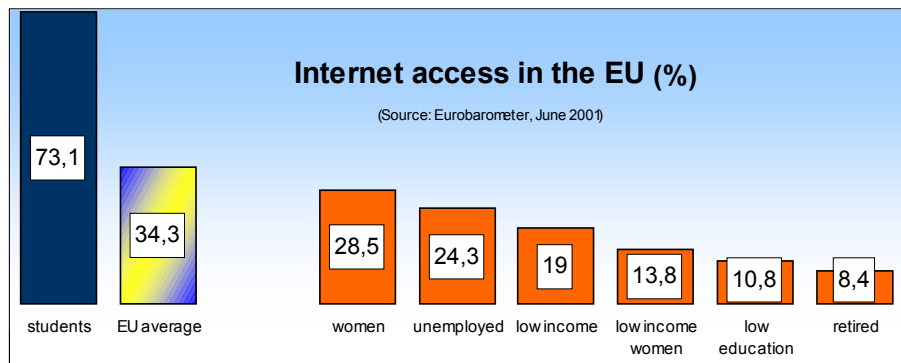
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Key messages

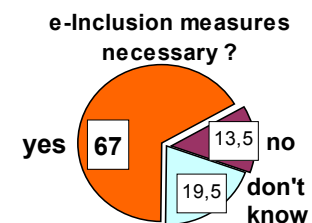
Users overwhelmingly highlight the **positive effects of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)** for their **everyday lives and jobs**. 93 % of users say that people who do not have Internet access are missing opportunities. About half of non-users already indicate a negative impact of **digital exclusion**.

Internet usage is increasing across all socio-economic categories, but the **access gap** – between men and women, employed and unemployed, high and low-incomes, highly educated and less educated, old and young – **has grown** in absolute terms, over the last months. Digital exclusion is frequently **cumulative**, affecting various kinds of social disadvantages.



Lack of access and training are the main barriers. But the resistance to the Internet should not be neglected: **about a quarter of EU population** seems **not to be at all aware of the possible benefits** for their own lives. However, this figure is much lower in Member States with advanced Information Societies.

Tackling the digital divide by targeted measures for disadvantaged people is widely supported by the public. **Two out of three Europeans call for e-Inclusion measures.**



In response to this challenge, e-Inclusion is a **key objective of the EU's Employment Strategy** and the **Social Inclusion Strategy**.

Under the e-Europe Action Plan, the ESDIS High Level Group, composed of representatives of the Member States, has been called upon to report on the development of e-Inclusion policies. Building on an analysis following an exchange of practices from public, private and voluntary sectors, **ESDIS proposes concrete measures**

- to **tap the Information Society's potential for disadvantaged people** by appropriate on-line content and services, on-line local communities, and ICT job opportunities;
- while **removing barriers** by raising awareness of its opportunities, making access to ICT available and affordable, promoting digital literacy, and enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities;
- through **partnerships of all stakeholders and communities**, stressing the role of Social Partners and civil society organisations and the importance of regional and local action, and

calls for developing e-Inclusion as an **integral element in the fight against social exclusion**.

Introduction

Two dimensions of e-Inclusion

- The Information Society **promises new 'digital opportunities' for the inclusion** of socially disadvantaged people and less-favoured areas. Information and communication technologies (ICT) have the potential to overcome traditional barriers to mobility and geographic distance, and to distribute more equally knowledge resources. They can generate new services and networks that support and encourage disadvantaged people in a flexible and pro-active way, and on a wider scale than is possible by "off-line" assistance. The Information Society offers also new job opportunities for people seeking employment or being at risk in the labour market.
- On the other hand, **new risks of 'digital exclusion' need to be prevented**. In an economy increasingly dominated by the usage of information technologies across all sectors, Internet access and digital literacy are a must for maintaining employability and adaptability, and for taking economic and social advantage of on-line contents and services.

Thus, the **strategic challenge for e-Inclusion policies is twofold**: to fully exploit the ICT potential to overcome traditional forms of social exclusion, while ensuring that all citizens to benefit from the Information Society.

The more the Information Society advances, the more social and economic opportunities depend on ICT usage. Exclusion from them increasingly becomes a barrier for individuals. Thus, e-Inclusion policies today will enhance social cohesion and quality of life in the future.

A co-ordinated policy response to e-Inclusion needs to combine public and private efforts at all levels, involving Social partners and civil society organisations.

The policy framework

Since the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, achieving an **"Information Society for all"** has become a **political priority for the European Union**. The **European Social Agenda**, the Union's work programme in the fields of employment and social affairs, highlights the potential ICT provide for combating social exclusion.¹ Seizing the job potential of the Information Society and digital literacy for all have become key elements of the European **Employment Strategy**², backed up with financial support from the **European Social Fund**. The challenges for education and training have also been addressed by the **eLearning Action Plan**³.

e-Inclusion is a core objective of the new **Social Inclusion Strategy** focusing on both of its dimensions: "to exploit fully the potential of the knowledge-based society and of new

¹ Annex I to the Nice European Council Conclusions: <http://ue.eu.int/en/info/eurocouncil/index.htm>

² see Employment Guidelines 2001, (COM 2001/64/EC), in particular Guidelines 5 and 15 - http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/empl/esf/docs/com2001_64_en.pdf

³ http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/elearning/doc_en.html

information and communication technologies and ensure that no-one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities."⁴

This objective is backed up by the **eEurope Action Plan**⁵ throughout its three priority areas: making the Internet "cheaper, faster and more secure"; stimulating the use of the Internet and boosting confidence in e-commerce; equipping people with IT skills and encouraging their participation in the Information Society.

In particular, the eEurope action line "**participation for all in the knowledge-based economy**" calls for **enhanced co-ordination at European level** of "policies to avoid info-exclusion" by 2001. The Commission's Communication on "eEurope 2000 – impact and priorities" submitted to the Stockholm European Council reinforced this target. As a **priority for eEurope**, it asked the High Level Group "Employment and Social Dimension of the Information Society" (**ESDIS**) to draw-up a report on e-Inclusion.

The focus of the report

Meeting this objective, the Commission's services present this report with the support of the ESDIS High Level Group – composed of representatives of the Member States.⁶ It is based on a broad exchange of policy practices and a specific Eurobarometer survey on e-Inclusion⁷:

- **Part A** sets out the challenge. It identifies access barriers, and thus defines disadvantaged people and areas lagging behind in the Information Society. It also underlines their interest in, and the public support for developing e-Inclusion policies.
- **Part B** presents policies to exploit the **digital potential** for disadvantaged people – by targeting on-line services, fostering on-line communities, and realising their job opportunities in the Information Society. To achieve this, **barriers** need to be removed: by raising awareness, incentives for public Internet access and private ICT usage, digital literacy training as well as by accessible ICT equipment and content for the people with disabilities.

Within this framework, the report focuses on specific measures for disadvantaged people and areas stressing, hence, its **complementarity to other dimensions of eEurope**.

Drawing on policy objectives and practices in the Member States, including the important contribution of public-private partnerships and the voluntary sector, the **ESDIS group has developed proposals**. They are presented at the beginning of this report – without prejudice to policy initiatives from the Commission – as an analytical background **for developing the e-Inclusion objective** within the Social Inclusion Strategy.

A more **detailed illustration of practices** and an inventory of relevant web-addresses for e-Inclusion in Europe will be **presented on the ESDIS web-site**⁸.

⁴ "Objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion" submitted to the Nice European Council, item 2 a)

⁵ http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/index_en.htm

⁶ A sub-group of Accessibility experts has contributed on the issues of accessibility for people with special needs, particularly with disabilities.

⁷ unless otherwise stated, the figures of this report refer to this **Eurobarometer survey, June 2001**.

⁸ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/info_soc/esdis/index.htm .

Proposals from the ESDIS High Level Group

Building on an analysis following an exchange of practices from public, private and voluntary sectors, ESDIS proposes:

... to tap the Information Society's potential for disadvantaged people by ...

appropriate on-line content and services

- Member States should enhance their efforts to make **on-line public services accessible according to demand profiles, understandable** for all people and **without technical barriers** for persons with disabilities.
- Member States should introduce **regular quality checks of public web-sites** benchmarking their user-friendliness, in particular their **response to special needs of disadvantaged people**, backed up with the dissemination of best practices.
- Targeted **services for disadvantaged people** – including in the areas of social assistance, job opportunities, education, and health – should be **a priority in deploying interactive eGovernment**. While integrating these services in general public portals, the establishment of dedicated portals for disadvantaged people, pooling relevant on-line services, should also be promoted.
- Public authorities should **encourage** the development of **on-line activities in the voluntary sector**, including its catalytic role favouring access to public services, by providing financial incentives, technical assistance and support to the networking of NGOs, including innovative forms of stakeholder partnerships with private actors.
- While on-line public services will increase the awareness of digital benefits, complementary **off-line** access to basic **services needs to continue** in an appropriate way.

fostering local communities through on-line services and networks

- Member States should **stimulate** the development of **local on-line communities**, including financial and technical support and the dissemination of best practices, with a priority to **disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods** and less-favoured **rural areas**.
- Serving the **needs of peripheral areas** should become a **priority for e-Government** initiatives.

realising ICT job opportunities for disadvantaged people

- Social Partners, when implementing the Employment Guidelines which call on them to provide every worker with the opportunity to achieve **ICT literacy** by 2003, should **ensure that low-income and lower-educated workers** are not left behind.
- Member States, in partnership with private actors, should provide incentives for the unemployed to get a **recognised certificate of basic ICT skills**, like the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).
- Interested unemployed or workers at risk of exclusion should be appropriately encouraged to take-up **conversion** courses in **ICT or e-business expert skills**, involving partnerships with the relevant industries.
- **Telework** should be facilitated for disadvantaged people by specific incentives, and generally, by further progress in telework framework agreements, investment in advanced communication infrastructures and the provision of broadband links to "e-work" facilities.
- **On-line recruitment** sites matching job markets to workers with **special needs**, e.g. for those with disabilities, should be promoted, by the public employment services and other services, and by support for adequate private initiatives.

... while removing barriers in the Information Society by ...

raising awareness of the Information Society's opportunities

- To attract technology shy or resistant people, awareness campaigns should be expanded in communities at risk of digital exclusion, **communicating the specific benefits for disadvantaged** people, and using channels that are appropriate for **their way of life**.
- Awareness measures should be designed as a first step in an **integrated** e-Inclusion strategy, **followed-up by incentives for access and training**.
- **ICT producers, information providers and political actors** should be **sensitised** to the special needs of disadvantaged people in terms of ICT equipment and on-line content, and in terms of opportunities for removing barriers for work.

making access to ICT available and affordable, within the legal framework of universal service, and, in conformity with competition rules, by targeted, complementary initiatives such as:

- Public authorities and public-private partnerships should set-up user-friendly **Public Internet Access Points (PIAP)** in all local communities as requested by eEurope, while **prioritising locations** which are favourable **for disadvantaged people**, offering **on-site training facilities**, and being accessible for persons with disabilities. A **register of PIAP locations** should be established in every Member State to facilitate the take-up.
- **Targeted financial incentives** which encourage the **individual purchase or use of ICT** by disadvantaged people should be further developed, building on successful best practices.
- **ICT-infrastructures for remote or dispersed localities**, particularly broad-band access, should be developed as an important element of e-Inclusion.
- As advanced **mobile communications and digital TV** increasingly provide new opportunities for e-Inclusion, appropriate measures should be considered to accelerate these effects.

promoting digital literacy for disadvantaged people

- Digital literacy initiatives for disadvantaged people should be expanded, **focussing on the basic usage of the Internet** and of **public on-line services**, and should be carried out in an accustomed environment and by trainers that understand specific learning needs.
- **Networks of eLearning centers** should be forged to provide disadvantaged communities with access to learning tools which they could not afford on their own.

eAccessibility: tackling technical barriers for people with disabilities

- Efforts to enhance the accessibility of **ICT equipment and web-content** for people with disabilities should be speeded-up by the **implementation of the eEurope actions** concerning the adoption of "Web Accessibility Initiative"(WAI)-Guidelines, the conformity of legislation with eAccessibility principles, the networking of "Design for all" competencies and related curricula, and the publication of Design-for-all Standards.
- The eAccessibility Expert Group should continue to monitor these actions and draw-up benchmarks on the adoption of the WAI Guidelines in the Member States.

... through partnerships of all stakeholders – with an emphasis on the regional and local dimensions

- Actions in these seven **complementary policy areas** should be pursued by joining the efforts **of all stakeholders**, taking full advantage of **public-private partnerships** and encouraging the key role of **regional and local actors, Social Partners** and **civil society organisations**.
- e-Inclusion policies should take due account of the **different levels** of digital exclusion **in the Member States regions and localities**, and should appropriately address the **various disadvantaged communities**, while **mainstreaming gender**.

e-Inclusion measures should be developed as an **integral element** in the fight against social exclusion, across all relevant policy dimensions, and provide an **added value** to its progress.

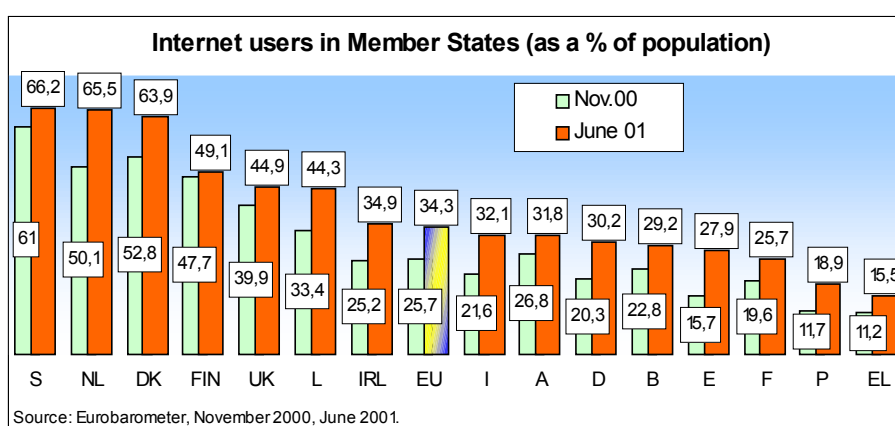
Part A:

The challenge for e-Inclusion

1. Digital opportunities – not to be missed

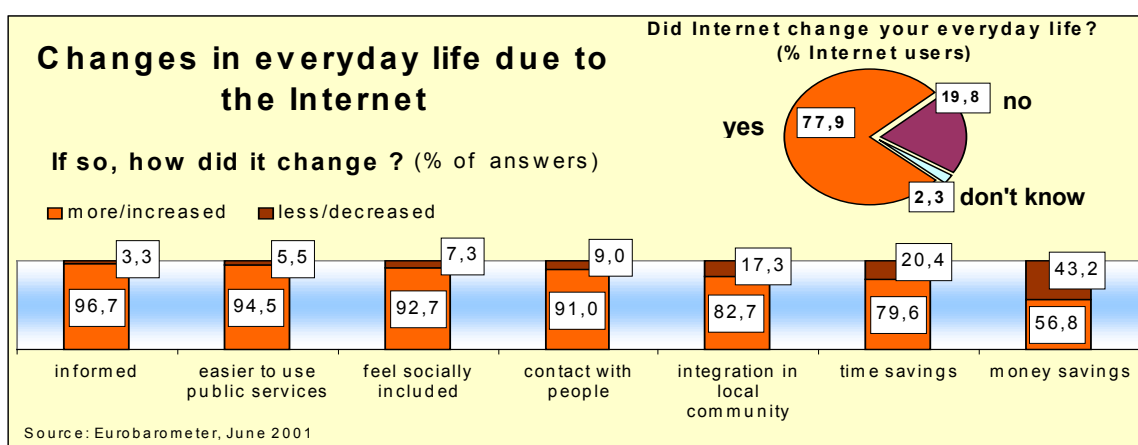
... the Information Society is rapidly expanding ...

In just seven months, from November 2000 to June 2001, the number of Internet users grew from one fourth to more than one third of the EU population.⁹ In the most advanced Member States almost two thirds of citizens are on-line. Forecasts indicate that EU average will reach this level by the end of 2004.¹⁰ Already 63 % of all Europeans use a mobile phone. Given the potential of advanced mobile services, this adds a promising approach to expand the Information Society.¹¹



... changing everyday life and jobs ...

Three Europeans out of four claim that ICT will have a **positive impact** on their quality of life¹². 77 % of users have already experienced a change – with better information, more contacts, saving time and easier use of public services quoted most frequently.



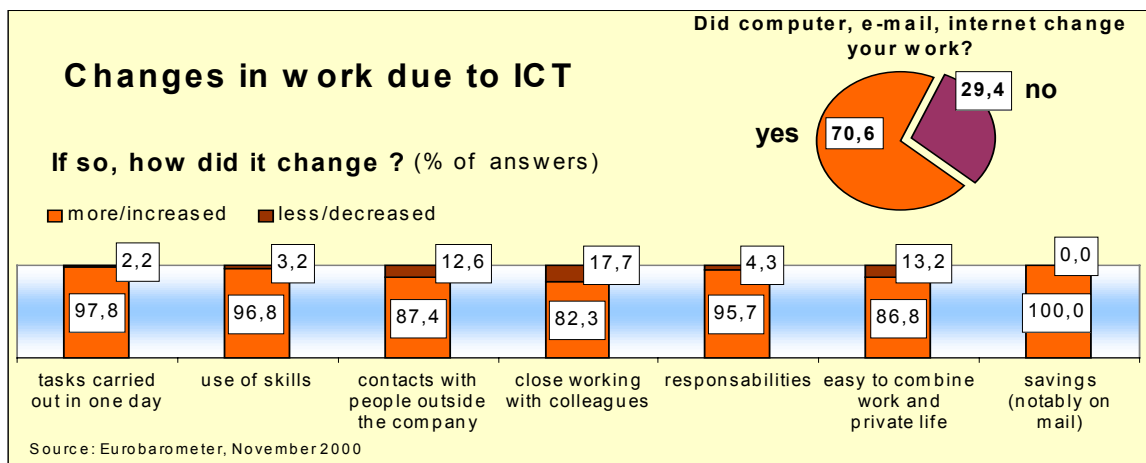
⁹ The referred Eurobarometer figures on Internet penetration refer to the question "Do you use the Internet?" (sample: population above 15 years). The results of other surveys may deviate according to different definitions. See also the "e-Europe benchmark" which refers to the Internet access in EU households at: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/benchmarking/list/2000/index_en.htm

¹⁰ IDC 2001 - http://www.nua.ie/surveys/index.cgi?f=VS&art_id=905356721&rel=true

¹¹ see section B.2.2.4.

¹² Eurobarometer November-December 1999.

The **fundamental impact of the Information Society on jobs across all economic sectors** has been highlighted by the recent ESDIS "Benchmarking Report"¹³. About half of all European workers already use ICT for their job, and this number is rapidly increasing.¹⁴ Thus, digital literacy has become a **basic condition for getting and keeping a job**. Employment is by far the **most important reason to learn to use a computer**, as two out of three EU computer users underline.¹⁵ ICT do not only change job profiles, but also work organisation: the vast majority of employed users claim that it **positively affects the productivity and quality of their work**.



... creating opportunities that should not be missed ...

Against this experience, 93 % of users believe that people who do not access the Internet are missing an opportunity.

2. Digital divides - targets for e-Inclusion

The Information Society still has **multiple access gaps** – across Member States and regions as well as by gender, age, income, employment and education. Digital exclusion is frequently **cumulative, adding to other social disadvantages**.

... Internet usage increases in all groups, but access gaps are getting broader ...

The number of Internet users is, in relative terms, increasing across all disadvantaged socio-economic categories. However, in absolute terms, **the gaps** in Internet penetration – between men and women, employed and unemployed, high and low-income, high and low-skilled, old and young – **have grown** over the last months.

All Member States experience a strong increase, but the variance of Internet penetration across the Union remains high.¹⁶ This implies a **different scope for e-Inclusion in the individual Member States**. For countries lagging behind, e-Inclusion is confronted with a

¹³ "Benchmarking report following-up the Strategies for Jobs in the Information Society", SEC (2001) 222

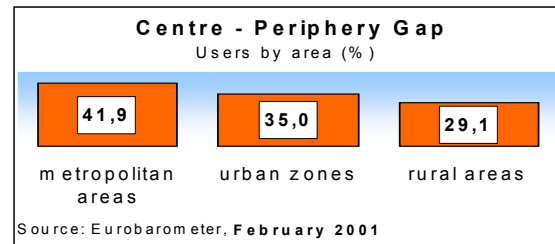
¹⁴ see chart on Internet access by employment in section 2

¹⁵ Eurobarometer November 2000

¹⁶ The average difference in percentage points between the 15 national Internet penetration rates and EU average even slightly increased from 12.6 to 12.8 percentage points from November 2000 to June 2001.

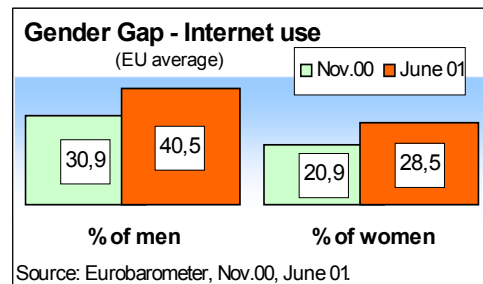
broader target. In advanced Information Societies, Internet access has already spread more into disadvantaged communities, increasing the potential of on-line services addressed to them. On the other hand, the individual effects of exclusion for non-users may be still more acute in an environment with high usage rates.

Regional differences within Member States – **centre vs. periphery, urban vs. rural areas** – also strongly define Internet access.¹⁷

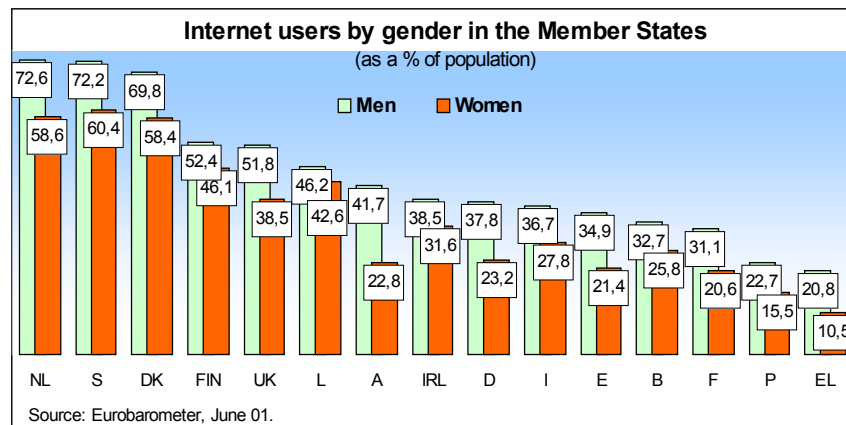


Internet access of women is still significantly less than that of EU men. In absolute terms, the **gender gap even grew** in the last months. Surveys indicate that women are less on-line in all Member States, with particularly high differences in some.¹⁸

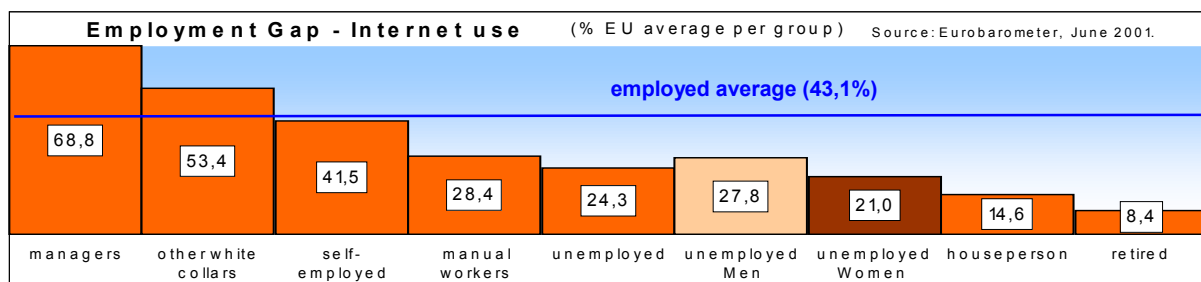
The **gender gap** is particularly relevant **within groups that are disadvantaged for other reasons**.



While gender difference in Internet usage is limited among white collar workers or students, it is very strong among low-income, less-educated, unemployed, or older people. This confirms the **need for mainstreaming gender in all inclusion policies**.



In a labour market increasingly determined by ICT skills, the low Internet usage of the **unemployed** – only about half that of the employed – is particularly worrying. Stimulating their ICT access and enhancing their digital literacy will be a *sine qua non* condition for improving their employability.

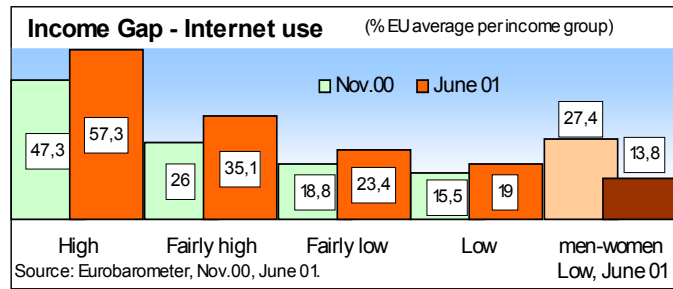


¹⁷ For instance, the overall indicator of IT penetration (homes and enterprises) varies broadly among Spanish regions: given a national average of 100, it reaches 201 in Madrid and 142 in Catalonia, whereas it is below 75 for Murcia, Canarias, Castilla la Mancha, Castilla León and Extremadura. This gap largely coincides with the distinction between Objective 1 areas and non-objective 1 areas according to the Structural Funds.

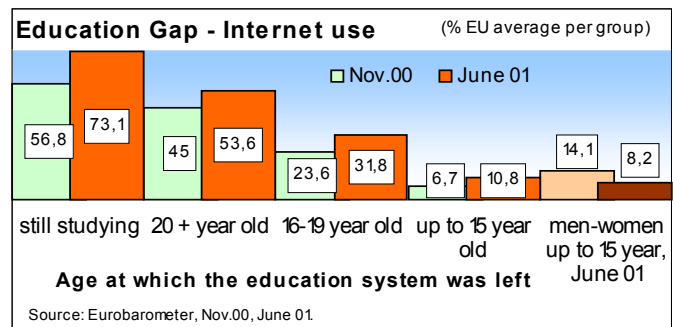
¹⁸ In the US, an equal gender distribution in Internet use has been reached (men 44,6%; women 44,2% - NTIA, August 2000).

Housepersons, most of them women, are among the categories which participate least in the Information Society. ICT literacy will also define their chances to re-enter the labour market.

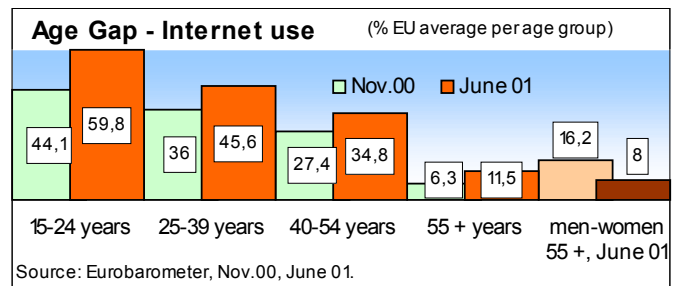
Internet access is still not affordable for everyone. Among people with **low-income**, female Internet users are only half that of men.



The education gap is still broader than differences by income. **Less-educated people** show least interest in getting on-line, though basic Internet usage would not require higher education. It could, on the other hand, help them to expand their knowledge on their own.



Older, and particularly **retired**, people have the lowest user rates. However, the rapid growth of retired users over the last months and considerably higher rates by the elderly in advanced Information Societies indicate the potential for e-Inclusion among older people.



Apart from these cleavages which are underlined by Eurobarometer results, the ESDIS group **highlights** also **digital risks for other groups of disadvantaged people**:

- ICT are especially promising for people with disabilities as they can assist them in overcoming their handicaps. However, this potential may not be realised if they cannot afford assistive technologies or if the accessibility of ICT equipment or web-content is not ensured. Studies in some Member States (e.g. in Sweden, Portugal) underline the persistence of a **"disability gap"**: among people with disabilities, the computer and Internet penetration is considerably lower among people with disabilities and the usage of on-line services is less intensive.¹⁹

¹⁹ In the US, Internet penetration among disabled people was only half that of people without disabilities in 1999, with differences according to the kind of their disability. (source: Survey on Income and Program Participation, research data file - Aug. Nov. 1999 - U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce):

people with:	no disability	a disability	learning disability	difficulty in using hands	hearing problems	vision problems	walking problems
internet access (%)	56,7	28,4	42,2	22,5	27,2	21,1	18,5

- With a high percentage of low-income or low-education among their inhabitants, **disadvantaged neighbourhoods within cities** are characterised by low Internet penetration, making public access facilities particularly important.
- **Ethnic and linguistic minorities** frequently lack on-line content in their own language.
- **Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers** often share other criteria of exclusion such as low-income, language barriers, or living in disadvantaged areas.
- Enabling **(almost) illiterate** persons to use the Internet is a particular challenge. In some Member States they amount up to 10 % of the population. Simple visual access modes will be important, e.g. to open them e-Government. But ICT may assist literacy training.
- People in need of social **reintegration** for various other reasons that can be supported in their inclusion efforts through ICT (e.g. ICT training for prisoners in Italy).

With a view to an enlarged Union – though not further investigated in this report – the still wider digital divides in Central and Eastern European Countries have to be taken into account. eInclusion is an essential dimension of the eEurope+ Action Plan, the Information Society roadmap launched by the **candidate countries** in June 2001.

3. Demand for e-Inclusion

... the interest in the Internet exceeds actual Internet penetration by far ...

A Eurobarometer survey in November 2000 showed that among the lowest income group, the number of people perceiving a computer as important in daily life was three times higher than actual Internet access. Among people with low education and among older people this figure was even six times higher than Internet access.²⁰

Almost half of all non-users admit that they are missing an opportunity – in some groups, like among the unemployed this figure is even higher. On the other hand, about the same proportion of non-users indicates that they **could be encouraged to use the Internet**.

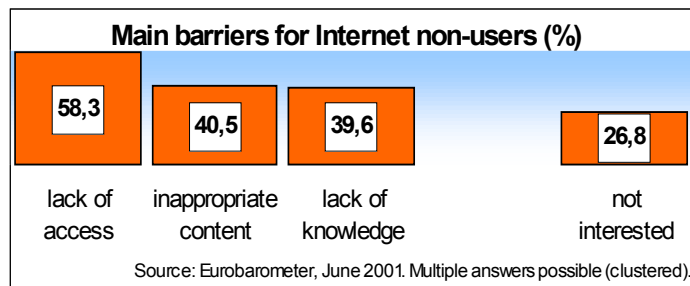
... but non-users are much less aware of specific opportunities ...

Unsurprisingly, however, the expectations of non-users about digital opportunities are far less clear than among users. They are still more felt among unemployed non-users. In the case of future Internet access, non-users expect positive changes for their daily life (apart from an increase in costs), but they are less pronounced than those of users.

²⁰ Eurobarometer, November 2000.

... lack of access and knowledge are the main barriers ...

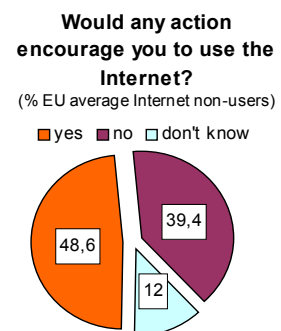
Asked why they do not use the Internet, **unavailable** or **unaffordable technology** (*lack of access*) is the most frequently mentioned barrier across all socio-economic groups. Internet availability seems to be still more a problem for female (61 %) than for male non-users (55 %), and cost factors are underlined most by the unemployed. **Lack of knowledge** is more frequently admitted as a main barrier by female non-users (49 % compared to 28 % among men), housepersons (50 %) and older people (51 %).



... but the resistance to Internet usage may not be neglected ...

9 % stress they are not using the Internet because they regard on-line content as not useful for them, and 27 % of non-users explicitly say that they **are not interested** in the Internet or **don't want** to use it. The latter figure is particularly high among retired (40 % of non-users), low-educated (39 %), low-income (31 %) and housepersons (31 %).

Seen the other way round, about the same proportion (39 % of non-users) claim that nothing could encourage them to use the Internet (61 % of retired non-users, 54 % of low-educated, 46 % of housepersons). This proportion is smaller among unemployed non-users (26 %). This data suggests that **about a quarter of the EU population** seems **currently not at all ready to access the Internet**.



... though non-users are much less sceptical in advanced Information Societies ...

However, these figures are **much lower in advanced Information Societies**. In Sweden and Denmark, only 5 % of the population show no interest to use the Internet, in the Netherlands 7% and in Finland 8 %. Similarly, in these countries less than 15 % of the population claims that nothing could encourage them to use the Internet. This underlines that the number of technology-shy or resistant people can be reduced.

... the digital divide does not disappear on its own ...

A market-led expansion of the Information Society alone will not be enough to attract all citizens. As disadvantaged people lack access, skills, and basic awareness of digital opportunities, digital exclusion will persist, unless targeted action is taken.²¹

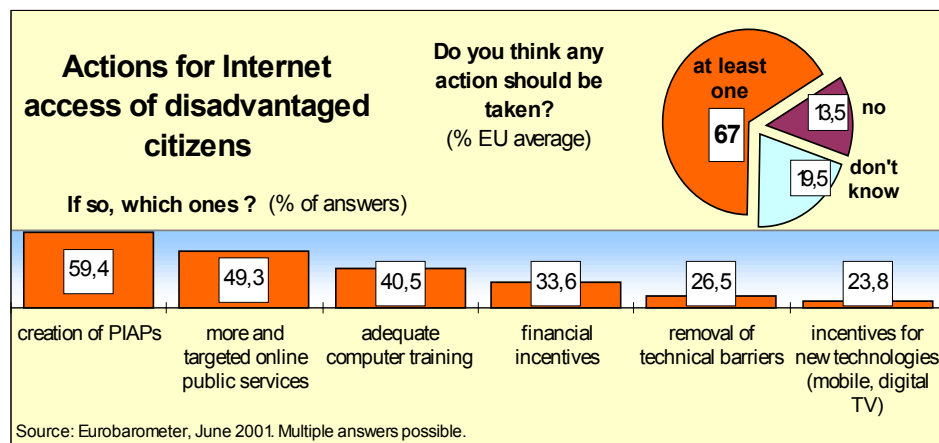
²¹ Comparisons to the US²¹ also confirms that advanced overall Internet penetration alone does not necessarily overcome a digital divide. For a comprehensive assessment of the US case see "Falling through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion, Report on Americans' Access to Technology Tools, October 2000, <http://www.digitaldivide.gov/reports.htm> - <http://search.ntia.doc.gov/pdf/ftn00.pdf>

... citizens support e-Inclusion policies ...

Preventing a digital divide is widely supported by public opinion. Two out of three Europeans (64%) call on public authorities to spend money in order to give access to ICT to everyone.²² Only 14 % of Europeans say that no action should be taken "to enhance the access of disadvantaged citizens to the Internet". Again, users are much more **keen to enable all citizens** for the Information Society – only 4 % of them see no need for any action.

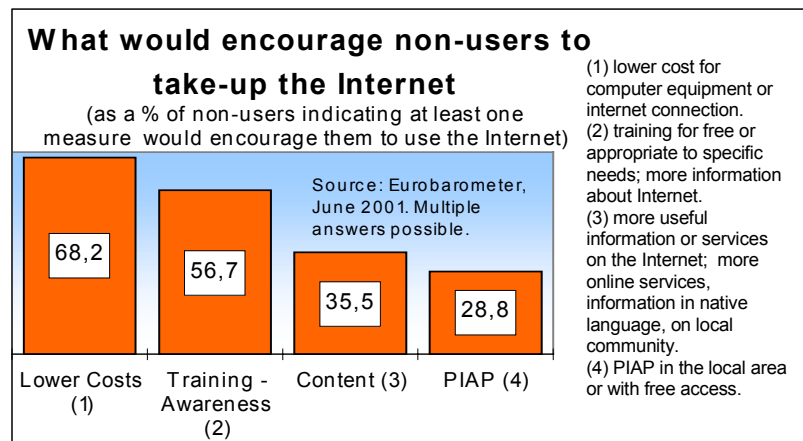
... public Internet access most frequently proposed ...

When asked which action should enhance Internet access for disadvantaged citizens, the most frequently proposed measures **concern ICT availability**, with the creation of Public Internet access points (PIAP) as the most frequently mentioned single item. Other areas high in demand are **targeted online public services** and **appropriate training** for disadvantaged people.



... non-users call for reduction of costs and targeted and free training ...

This ranking is somewhat different from the individual perspective of non-users. Asked which measure would encourage them to use the Internet, they regard the reduction of costs and the provision of training (including "training meeting my needs"/" free courses") as the most significant means.



... a large part of non-users is ready to benefit, others need to be made aware ...

Overall, survey data clearly indicate digital divides, but also the public support for e-Inclusion measures and the willingness of about half of all non-users to benefit from them. Targeted action should facilitate their up-take and attract further disadvantaged people.

²² Eurobarometer, Spring 2000; all other data are based on Eurobarometer June 2001.

Part B

Policy areas for e-Inclusion – Towards a co-ordinated approach

1. Exploiting the Information Society's potential for disadvantaged people

1.1. Appropriate on-line content and services

eEurope highlights that ensuring access to on-line public services for all citizens becomes as important as ensuring access to public buildings. But **preventing exclusion from e-Government** is only one essential aspect. On-line provision is also a **catalyst for social inclusion** by offering **new and better services**. The groups lagging behind in the Information Society are frequently those who especially need public assistance and could thus strongly benefit from their on-line supply.

The **reduction of administrative distance** that facilitates e.g. the search for the appropriate public office and avoids queues in administrations is particularly useful for people who are restricted in their mobility - like persons concerned with child-care, the elderly, or persons with disabilities.

On-line provision can also raise the quality of the **public service** and make it **more attractive for disadvantaged people**. Social services are frequently supplied within diverse systems, depending on different public authorities. Virtual access can eliminate such differences. Thus, sites should be **organised according to demand profiles**, rather than according to actual service supply structures.

... making on-line services easier ...

All national governments have established Internet sites. However, a first appraisal of public services in the Member States presented in the ESDIS "Benchmarking Report" indicates **little interactivity** of on-line services and still, in several cases, a lack of easily understandable "Citizens' sites". This is also the case for services in the field social policy which is essential for the daily life of disadvantaged groups. Thus, public service providers need to enhance efforts to make them **accessible and comprehensible for all people**.

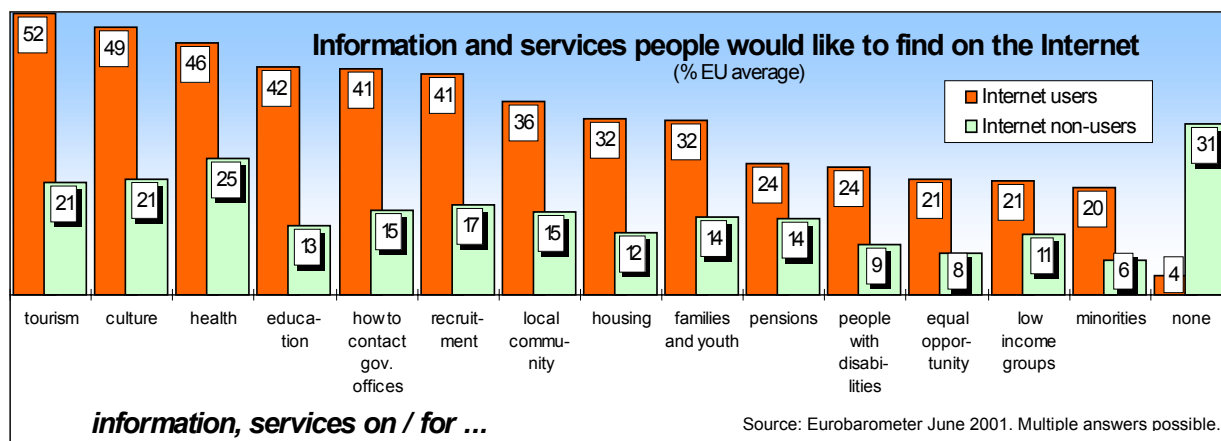
In *Ireland*, an electronic gateway called "eBroker" has been created, that facilitates service access e.g. for "life events" such as registering a birth or buying a house. It provides an integrated set of processes and procedures and a design that ensures that information about services can be accessed with maximum ease for the user.

To back up ambitious objectives²³, regular **checks of public web-sites and the promotion of best practices** are essential:

In **Denmark**, quarterly quality checks screen all public home pages to ensure that public electronic information is easily accessible in terms of both form and content, immediately understandable, useable and of high quality, including attention to the requirements of special groups, like people with disabilities, the elderly and ethnic minorities. The results of these quality checks are published to disseminate best practices. In the **Netherlands** a group of people with disabilities is monitoring web-sites.

... on-line services targeted at disadvantaged people ...

The Information Society offers also wide potential for new forms of services - matching demand and supply in targeted information and assistance at a wider and more flexible scale. Even **among non-users, two thirds are interested** in one or another area of on-line information and service. A considerable number of citizens wants to find social services on the web.



Many Member States have reported on on-line services targeted at different groups of disadvantaged people.

For people with disabilities: In **Spain**, an Internet portal for disability – "Discapnet" - has been created to provide up-to-date information on issues of importance for the daily life of people with disabilities, including an interactive exchange of job and training opportunities. In **Denmark**, the Danish Centre for Technical Aids for Rehabilitation and Education has been set-up as national information and resource centre aiming at equal opportunities for people with disabilities within the areas of rehabilitation, assistive technology, special education, and accessibility of physical environment and ICT. In **Germany**, the REHADAT database supporting vocational rehabilitation. The database pools relevant information such as addresses, R&D, legislation, technical aids, work-place adaptations. In **Greece**, a portal for people with disabilities offers long-distance training and multimedia applications for special needs. In **Austria**, the "Blind line" call-centre provides free information about ICT-related and other issues relevant for blind people, including IS job opportunities. In the **Netherlands**, www.integratienet.nl is a portal with all relevant links and information concerning the integration of **minorities** at local and regional level. Similar portals are being developed in **Portugal**. In **Sweden** (seniornet) and in the **Netherlands**, special portals/services have been developed to stimulate the participation of the **elderly**.

²³ see the objectives set in the "Strategies for Jobs in the Information Society" and in the e-Government action line of e-Europe.

On-line **health services**, which are targeted by a specific eEurope Action line, can provide particular benefits for disadvantaged people, like frequently ill people or those with a restricted mobility, but also for those socially excluded who are not covered by a health insurance. Survey results underline that health is the **most attractive on-line service for non-users**.

In *Spain*, tele-medicine services are provided for people with disabilities, older people and immigrants.

A further important dimension concerns the potential of on-line services for **fostering cultural identities** and, hence, social integration. Specifically, ICT may activate the cultural potential of persons with disabilities.

In *France*, a network of cultural multimedia spaces is established; in *Italy* a cultural portal; in the *UK* a content initiative supporting lifelong learning on cultural heritage. In *France*, new perspectives of e-publishing for visually impaired and blind people are being explored: a body will forward orders to the publisher with the guarantee of text integrity and of copyright.

ICT can also help to **overcome linguistic barriers**, by on-line translation or new electronic tools for learning foreign languages. On-line facilities for immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees to receive public information in their native languages can assist them to get accustomed in their new environment. However, as 75% of all web-information is produced only in English, many citizens still face problems to use content not provided in their own language. **The development of European content on the web and its linguistic diversity** are now supported by the *eContent* Initiative under the eEurope Action Plan.

... Voluntary associations are a mediator for on-line services ...

Voluntary associations play a vital role in disseminating public information and generating targeted on-line services for their respective clients. Public authorities can encourage this development by **providing financial or technical support**.

In *Germany*, a Government initiative operates as a big umbrella providing web-space on its server to self-help organisations of people with disabilities, at the condition that the web pages follow basic accessibility guidelines. Several other practices are presented in *Section 3.2*.

... a safety net for Internet-"outs"...

Though e-Inclusion measures will reduce digital divides, a considerable number of people will stay outside. Thus, while public information and services become increasingly on-line, there is a need that **complementary off-line access to basic services continues in an appropriate way**. These opportunities for "outs" may even be improved due to the usage of ICT in the internal working of public authorities, as illustrated by the following example:

In *Denmark*, a call centre has been established where citizens can call using a four digit number to obtain information about all public authorities and institutions. The idea is, that citizens who do not have Internet access should have improved opportunities for obtaining information from the public administration. The establishing of a call centre gives citizens the opportunity to obtain information about all public authorities and institutions with a home page by making just one call. This enables those citizens who do not have the opportunity to/respectively not want to use the Internet, to obtain the same information as Internet users. In *Greece*, a national call center (4 digit telephone numbers, with 10.000 calls per month) has been set-up to facilitate access to public administration,

supported by Ministries, Municipalities, Prefectures, Universities, Hospitals and many other public services. Applications for certificates made by telephone are channelled by these centers to the responsible administrative units which sent the certificates to the applicant.

1.2. Fostering local communities through on-line services and networks

At local level, ICT offer new tools and ways for inclusion – integrating people into their local environment – reinforcing the exchange among local administrations, business, voluntary organisations and citizens – rebuilding communities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods – and connecting peripheries closer to their centres.

In fact, a large part of public on-line content is **run locally and serves local purposes**. The number of municipalities and local communities present on the web is rapidly increasing, offering a variety of services. A Eurobarometer survey of local government showed that already 56 % of local authorities had a web-site, though a lack of interactivity is still limiting also at this level. The **active involvement** of as many **public and private actors** as possible is vital for creating network effects of the appropriate regional/local scale.

The initiative of "free-forming regional portals" in *Finland* is one example of flourishing local networks which build on the co-operation of municipalities, private enterprises, and civil society organisations. They have been successful in jointly developing on-line communal services, creating a market place for local enterprises, as well as an interactive forum for citizens to exchange on events in the region.

There does not seem to be a general need for co-ordinating local on-line services at a central level, but government can effectively **stimulate** local action as several Member States (*e.g. UK, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Finland, Spain, Netherlands*) indicate. These measures include financial support and the dissemination of best practices to local communities.

In the *UK*, more than one hundred councils are taking part in "pathfinder projects" targeted at developing better, more accessible local services by harnessing the benefits of ICT. To be eligible for Government funding, these councils, in partnership with other public service agencies, local communities and the private sector, are to agree with the Government how they can best become centres of expertise from which all local government can learn.

Particular attention needs to be paid to **disadvantaged local communities**. They can use ICT as new tools for social integration supporting the renewal of neighbourhoods, but they frequently lack sufficient own resources to fully exploit these opportunities. As Internet access and digital literacy is particularly low in such areas, the development of on-line neighbourhood services needs to be combined with public Internet access and training.

In the *Netherlands*, the *Digital Playgrounds* build around Digital Access Centres set up in poor neighbourhoods. Residents can use computers and learn how to use the Internet with and from each other, but emphasis is also put on offering at the same time a social meeting place, and to catch up on local gossip and neighbourhood news. The Initiative is financed partly by the State, and partly by communities, in many cases with the support of private companies. The companies chose in co-operation with the local authorities the nature of their contribution which is frequently in kind - by providing equipment, developing a knowledge system, or promising jobs to members of disadvantaged groups after completing ICT training. In a similar way in *Spain*, the RED INTEGRA initiative of the regional government of Extremadura develops community Internet access animated by social workers at cultural centres of less-favoured neighbourhoods and small

villages. In the *UK*, the "wired Up Communities" initiative – apart from computer donation to the disadvantaged in a defined local area – targets at the potential for community interaction with local portals.

Integrating communities in on-line networks is also important for **peripheral areas** to overcome traditional barriers due to their remoteness. Member States have launched initiatives in this respect, backed up in some cases by the EU's Structural Funds.

In *Greece*, within the programme ARIADNI focusing on the improvement of public services in municipalities through ICT, the part "ASTERIAS" concerning the islands has been completed as a priority.

1.3. Realising ICT job opportunities for disadvantaged people

The "Strategies for Jobs in the Information Society" set-out key areas of progress to realise the ICT job potential. This fed into a reinforced emphasis on ICT and digital skills within the European Employment Strategy – particularly Guidelines 5 and 15. The recent ESDIS Follow-up Benchmark Report confirmed the rapidly increasing impact of the Information Society on jobs (*see also Part A, section 1*). Tapping the ICT potential for employment is essential for meeting the targets set by the Strategy adopted by the European Council in Lisbon, in particular the increase in employment rate up to 70% by 2010. ICT opens new job opportunities for employed, unemployed and also for people currently out of the labour market.

Within this context, the focus of e-Inclusion concerns three aspects: **digital skills for entering / re-entering** the labour market or improving the **adaptability of workers at risk**; **telework and assistive technologies** to remove job barriers; and the potential of **on-line recruitment**.

... Integration through Information Society skills ...

More than half of all jobs already require digital skills. For new jobs this proportion is much higher. Skills at **digital literacy** level (word processing, spreadsheet operations, Internet usage and basic database management) are becoming a **sine qua non condition for entering** and increasingly for **retaining employment**.

- However, only 31 % of the unemployed say that they have "any kind" of computer training (not specifying whether this would be sufficient for a job).²⁴ 6 % of the unemployed indicate a computer training from Public Employment Services.
- In disadvantaged socio-economic groups, basic ICT skills are still less frequent, risking their adaptability to an ICT based job environment. For example, only 12 % of low-educated people have had any kind of computer training and only 4 % of low-income earners (3 % for female) have ever received a computer training paid by their employer.

This highlights the need for enhancing ICT user skills for disadvantaged people. **Social partners and employers** have an important responsibility in providing these skills as set-out

²⁴ The definition for these data from the June 2000 survey is wider and, thus, the figures higher than those reported in the ESDIS Benchmarking Report in February 2001.

in the Employment Guidelines. A recognised certificate, like **the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)** which is promoted in most Member States, will be particularly important for people that have to prove their employability after longer periods out of work.

In *Belgium*, 10.000 unemployed people are being offered an ICT induction course with the possibility of getting a free PC at home for a limited time, to practice and search for a job. In *France*, a training module in basic computer, Internet and multimedia skills (14 hours) is systematically integrated in vocational training for people seeking employment. 1,2 Mio. persons should obtain a certificate in Internet navigation before end 2002. In *Germany*, the "Internet for All" Programme makes a commitment to provide the unemployed with the opportunity to get the ECDL. In Southern *Italy*, special programmes have been launched for training and social inclusion, among which there is a 100 million € initiative on ICT literacy for young unemployed. In *Sweden* since 1995, Computer-activity centres have been introduced as an alternative to traditional training. They are run by municipalities in co-operation with Employment Services and offer three months of basic computer training, combined with activities helping the unemployed to enter the labour market through project work, vocational guidance, study tours, and job experience. In 1999, 32.000 persons started such a course (54% of which were women). The "*UK* online: Computer Training" initiative aims at improving basic ICT skills amongst unemployed and the economically inactive. In *Greece*, the Operational Programme "Information Society" provides basic ICT education to 40.000 people during the period 2001-2002 (with a budget of € 25 Mio.), mainly targeted to the unemployed and certain groups of employed. In *Austria*, several projects facilitating access to ICT jobs integration are part of the employment initiative for **people with disabilities** with financing amounting to 73 Mio. Euro. Also in *Austria*, the ISIS project focuses on ICT training for blind persons, from the basic ECDL to more specialised levels, and supports them in entering IS jobs.

At a higher **technical level, (conversion) courses in ICT or e-business skills** offer promising job profiles on the basis of relatively short training periods. However, **disadvantaged people** often need to be **specifically encouraged** to take up this opportunity. Industry involvement frequently enhances the chance of participants to get employed at the end of the training.

In *Sweden*, the SwIT programme (a joint project of the government, the Swedish IT Industry Association and the Federation of Swedish Industries), provides vocational training to (until now 11.700) persons, with At least 75 % of the places have been allocated to unemployed persons with special opportunities given to groups underrepresented in the sector – women, immigrants and people with occupational disabilities. Two thirds of participants have got a job. In *Ireland*, the Fasttrack to IT Initiative trains and assists unemployed people to enter the IT industry at professional level. Companies involved offer work experience or Job Placements which can lead to employment within the company. In *Greece*, training in advanced ICT skills and “on the job training” for 10.000 people is provided by the Operational Programme IS in the period 2001 – 2002 (with a budget of € 38 Mio). In *Spain*, the National Employment Institute (INEM) provides an extensive course training 14.000 ICT specialists with a particular focus to attract unemployed and people at risk of social exclusion. In *Italy* a project focuses on the reintegration of prisoners by providing them IT, multimedia and film production training.

In some countries, like *Germany*, *Sweden* and *Austria*, the National Action Plan (NAP) Employment and/or the NAP Social Inclusion put a particular emphasis on **enhancing ICT job opportunities for women**.

While most of these initiatives generally aim at increasing female participation in ICT jobs, the following example focuses on women at risk of social exclusion: In *Austria*, the non-profit organisation Abz Wien, through its "abzwien.techno-media-center", financially supported by the Public Employment Service in co-operation with the City of Vienna and co-financed by the ESF, promotes the take-up of ICT jobs for long-term unemployed women and those seeking reintegration into employment by offering a one-year training on the job which prepares for several ICT job

profiles at technical level. A shorter course gives no-income or long-term unemployed women an orientation about ICT job profiles which may be followed-up by more specialised training.

... integration through telework and assistive technologies ...

Telework is known for its beneficial productivity effects. But it can also be an additional – though clearly not the only – means to integrate people with **limited mobility** into jobs by reducing work-related transport. It can also contribute to revitalising local communities, notably in rural areas.

The ESDIS "Benchmark Report" underlined the rapid increase of telework, with about 6 % of European workers using it. But there are significant differences by gender (more men than women) and by type of occupation (most widespread among managers). **Disadvantaged people** telework less likely, **though** some of them **might particularly benefit** from it.

Further progress requires expanding the coverage of **telework framework agreements** (as is currently underway at European level); investment in advanced ICT infrastructures and services; and the provision of **broadband links to “e-work” facilities**. For people with disabilities, the **provision of appropriate assistive technologies** (*see also section 2.4*) will be an essential condition for using these work facilities.

In *Portugal*, a specific program has been launched to facilitate telework for citizens with restricted mobility. In *Spain*, REDAR is an initiative by the region of Aragon to encourage telework and tele-training of people with disabilities in rural areas.

...on-line recruitment services ...

Looking for a job is one of the favourite on-line services. Almost half of all Internet users would like to take advantage of it. Already one third of the unemployed looks for a job on the web.²⁵ Public Employment services are making considerable progress to use this medium and there is a large number of private on-line recruitment services.

One benefit of on-line recruitment for disadvantaged people lies in the opportunity to **match job markets for special needs**. Internet-based public employment services also facilitate access for those with physical difficulties or those living in remote locations.

In *Spain*, the web-site MERCADIS which provides for free job search for people with disabilities has been created matching offers and demand in a network of about 400 enterprises with a considerable success in recruitment.

²⁵ Eurobarometer November 2000.

2. Removing barriers in the Information Society

2.1. Raising awareness of the Information Society's opportunities

The Internet has become a common feature of today's life. Still, four out of ten non-users completely lack the understanding how ICT, and particularly the Internet, may improve the quality of their **own** life. About 13 % of low-educated, low-income, or retired non-users even say they do not know what the Internet is. However, the awareness of **personal benefits is the first step to attract** people at risk of digital exclusion.

Most Member States run awareness campaigns involving a **wide range of means** – mass-media, various types of "road-shows", specific events or publications for target groups. These practices underline the need to address the **particular needs of late-adopters** and **use channels that interact with their way of living**.

In **Ireland**, the Information Society Commission and the State Broadcaster RTE collaborated on the production of a major TV series – "Dot.what?" – broadcast from May to July 2000. It focused on an audience that would traditionally be technology shy. A central part of the magazine style programme tracked the fortunes of a family over the eight weeks as they dealt with purchasing a new home PC and coming to grips with it as well as the internet and email. In **Belgium**, the "Road Show 2000 – Tous sur le net" campaigned in 128 towns and many villages, explaining to more 55,000 people the practically the setting-up of an Internet connection, supported with the publication of an Internet guide. A similar road show in **Denmark** focused on IT for the elderly. In **Sweden**, within the framework of the national action plan for the elderly policy, "Senior surfing days" are organised annually with a high participation of older people across the country. They include also projects where young people and elderly can meet around ICT. In **Austria**, mobile Internet trainers are approaching people in shopping centres.

Campaigns building on already existing **local structures seem to have a particular impact**. This is e.g. the case if public Internet access points are available in community or recreation centres (*see section 2.2.1.*). The **voluntary sector** clearly plays an important role in identifying the needs and disseminating information to its "clients". The success of awareness campaigns depends also much on an **easily accessible follow-up** in terms of access to ICT facilities (*see section 2.2.1.*) and literacy training (*see Section 2.3.*).

In the **UK**, the "Webwise 99 and 2000" initiatives, involving government and BBC, offered free "taster sessions" - attended by 105.000 persons - with the objective of social inclusion and life-long learning. 50 % of participants have since enrolled in ICT courses.

It is also important to address the **social environment** of disadvantaged people. Further, **ICT producers, information providers and political actors** need to be sensitised about the special needs of certain disadvantaged people, e.g. in terms of accessibility.

In the **Netherlands**, one objective of the "Drempelweg project" is to bring the internet-possibilities to the attention of parents and other persons taking care of people with disabilities. Another purpose of this project is to encourage all information providers to pay sufficient attention to the accessibility of web sites. For one year a large-scale publicity-campaign will promote the Web Accessibility (WAI)-guidelines. Similar initiatives targeted at IT designers, but also at political

actors are currently carried out by the *Swedish* Handicap institute in co-operation with major disability organisations as well as in *Portugal* and *Spain*.

The **importance** given to awareness measures **varies across the Union**. In most Member States they are regarded as a priority of e-Inclusion policies. In some cases, like in Finland with a relatively high Internet penetration, basic awareness is taken as sufficiently raised and e-Inclusion policies focus on other dimensions.

2.2. Making ICT available and affordable

... ICT becoming cheaper ...

The development of ICT equipment is characterised by **falling prices** – not just by an extremely strong increase of capacity for value, but by continuously cheaper base computer models. To reduce the costs of Internet connection, the eEurope Action Plan has set ambitious objectives through delivering the necessary infrastructures and legislation fostering competitive markets.²⁶ In fact, Internet access costs have fallen considerably since eEurope has been launched.

... universal service obligations ...

The EU legal framework for the provision of electronic communications networks and services to end-users is currently being adapted by the draft Directive on **universal service**.²⁷ Within the scope defined by this Directive, services, including access to data services, i.e. Internet, should be made available to all end-users, independently of geographical location, and, in the light of specific national conditions, at an **affordable price**. As to access to the Internet, the text on which political agreement has been reached on a Common Position clarifies that universal service obligations **cover only narrowband**, and not broadband, access.^{28 29}

... complementary measures to stimulate Internet access ...

Survey data presented in Part A underline that the lack of a **computer and/or connection costs** are still seen as crucial **barriers** by the majority of non-users. Thus, the regulation and stimulation of the market needs to be **complemented by targeted public incentives and public-private partnerships** which, while respecting competition law, facilitate and accelerate ICT access for all, particularly for disadvantaged people.

²⁶ In particular, the unbundling of the "local loop", enforced by a Regulation at the beginning of this year, is expected to induce further competition and, hence, reductions in tariffs.

²⁷ On 27 June 2001, the Council reached a political agreement on a common position with a view to adopting a "Directive on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services", to be forwarded to the European Parliament for its second reading, in accordance with the co-decision procedure.

²⁸ On the detailed conditions see Article 4 and Recital 5 of this Draft Directive as agreed by above Common Position.

²⁹ The Directive also envisages a periodic review of the scope of universal service in the light of social, economic and technological developments. In this context, a specific element to be considered should be whether the scope of universal service should be revised in view of the need to ensure social inclusiveness, i.e. whether the lack of availability or non-use by consumers result in social exclusion.

Three effective ways of support are addressed in the Member States:

<p>Public Internet access points (PIAP) <i>section 2.2.1.</i></p>	<p>PIAP are an appropriate mean for reaching potential users at large scale, for encouraging a first step to the Internet which may be a springboard for individual ICT purchase. They are frequently employed for Internet access on the spot, where people actually stay during the day, and to support access to public on-line services. Further, they seem to be particularly useful for people needing extra care, such as on-site training.</p>
<p>Incentives to purchase and effectively use ICT equipment <i>section 2.2.2.</i></p>	<p>Individual incentives can be more targeted and result in a higher rate of active participation. They can usually be provided faster than deploying PIAP. They are also regarded as more suitable for people needing special assistive technology and for potentially intensive internet users.</p>
<p>ICT infrastructures in less favoured regions <i>section 2.2.3.</i></p>	<p>Special measures on ICT-infrastructures for less-favoured areas have a particular high profile in the e-Inclusion strategies of some countries where (broadband) access would otherwise not be economically viable due to the remoteness or territorial dispersion of localities.</p>

A **combination of these policy measures emerges as the preferred approach** of most Member States as they are seen as **complementary** and not excluding each other. In addition, new technologies, like advanced **mobile communications and digital TV**, will increasingly offer new possibilities and challenges for e-Inclusion (*section 2.2.4*).

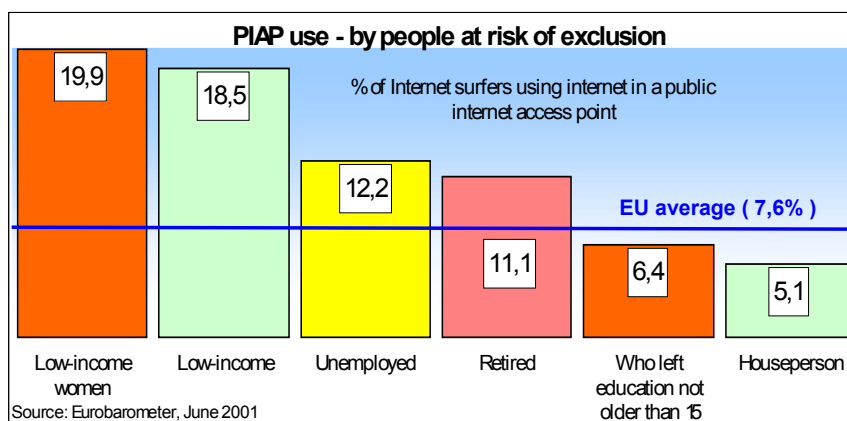
2.2.1. Public Internet Access Points (PIAP)

Everyone, particularly those who do not have access at the workplace and/or can not afford it at home, should be enabled to use Internet access in the neighbourhood. The **eEurope Action Plan includes a specific action** to enhance the proliferation of PIAP.³⁰

... survey data confirm important role of PIAP ...

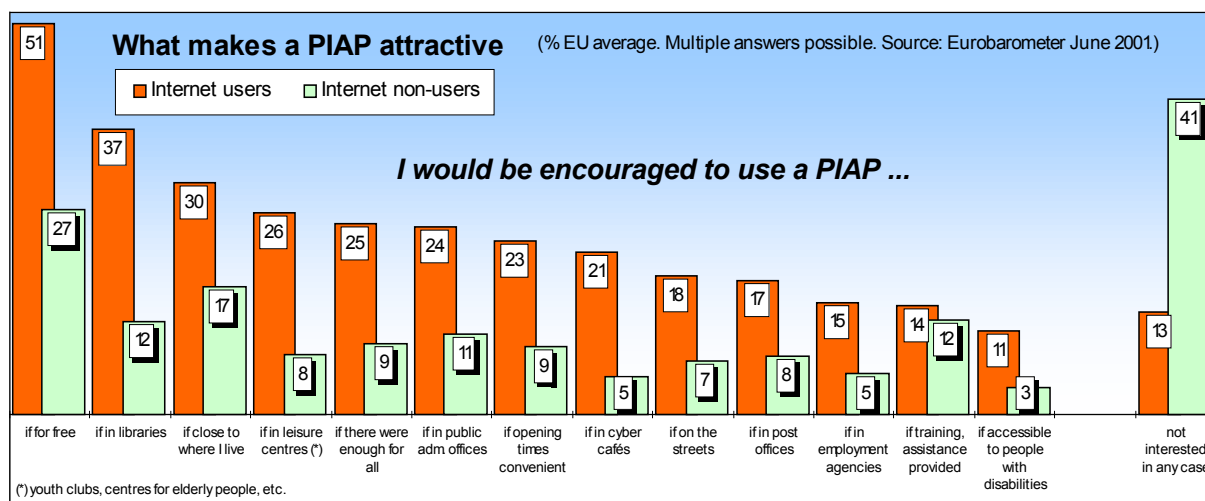
Asked which action should to be taken to enhance Internet access for disadvantaged people, PIAP are most frequently quoted – by 40 % of Europeans and 60 % of users.

However, currently only about 8 % of EU Internet users take advantage of PIAP, with considerably higher rates in advanced IS like Finland (24 %), Denmark (21 %), Sweden (18 %) and the Netherlands (16%). Survey data also confirm the **higher attractiveness of PIAP for disadvantaged people** – e.g. low-income, unemployed and retired users.



³⁰ "Set up public Internet access points in public spaces and establish multimedia tele-centres in all communities providing access to training and e-work facilities, where appropriate using the Structural Funds – by end 2001".

The potential for PIAP is much wider: 61 % of Europeans and 87 % of users indicate that they could be encouraged to use it. Three quarters of them say this would depend on the appropriate public location.



... expansion of PIAP underway ...

At present, the overall number of PIAP is relatively low. In most Member States the density of PIAP is below 1 per 10.000 inhabitants, and thus far from a convenient public access in all neighbourhoods. But all **Member States are currently expanding PIAP** with a variety of approaches as concerns location, purpose, public/private support.

PIAP	where...									...how many	
	Libraries	Streets of cities	Public offices	Post offices	Centres for old / young people	Employment agencies	Dedicated centres	Other places / initiatives	Info about location	Total number	PIAP per 1000 inhabitants
Austria	35%	x	x			x	x			342	0,04
Belgium	90%									601	0,06
Denmark	100%						x			781	0,15
Finland	100%						x			2380	0,46
France	16%			x	x	x		x	x	1800	0,03
Germany	x									4700	0,06
Greece	10%		x				x	x		110	0,01
Ireland	100%		x						x	2031	0,55
Italy		x			x			x			
Luxembourg			x								
Netherlands	97%				x		x			1050	0,07
Portugal	100%			x	x		x			650	0,07
Spain	18% (1999 data)		x	x	x					1500	0,04
Sweden	100%			x						989	0,11
United Kingdom	41%					x		x		1763	0,03

Source: ESDIS.

... installing PIAP in public places of all localities ...

Libraries represent the most widespread and most visited location for PIAP. Several countries place PIAPs in *public offices*, particularly to support access to administration through on-line services (e.g. also beyond office hours). *Post offices* are not only easily accessible for all groups, but offer also a new dimension to the postal service.

In *France*, the programme "cyberposte" provides 1000 PIAP in post offices situated across the territory. Since September 2000, the first hour of Internet connection at this cyberposte terminals is free. The public post service also provides a permanent electronic mail box for citizens. In *Portugal*, PIAPs are installed in 223 post offices.

Equipping the *schools* with ICT is a priority target of the Lisbon strategy and enormous investment is made. This ICT potential should, as appropriate, without distortion to education purposes, be opened up **to a broader public**, particularly to target groups.

In the *UK*, several schools and colleges open their computer labs in the evening to all of the community.

Spontaneous access to information is encouraged, if PIAPs are installed *in the streets* of cities.

In *Austria*, 300 PIAP columns are to be installed, by a public-private initiative, in the streets of Vienna. Similar sites exist in Bologna, *Italy*.

... while focussing on specific locations for disadvantaged people ...

To **attract specific target groups** the placement of PIAPs in an **accustomed environment** which they **visit for other reasons** proves to be useful:

In *France*, free Internet access to job offers and related information is provided in 750 local *employment agencies* to be extended to all agencies by June 2001. Similar initiatives exist in *Austria* and the *UK*. In *Spain*, as a joint project of a financial institute CAIXA and the Autonomous Communities, PIAP are being created in *centres for older people* (4000 in the next two years; currently 1.500). A similar programme in the *Netherlands* aims at setting Internet cafés in housing and care centres for the elderly. All state *youth centres* in *Portugal* and the network of 500 information centres for young people in *Italy* have Internet access. Also in the *Netherlands*, under the *Digital Playgrounds Initiative* experimental Digital Access Centres are set up in up to 120 *disadvantaged neighbourhoods* where residents can use computers and learn how to use the Internet, surf and chat, look and apply for jobs.

To ensure access for all, **user-friendliness** and **accessibility for persons with disabilities** needs to be a common feature of PIAP.

In the *Netherlands*, several PIAPs are adapted to the needs of handicapped people with a variety of technical provisions (contrast stickers, screen-enlargement etc. etc.) and specific training is offered for them. In *Austria*, an Internet-café for blind people integrated into the ISIS ICT training centre combines off-line with on-line communication with services for their specific needs.

An important function of PIAP requested by eEurope is to provide on-site training **facilities** (see also section 2.3.).

In *France* 2500 of the 7,000 PIAPs foreseen, with a budget of € 365 Mio., by end of 2003 will provide targeted on-site training facilities, while creating 4,000 new jobs for multimedia trainers.

Local action is expected to spread PIAP in the long run. In this respect, several Member States stimulate activities of the municipalities:

In *Luxembourg* competition and co-operation among municipalities is encouraged to spread PIAP best practices. In *France*, the central government provides subsidies to mobilise the creation of PIAP by local authorities. In *Portugal* a special programme for municipalities stimulates the creation of Dedicated Centres for Internet Access with support and training.

As PIAPs will frequently be a springboard for private ICT consumption, their proliferation should also be attractive to the private sector. Several of above examples involve **public-private partnerships** in establishing and equipping PIAPs.

Fully private, profit-based initiatives, like **Internet-Cafés** (not included in above data) also contribute to spreading the availability of the Internet. About 6 % of EU Internet users have visited such places, but they are considerably less used than PIAP by disadvantaged people.

Finally, **transparent information about the location of PIAP** is an important condition for their successful up-take. However, there is still a lack of easily accessible registers of PIAP locations in most countries.

In *Ireland*, the *Internet Access Directory* allows to find out where the nearest PIAP is, as well as information on its services. The directory can be accessed on-line and by phoning a local number – which is essential for non-users. A similar directory exists in *France*.

2.2.2. Incentives for individual access to ICT

While public locations are necessary to offer access for all, home usage is favoured for most purposes. Eurobarometer figures show that 76 % of all Internet users access it (also) from home. Thus, incentives to acquire and/or use individual ICT equipment are a further component of e-Inclusion strategies.

Several Member States have launched such initiatives by **distributing or subsidising computers**. Providing ICT equipment at reduced prices, not totally for free, and the consequent feeling of "ownership", has been proved to stimulate the up-take.

In the *UK*, the "Computers within reach" initiative provides up to 100,000 recycled computers to be leased at £ 60 to low-income families in certain areas. In *France*, IT equipment which is not used anymore in the public administration is provided for free to associations for disadvantaged people. Similar initiatives exist in the *Netherlands*. Also in the Netherlands, handicapped people get financial support to buy a PC and to get connected to Internet to stimulate their social participation. In *Austria*, subsidies are provided for assistive tools for people with disabilities. In *Sweden*, people with disabilities are provided with special input- and output-devices at no cost. In *Italy*, loans at zero %-interest rates are offered to pupils purchasing a computer, which will be particularly important for poorer families.

Further to the recommendation in the "Strategies for Jobs in the IS ", several Member States have introduced some kind of tax exemptions for workers buying a PC or for companies for

providing workers with ICT at home. They help to reduce the digital divide in general, but are not necessarily limited to disadvantaged groups. There are also more specific cases, where disadvantaged people benefit from **tax reductions on ICT purchases**.

In *Germany* two tax relief measures are provided under the Chancellor's Information Society Programme: computers purchased for staff of companies are not VAT levied and free Internet access for employees is not considered as a taxable benefit. *Spain, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, and France* run somewhat similar measures. In *Sweden*, under the so-called "private personal computer reform", in addition to tax incentives which encourage employers to offer subsidised computers to workers, similar schemes are also available through trade-unions (eligible also for the unemployed) and other organisations like associations for retired people. In *Portugal*, families receive tax deductions of 25 % of the price for the purchase of computers. In *Italy*, tax relief is granted (among other measures) to those supplying IT equipment to prisons.

These practices underline that **financial incentives are a widely used means** to encourage individual access to the Information Society. However, **some of them are not targeted** at specifically disadvantaged groups.

2.2.3. ICT infrastructures in less-favoured regions

Cost-intensive investments in ICT infrastructures, particularly high-speed, broad-band connections, will frequently fail to be economically viable in remote areas with low and dispersed population or less-developed business structures.

Missing the connectivity to broadband networks will hamper the full exploitation of the ICT potential in these areas. Thus, rather than overcoming traditional barriers of distance, the digital asset for peripheries, the Information Society might even reinforce territorial disadvantages on a new dimension as underlined by the strong centre-periphery gap in Internet penetration (see Part A).

eEurope addresses this challenge by a specific action.³¹ Still, some countries highlight the social inclusion aspect of these infrastructure policies, regarding it also as a **priority in their approach to eInclusion**.

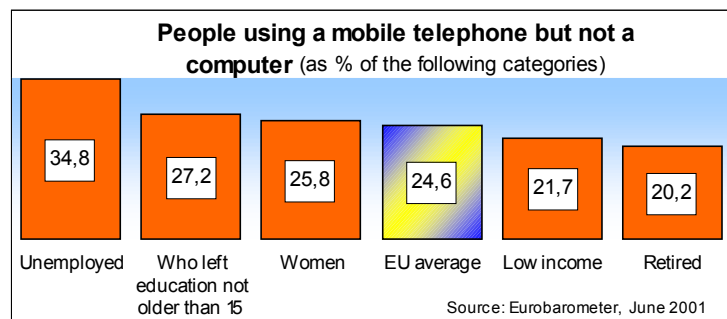
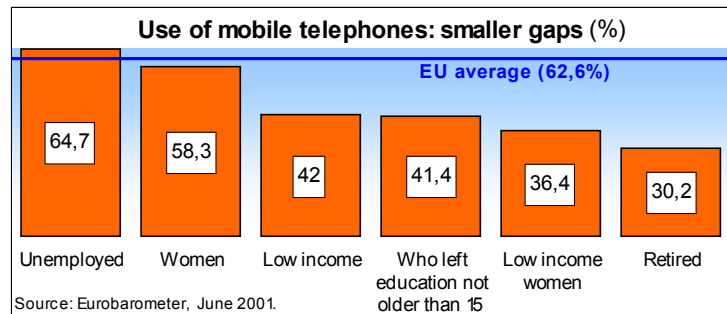
In *Sweden*, special Government funding facilitating access to the broadband network in sparsely-populated areas, which adds to large-scale investment in backbone and urban networks and tax reductions on individual costs to connect to networks with significantly higher capacity. Similarly, a substantial portion of the *Irish* Development Plan 2000-2006 is targeted to facilitate investment in advanced communications and e-commerce infrastructure in the less developed regions. In *France*, a new legal framework for regional development facilitates ICT investment in less-favoured areas. In *Greece*, the development of local access network infrastructure in small towns and remote areas is a priority of the Operational Programme IS.

³¹ "Where necessary and without distorting competition, public financing instruments will give increased priority to supporting the development of information infrastructure and projects, notably in the less-favoured regions". This concerns a wide-range of measures within the framework of telecom and regional development policies which are not addressed here in detail.

2.2.4. e-Inclusion through new technologies – Mobiles and digital television

With technological development advancing, on-line services will become less dependent on the usage of a computer. Diversified access opportunities may **attract new user groups**:

- In fact, penetration rates of **mobile telephony** are much **higher and less divergent** than Internet usage – both across the Member States and across socio-economic categories. Thus, mobile communications and services are **promising to contribute to a more cohesive Information Society**. However, at present the up-take of WAP technology is still very low with about 1 % of Europeans. As to the 3rd generation of mobile phones, it is to be seen, how fast this digital asset will become affordable for low-income groups.



- As concerns **digital television**, 11 % of Europeans – with an extraordinarily high 33 % in the UK – indicate they use it. Some research claims that it will be the most popular means of accessing the Internet in Europe by 2005.³² Still, according to OECD figures for 2000, less than half of European digital TV subscribers were offered e-mail capabilities and less than 10 % of them had access to Web services.³³ Further, it is not yet possible to accurately foresee the actual supply and the kind of consumption of on-line services via digital TV, and hence how far they replace functions of Internet access by computer. Still, there is a huge potential as a digital TV would be based on an acquainted tool and, thus, **not** cause the same **psychological barriers** like computers.

The discussion in ESDIS highlighted that a **multi-dimensional, dynamic approach to e-Inclusion** is increasingly needed. e-Inclusion strategies should not be limited to Internet access through computers, but should pay attention to the potential of other technologies, in particular mobile communications, digital television, and palm top devices.

In some Member States initiatives have been launched to tap the on-line potential of these technologies.

The spread of digital television is particularly encouraged in some countries: In the **UK**, where a quarter of households is estimated to have digital TV in 2001,³⁴ public and private television invest in a wide ranging roll-out of digital infrastructure. In **Finland**, analog television is announced to completely cease operations by end 2006 as the whole Finnish TV-system will be digitised.

³² http://www.nua.ie/surveys/index.cgi?f=VS&art_id=905356572&rel=true

³³ Understanding the digital divide - OECD 2001.

³⁴ Economist, 25 May 2001.

Subscribers are expected to prepare themselves with appropriate cabling and/or equipment at their own cost. In *Belgium*, a pilot project of digital platforms builds on the asset of 95 % cabled Belgian households. In the *Austrian* Salzburg region, an "Internet cheque" provided to citizens can be traded-in as a government subsidy for purchasing either an internet-capable PC, a Laptop, a Palmtop or a „set-top-box“ accessing digital TV.

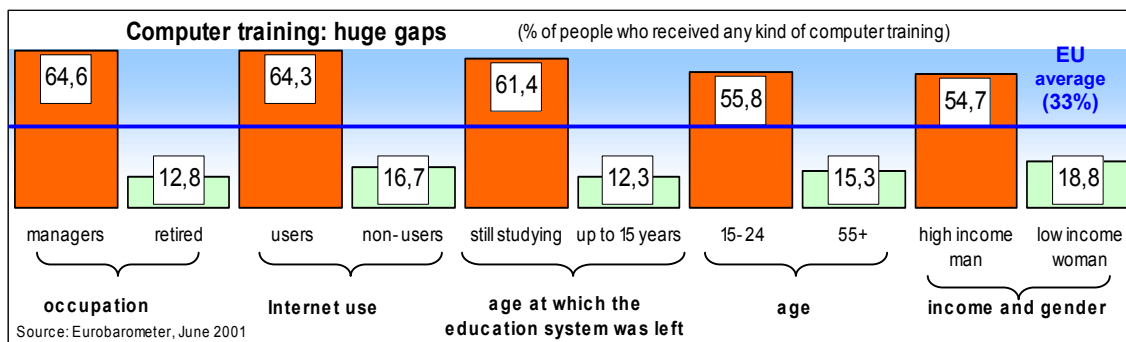
As advanced mobile communications and digital TV will increasingly define social opportunities, an early prevention of new risks for exclusion is needed. In the next years, it will be increasingly important to closely assess the effects of these technologies for disadvantaged people, in particular people with low-income, those living in peripheral areas, or persons with disabilities, and to develop, as appropriate, e-Inclusion measures.

2.3. e-Learning for e-Inclusion: Promoting digital literacy for disadvantaged people

Equipping people with skills is a key element in the European Union's policy response to the Information Society, within the European Employment Strategy and the eLearning Action Plan.³⁵ **e-Learning** can make a major impact for social inclusion. It provides access to education and training opportunities for all, in particular for those who have access problems for social, economic, geographic or other reasons. ICT offers possibilities of transforming the learning paradigm and bringing knowledge to those who have not earlier been able to participate in education. eLearning can also play a significant role in implementing the concept of flexible and individualised learning, answering individual education needs, and avoiding the limitations of current systems, based mainly on pre-defined options.

Disadvantaged people must not be left behind - as an essential element of life-long learning, digital literacy is also needed by those neither in employment, nor in education. Frequently standard ICT courses will not attract them as they are offered in an environment that they would not enter, because they are too costly, or because the curricula does not fit to their special training needs.

The challenge concerns **not only IT training for jobs** (addressed in section 1.3.), **but also very basic knowledge**. People at risk of social exclusion, and more in general, technologically shy late-adopters, should learn how to use the Internet and on-line services. The current situation indicates room for improvement.



³⁵ see Strategies for Jobs in the Information Society (COM(2000)48), e-Europe Action Plan - line 2a) and 2b); e-Learning initiative (COM(2000) 318 final)

The lack of basic competence can be a **psychological barrier** to take the very first step even for those who could afford Internet-access. The high number of non-users that believes that the Internet is too complicated underlines this. Thus, it is important to address these people in an **accustomed environment** or in "neutral" surroundings which are not related to education or training. It is also important that **trainers understand their specific learning problems**.

In the *Netherlands*, young people from ethnic minorities are trained to help their friends, relatives and other people in their neighbourhood to get acquainted with the Internet and get the necessary skills for a job in the information society. In *Italy*, the "Grandparents and grandchildren" project is designed to familiarise older members of the community with the tools of Internet exploration. Their instructors are students who volunteer their time and skills. In *Sweden*, within the "national action plan for the elderly" ICT training for the elderly is a specific focus. It includes: on-site training during the yearly "Senior surfing days"; projects which encourage interaction of young people and elderly around ICT; specific actions for elderly with disabilities; substantive funding ICT training programmes of non-governmental organisations for older people. In *Ireland*, a mobile computer-training unit was deployed around the country offering basic ICT training in 150 locations.

For people less familiar with technical adaptation, it is also essential to **be trained in a practical way targeted to their specific needs**, rather than receiving a systematic and technical introduction. Initiatives should focus on the simple use of **applications that improve the standard of living**, such as basic competence for **on-line public services**. Further, the specific needs of persons with disabilities need to be considered.

In *Spain*, 1 million citizens are targeted by a 15 hours on-site or tele-learning course programme focusing on the very basic skills to access the Internet, implemented by voluntary organisations like parent, elderly, or neighbourhood associations. Government will finance the programme co-ordination (for this year € 2.4Mio.) assisted by a consultant, which will elaborate the training material and supervise the whole process. Besides, it will undertake the training of 260.000 active people, specially unemployed and young people at risk of exclusion. Pupils will pay a low amount to make sure that they value it. Also in Spain, about 50 universities provide a three year course for third age students teaching skills for the elderly which include ICT skills as one important element. In *Austria*, the Centre for Usability Research develops Internet introductory courses which are specifically designed for the needs of older people.

Certificates are clearly an incentive for learning and are a proof of skills valuable for jobs. As set-out in section 1.3., this is particularly the case if the certificate is widely recognised like the European Computer Driving Licence (**ECDL**). As this may be too comprehensive for some, ECDL *Ireland* Ltd has also developed a **simpler on-line test for late adopters**.

Pooling teaching competencies by a **network of learning centres** proves to be an important way to spread digital learning facilities at large scale, including disadvantaged areas which might otherwise not have access to appropriate training tools.

In the *UK*, a network of around 700 ICT learning centres in England aims at improving access to ICT and ICT-based learning for adults in disadvantaged communities and by 2002 all libraries will be linked to a country-wide life-long learning network.

2.4. e-Accessibility: tackling technical barriers for persons with disabilities

People with disabilities are a **major target in all dimensions of e-Inclusion**. As set out in the sections above, many initiatives have been launched to offer them specific on-line services, incentives for taking-up new ICT job opportunities, ICT training facilities as well as support schemes for their public and private ICT access.

However, the up-take of this potential is subject to a basic condition: the removal of technical barriers for using IT equipment, assistive technologies, software and web-content. This is the rationale behind the four technical actions of the "Participation for all" section of the **eEurope** action plan, which are monitored by the "**e-Accessibility expert group**", a sub-group of ESDIS:

- **Adoption of the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines for public web sites** (by end 2001);

Accessing Internet web pages and their content presents a variety of problems for persons with physical, sensory or cognitive impairments. For example, web-sites may not be compatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies, provide too complex multimedia presentations or difficult-to-understand page organisation. Thus, public web-sites should lead by example through delivering services in a form that is accessible and effectively usable for all. This is a basic condition for addressing all citizens equally through e-Government.

Many Member States have already launched actions in this respect, but the so called Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines provide a **benchmark to measure compliance** with the generally accepted principles for such access. These guidelines, developed by the World Wide Web Consortium with the financial support of the European Commission, are recognised as a *de facto* global standard for the design of accessible web-sites. They entail three priority levels. The first level, which is the short-term target under the eEurope action, calls for basic requirements to make access for all user groups *possible*.³⁶

To ensure the adoption of these guidelines in European institutions and in the Member States, the Commission is currently preparing a Communication with detailed recommendations. It highlights the political exigency of the adoption of the WAI Guidelines, the advantages for people with disabilities in terms of equality of access to information, the general technical approach embodied in the WAI guidelines, and description of national implementation plans and methods which may be suitable models for transfer to other Member States. It builds on information on the 'state of play' concerning accessibility of public web sites, gathered by the eAccessibility group. This group will also benchmark the implementation of the WAI Guidelines in all Member States and in the Institutions of the European Union.

³⁶ Priority 1 (level A): Web content **must** satisfy this checkpoint otherwise one or more user groups will find it **impossible** to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint is a **basic requirement** for some groups to be able to utilise Web documents. Priority 2 (level AA): Web content **should** satisfy this checkpoint otherwise one or more groups will find it **difficult** to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint will remove **significant barriers** to accessing Web documents. Priority 3 (level AAA): Web content developer **may** address this checkpoint otherwise, one or more groups will find it **somewhat difficult** to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint will **improve** access to Web documents.

- **Review relevant legislation** and standards to ensure **conformity with accessibility principles** (end 2002);

This action aims at ensuring that national legislation takes into account accessibility principles in all areas which affect the accessibility of ICT for people with disabilities. In this respect, it should also contribute to a more coherent approach in the Member States. As a first step, the eAccessibility group is currently establishing a common framework for inventory and analysis, defining the coverage of the review. This work builds on research in this area, notably the ACCENT project³⁷ and the "COST 219bis" survey, as well as on further national contributions. This will allow the definition of "accessibility principles" and indicators, on which comparative analysis and exchange of good practices will be based.

- Ensure the establishment and **networking** of national **centres of excellence in design-for-all** (DfA) and create recommendations for a European **curriculum for designers** and engineers (end 2002);

This network should enhance synergies of national research and development concerning the design of accessible ICT and on-line services. In a first step, existing DfA centres of excellence have been identified, which will now establish the framework for their co-operation. The second element of this action aims at elaborating and disseminating educational resources for specific training on eAccessibility issues for future ICT and service designers and engineers.

- **Publication of "design for all" standards for accessibility** of IT products, in particular to improve the employability and social inclusion of people with special needs (end 2002).

Standards to ensure the widest possible utilisation of ICT and services especially amongst people with disabilities are being elaborated by the European standardisation organisations CEN and ETSI.³⁸ In a further step, it will be important to develop "popular editions" of the technical standards and to disseminate them.

³⁷ <http://www.statskontoret.se/english/accnteng.htm>

³⁸ CEN is addressing these issues under Mandates M/273 and M/283. These mandates aim at making all standardisation work take the needs of disabled and elderly persons into account. To this end a first open workshop involving the interested parties was held on June 11th 2001. For ETSI, the work in this area had already started via its Human Factors group. A first report of progress was issued on 27th April 2001.

3. Strategies and Actors

3.1. An integrated approach to e-Inclusion

Actions in the seven policy areas set-out so far – appropriate content and services, fostering communities, job opportunities, awareness, availability, literacy training, and removing technical barriers – prove to be **complementary and mutually reinforcing** each other. The practices in the Member States highlight this interdependence. Thus, it is important that the various activities are **integrated in a broader strategy** which comprehensively exploits digital opportunities, while tackling the structural origins of a digital divide.

... different policy approaches so far ...

So far, the actions presented in this report have been developed within different policy frameworks:

- in several Member States the **overall Information Society programme** (frequently developed in response to the eEurope Action Plan) includes an emphasis on e-Inclusion aspects. This is the case, e.g., for "infoXXI" in *Spain*, the *e-Italy* Action Plan, *eLuxembourg*, *eAustria*, or the German "Internet for all" Programme.
- in some cases, they have been elaborated within **programmes combating social exclusion** or, specifically, on **eInclusion**: e.g. in *Ireland* in the Programme for Partnership and Fairness, in *Austria* the employment initiative for people with disabilities In *France*, the Interministerial Committee for IS (Comité Interministériel pour la Société de l'Information – CISI) has developed a program investing more than 450 million € to tackle the digital divide and about 150 million for research, focusing on a balanced regional development, in *Portugal* the National Initiative for Citizens with Special Needs in the Information Society.
- many reported practices have been developed as **ad-hoc measures** outside a strategic programme, based on the initiative of various stakeholders.

... e-Inclusion as an integral element of the Social Inclusion NAPs ...

Part A underlined that risks of **digital exclusion are frequently cumulative to other forms social exclusion**, and that digital opportunities can improve the quality of life for traditionally disadvantaged groups. Thus, it is crucial to develop e-Inclusion **not only from a technologically driven perspective**, but to address it as an **integrated element** of the policy response **to social exclusion across its various dimensions**. Fully exploiting digital tools and services means to use their added value for different forms of social inclusion measures.

In the **National Action Plans** on Social Inclusion, which have been submitted by the Member States for the first time in June 2001, the **eInclusion** issue is substantially **recognised**. Though identified among the challenges, eInclusion is taken up at a **strategic level** only in some cases, such as the *Netherlands*, *Portugal* and *Spain*, where it is included among the strategic principles for social inclusion. Several NAPs do not address both dimensions of eInclusion, but rather focus on removing the digital barriers.

3.2. Combining the efforts of all stakeholders

e-Inclusion calls for **combined efforts by public and private actors** at all levels. The **main focus of this report** has been on policies developed by the **Member States**, but it has also referred to a multitude of activities by local authorities, social partners, business, and voluntary associations.

The **European Union** provides policy co-ordination in the framework of the Employment and Social Inclusion Strategies, backed-up by Information Society roadmaps like the eEurope and eLearning Action Plans. Within the Structural Funds, notably the European Social Fund, the focus of financial support to employment and social objectives of the Information Society has been reinforced.

From now until 2006, over 12 billion Euro from the **Social Fund** has been earmarked for lifelong learning initiatives, including digital literacy measures. For the so-called "Objective 1 " regions, the poorest regions in Europe, an estimated 6 billion in Community Funds will go towards encouraging access to the knowledge society. In **Greece**, for example, the Structural Funds put a particular emphasis on Information Society in the context of the "Operational Programme Information Society" which mobilises € 120 Mio for various actions combating the digital divide in the next three years, of which € 60 Mio are targeted to specific actions for disadvantaged groups.

With subsidiarity particularly important to bridge digital divides at the grassroots, the report has highlighted the **essential contribution of sub-national actors** (at regional and local levels), frequently encouraged by incentives from national governments.

Social Partners have an important responsibility in this context as set out in the Employment Strategy and the Social Inclusion Strategy. ESDIS highlighted that less-skilled workers or workers at risk of exclusion should not be left behind when implementing these commitments. In particular, Social Partners should play a vital role by ensuring the necessary ICT training supply to workers at risk of exclusion and to enhance their benefits from new forms of work organisation, like telework.

Mobilising **business** for eInclusion initiatives is facilitated by a win-win-situation as higher participation rates also imply the extension of ICT- and on-line markets. The opportunities of **public-private partnerships** are underlined and practised – more or less intensively – by all Member States.

For example, digital divide initiatives under the **eLuxembourg** Action Plan grant preference to collective projects presenting synergies between all three actors – public, private and NGOs .

The **voluntary sector**, comprising different kinds of civil society organisations, proves to be an essential stakeholder for e-Inclusion. NGOs serve as a valuable partner for public action due to their **knowledge of and access to late adopter groups**. As set out in Section 2, many of the targeted ICT awareness and training initiatives build on their potential to communicate new technologies in an acquainted environment. They are also particularly useful in pooling public information on their web-sites, customising it to the specific needs of their clients, and providing, thus, multiplier effects.

In fact, Internet has rapidly been taken up in the voluntary sector. In the UK, for example, already 90 % of not-for-profit organisations use the Internet for promotional reasons and 46 % have developed a detailed Web strategy. A number of projects in the Member States,

involving public-private partnerships, aim at supporting the e-Inclusion potential of NGOs.³⁹ Apart from subsidies for equipment, some of these practices take innovative forms of exchanging ICT know-how.

An example is the *Irish* CAIT initiative funding demonstration projects that harness ICT for social and economic development primarily undertaken by non-governmental organisations such as voluntary and community groups. The rationale for this approach is that such groups may already have innovative solutions for their particular constituency, which could be put into practice within a short time scale, but might lack the necessary finances. These groups would not be precluded from partnering with commercial or public bodies to propose, plan or implement their projects. Of 450 project proposals, 71 have been funded and launched. In *Spain*, the Fundación Tomillo developed an initiative for training ICT trainers which should disseminate their skills in more than 150 NGOs, thus, ensuring a considerable multiplier effect. In *France*, "La Net Association" (www.netassociation.org), founded with the support of the Grenoble Graduate School of Business (Le Groupe ESC Grenoble), motivates students from high schools, universities and business schools to voluntarily assist non-profit organisations use the Web to better communicate, structure and manage their activities. It is financially supported by private partners (Caisse d'Epargne, France Telecom, le FIGARO Etudiant, IBM). In *Belgium*, the RES-e-NET network links a number of non-profit associations dealing with social inclusion to increase their ICT usage.

³⁹ For its comprehensive approach, an example from outside the EU should be quoted: In Canada, the VolNet (Voluntary Sector Network Support Program) aims at offering to some 10.000 voluntary organisations Internet connectivity, including computer equipment, new information technologies, network support and Internet skills development, by March 2002.

Conclusions

The report underlines that **all Member States** have recognised the risks of a digital divide and **launched e-Inclusion measures** that encourage disadvantaged people to benefit from the Information Society. However, they have set **different priorities**, confirming the added value of this exchange of best practices. According to the level of Internet penetration, a shifting policy perspective can be noted among the Member States – **from a focus on enabling participation to exploiting opportunities**.

Public Internet access points rank high in the expectations of citizens and in the policy response as they are deployed in all Member States. In most cases they are **complementary to specific incentives for individual ICT access**. **Raising awareness and ICT literacy** among disadvantaged people is addressed by a number of initiatives, but with low-rates of basic computer knowledge among these groups the challenge is huge. There are several examples for **on-line** services focussing on **social inclusion issues**, but user-friendliness needs to be expanded across e-Government.

The particular emphasis on **people with disabilities** – requested by the Social Inclusion Strategy – has been considerably taken into account in most Member States. In fact, the broadest range of reported practices refers to this target group. ICT literacy for the **unemployed** is a key element in several Member States, though low figures of actual training highlight that their vast majority could not yet benefit. A number of initiatives explores innovative ways to attract technology shy **older** people. Providing ICT equipment and on-line services to **less-favoured areas** is a further field ambitiously addressed by some countries. Several **other groups** at risk of digital exclusion – like housepersons, people with low-education, learning problems or illiteracy, immigrants – are **scarcely addressed**, leaving considerable room for expanding activities.

There is also **little evidence for gender mainstreaming** in the reported e-Inclusion policies. In some countries specific IT training initiatives for unemployed women are in place. However, the purpose of mainstreaming is to integrate gender specific orientations across e-Inclusion measures. In this respect, **improvement** seems to be necessary.

Finally, the need for a **safety net for those remaining outside the Information Society** despite all e-Inclusion efforts has been highlighted. While e-Government expands, appropriate measures should **maintain the access to basic services for non-users**.

Civil society organisations prove to be highly active, **attracting their "clients"** to the Internet and offering them on-line services accustomed to their specific needs. The report also indicates a wide range of local action and possibilities for e-Inclusion partnerships with private business.

Transparent information on eInclusion initiatives is essential to ensure that all stakeholders can build on best-practices. This report contributes to stimulating this exchange. The **proposals from ESDIS** presented at the beginning of this report should **further enhance a co-ordinated approach to e-Inclusion in Europe**.