

# e-Inclusion ... what next? Embracing the future of social innovation 2010-2015

## Consultation of Stakeholders and Member States

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### ITALY POSITION PAPER

(PRELIMINARY REMARKS: DUE TO SHORT NOTICE, THIS PAPER SHOULD NOT BE INTENDED AS EXHAUSTIVE AND OFFICIAL. IT CONTAINS REFLECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF A CONSULTATION GROUP OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR INNOVATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE PRESIDENCY OF COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, COMPOSED OF EXPERTS AND INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN THE E INCLUSION POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES)

**How should e-Inclusion feature in the information society policy agenda to succeed beyond the i2010 initiative? .**

What should be enhanced everywhere and with every means is the **"culture of accessibility and usability"**. It should be clear that not only the Information society but the society as whole should be at focus.

Usability and accessibility for all should be **synonym of quality of products and services** for citizens and enterprises.

A "soft law approach" by the Commission in this sense could be worth to be proposed to the Member States.

**Several of the "Riga Targets" will not be met<sup>1</sup> without strong policy actions. What are the constraints and barriers hindering digital inclusion? What more could be done to address them?**

The constraints and barriers to digital inclusion remain the ones already identified in the Riga Declaration and reconfirmed in the Vienna Conference Conclusions. As the Riga target are mostly far from being reached, the Commission and Member States' engagement should be reconfirmed and the national policies should take into consideration the need to intervene and mainstream the eInclusion initiatives in the different **national and regional sector policies** (or, in some cases, considering the excellence of many regional projects, viceversa) and in the Structural Funds application.

It is important to promote and foster the use of suitable and effective ICT in public services, schools, universities, public health centres (caring of people with disabilities), centres for immigrants, public access points. The potential of ICT for supporting inclusive practices is very high, but most of the institutions do not have sufficient know how for making effective use of it and for choosing the most suitable tools.

Information and awareness campaigns are still needed as well as specific educational interventions devoted to operators of the different sectors (teachers, educators, health workers etc...)

The Italian Parliament has recently ratified the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and instituted an Observatory on the conditions of disabled people.

Furthermore the Italian eGov 2012 Action Plan - agreeing that greater e-Inclusion can generate systemic innovation, new business models, and new modalities for service delivery, reaffirmed the commitment for the reduction of 50% of the digital divide of social disadvantaged groups and regions, mainly through projects fostering innovation in government and governance, health care and justice systems through the use of ICT and enhancing the public services demand.

The cooperation of the Commission and other stakeholders should be reinforced in order to find common approaches based mainly on the exchange of well identified (and **analyzed** in their different components) successful and sustainable practices.

**What type of action can be envisaged for the European Commission to enhance added value in these two areas? (digital literacy and cultural diversity)**

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, 2007, Riga Dashboard

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/einclusion/docs/i2010\\_initiative/rigadashboard.doc](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/docs/i2010_initiative/rigadashboard.doc)

According to the RIGA Declaration, the focus should be on eInclusion, which includes accessibility but also the explicit use of ICT to reach inclusion objectives.

Digital literacy should be included and given particular attention in the framework of the "life long learning" programmes and policies, together with accessibility to distance learning technologies and educational/training accessible contents.

As far as cultural diversity is concerned, the school has a fundamental role, as a knowledge platform to exchange ideas/experiences to integrate and include; it constitutes the ideal context of validation and diffusion of e-culture and e-inclusion projects and actions.

Furthermore it is the starting point and main context where to teach and implement the "culture of e-inclusion".

The Commission should also contribute in monitoring and giving evidence to the best practices and best solutions in those fields through publications, conferences and prizes (rewards).

Italy at regional level is experimenting different approaches worth to be taken into consideration in their results.

**Is "ICT for Ageing Well one priority area for addressing social and economic innovation? What more could the Commission do to support the development and uptake of ICT based solutions at national and local level and to support innovation in integrated care, social inclusion and participation in the labour market related to elderly people?**

The Commission should give policy makers sound and well presented evidence of the economic and social impact of eInclusion, analyzed through studies and benchmarking actions based on simple and commonly agreed indicators, in order to demonstrate, also through business models the economic benefits and market opportunities offered by the use of ICT by the elderly. The results and solutions in the Ambient Assisted Living Initiative and the CIP-ICT Programme should be taken into consideration and publicized.

Furthermore being part of the active world is an important aspect of human life and ICT can provide aged people with the possibility of participating to the labour market beyond their retirement; this can happen even if they are forced to remain home. Tele-working can be a key idea; it could represent a tremendous opportunity for aged people, and hopefully it should be fostered and encouraged at European level.

**What policy and/or regulatory measures should be in place to further promote e-Accessibility? How to best coordinate efforts at national and EU level?**

It is important to underline that eAccessibility is not limited to web accessibility: it means multiplatform accessibility, regardless of the technological device used, but also usability for everybody (the not ICT skilled, the elderly and the social disadvantaged and immigrants, with different cultures and different languages). Moreover, according to the RIGA Declaration, the focus should be on eInclusion, which includes accessibility but also the explicit use of ICT to reach inclusion objectives.

The design for all approach is a concept that should be further encouraged in public procurement, particularly the eHealth and eSchool public procurement.

Italy, together with Sweden, is proposing an "ideas paper" to be discussed with other member states representatives during the first meeting of the renovated eInclusion beyond i2010 subgroup in Cyprus.

The possible future actions can be resumed as follows:

- convergence of ICT and mobile technologies should be taken into consideration
- the accessibility of the intranets and workplaces should be assessed
- the previously considered "special interest of disabled persons" should be considered a "public interest"
- mainstream eAccessibility into other policy areas, such as eGovernment and eHealth, e-care, remote assistance, infomobility, e-school and define common specifications and quality targets for procurement (i.e. 376 mandate)

- the EC should focus on studying and analyzing the new accessibility guidelines and find the way to adopt them as a reference framework being very careful not to hinder those who already follow WCAG 1.0 or other national standards in their efforts to guarantee acceptable levels of accessibility
- a European portal on eAccessibility, with among others the measuring and benchmarking of web accessibility at European level;
- invest in R&D on accessible human-machine interfaces and RFID technological solutions
- avoid market fragmentation of assistive technologies

**Should investments in broadband infrastructure be coupled with encouraging the offer of inclusive public, social care, or healthcare services? How should e-Inclusion goals be best supported by this form of investment?**

*The Italian Government approach goes in that direction. The goal is to create an adequate amount of demand of public services to justify the private investments on infrastructures.*

**What type of activities can be pursued to enhance international cooperation and best practice exchange in the area of e-Inclusion?**

*As far as international cooperation policy is concerned Italy has supported in the "dynamic coalition" on Internet rights active in the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) the Dialogue on Internet Rights and principles, supported by some extra UE Countries*

*The Cooperation programme in the FP7 could be used to support eInclusion actions and maybe some Thematic Networks in the CIP ICT Programme could approach this theme.*

**Are further actions from the European Commission useful in these areas? Which ones?**

*All the existing instruments (political, legislative, financial, benchmarking (qualitative and quantitative), should be oriented to the main purpose of spreading the culture of eInclusion also linked to other policies. (Es: through the Structural funds and Interreg actions)*

*Specific actions should be envisaged for using ICT with the aim of supporting re-employment of those who lost their job (a living matter today). ICT can play a major role at these ends and can help this category to find new types of jobs. These people are often unskilled from a technological point of view (and/or their actual competencies are fast becoming obsolete); the attempt of "reskilling" and retraining them should be considered as a priority.*

*Diffusion and awareness-raising actions on eAccessibility could be promoted, linked with other sector policies (school, employment, health sector, consumers policies).*

*Special attention could be reserved to schools and public access points (PAPs) as validating places for accessible products (learning tools, digital books and documents, web services, simplified communication tools, etc.)*

**What should be the approach in the future? (several responses are possible).**

**Focus on the areas where e-Inclusion policy has traditionally more control in terms of implementing funding instruments for research and innovation (such as ageing, accessibility and inclusive e-Government);**

**Extend efforts in the areas more weakly covered by truly "mainstreaming e-Inclusion" and using legislative and reinforced benchmarking;**

**Attempt to cover "new areas" in innovative ways using the tools which are directly managed by DG INFSO of the European Commission (e.g. RTD framework programmes and the CIP ICT-PSP programme) with a longer term horizon.**

*All of them. Results obtained in the traditional eInclusion sectors are still not satisfactory and it worth insisting in supporting the experimented approach.*

*A specific focus on "school and education" is needed; school e-inclusion is not a "new area" but it has significant peculiarities that need to be specifically addressed. As an example it should be reminded that the Italian law 4/2004 in force explicitly focuses on the need for evaluating the accessibility of educational tools*

and several specific actions have been carried in this field; the accessibility requirements for educational software products should go far beyond those for other software products.

**On the basis of ICT maturity and market potential, which applications and services should in the future be supported in ICT PSP programme (e.g. self-service terminals, white goods, assisted navigation systems, accessible digital content, integration of assistive and mainstream solutions, solutions for ageing well)?**

All of them, especially accessible digital content, integration of assistive and mainstream solutions, self-service terminals and solutions for ageing well.

**Which priorities should the EU research framework programme support to promote future solutions for ageing well as well as inclusive technologies, processes and services? (e.g. integration of mainstream with low-cost assistive technologies; intelligent systems and devices for care and support at home and on the move; accommodation of elderly people in the workplace, multi-channel accessibility of content; User-friendly interfaces; automatic translations and interfaces for services; inclusive Ambient Intelligence)**

All of them. Moreover it is not only a problem of priorities but also of strategies, also at European level. The already existing funding instruments for supporting innovation in eInclusion, ( i.e. application pilots of already available technology, integration of available technology in prototypes of innovative services and applications, and focused project to address specific needs or new promising technology , with results in the medium term - 3 to 5 years) are extremely important.

However, as a Design for All approach is necessary to impact on future developments (for example really "intelligent" systems, user-friendly interfaces, Ambient Intelligence, or integration of Web2.0 and the Semantic Web in "intelligent" Web applications), this has to be planned in a long term perspective (at least 10 years), Therefore, instruments funding long term research (across different framework programmes) should also be established.

Furthermore the concept of "cognitive accessibility" should be stressed, which is not the same as usability and doesn't even mean that everybody must be put into the condition of understanding everything.

Also in this field the "design for all" approach should be adopted. Taking into account cognitive accessibility of ICT tools means that particular attention should be devoted to avoiding cognitive overload and to providing suitable features for fostering comprehension (for example: A) use as many complementary formats as possible -visual, audio, multi-graphic, B) reduce the need for utilizing complex organizational skills C) decrease the dependence on memory as a tool for recalling information D) be presented in a vocabulary or reading level that approximates the level of mainstream users.