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INFSO/H3/SB

Workshop on "Ethical Aspects of Inclusion in the Information Society"

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avenue de Beaulieu 25/09, 1600 Brussels

1. BACKGROUND

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are advancing rapidly and are changing society profoundly. Such technologies can genuinely empower citizens to play a full role in society, notably those that are at risk of exclusion. Inclusion in the information society, or e-inclusion, aims at using ICT to improve social and economic inclusion. E-inclusion is also concerned with inclusive ICT, i.e. ICT that is accessible, available and affordable for all.

However, as the knowledge-based economy develops, the increasing use of leading-edge technologies in all areas of life can also present major challenges for some people and introduce new threats to sustained growth and social inclusion. There is a risk that, despite their many benefits, new technologies could set people apart, create new barriers, and increase exclusion. In this respect the European Commission is paying special attention to vulnerable groups in society, those that are at high risk of being excluded, due to a wide variety of reasons, such as age, disability, culture, literacy. Many of these groups have common difficulties in i.e. finding employment and obtaining a proper education.

Ethical issues encompass dealing with sensitive problems such as **informed consent, right to privacy and protection of personal data, respect for dignity and integrity of the person, non-invasion of the private sphere, equity, intrusiveness (of information technologies), risk and responsibilities for critical technologies**. Ethical aspects

concern also the use of ICT for **social and cultural integration of migrants** in their new communities in Europe, ICT for the social inclusion of **marginalized young people**, and the use of e-government services.

While discussing the importance of the respect of the fundamental ethical principles, one shall bear in mind that the compliance with the leading ethical standards, as defined by the **2000 Nice European Charter of Fundamental Rights**, the secondary EU legislation and the recommendations of the European Group on Ethics formulated in their Opinions, cover any area of technology development and use, whether research, validation, deployment, or implementation.

Ethical guidelines for undertaking EU-level research in the **Framework Programmes** (FP) have already been introduced. Annex 5 of Call 1 of FP7 requires applications for EU-funded research activities to explicitly address ethical issues (in terms of the research, its conduct and outcomes) and outlines how ethical issues raised by the proposed research will be handled.

As regards EU-level validation and deployment actions, the CIP-PSP actions on e-Health and e-Inclusion may as well raise ethical issues. The same will apply also to applied research projects under the new Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) joint programme.

Similarly such issues may come up in deployment and implementation actions at national, regional or local level.

The recent Commission Action Plan on Ageing well in the Information Society identified the need to initiate a dialogue on ethical issues as regards ICT and ageing. More generally, such a dialogue is considered to be necessary on ethical issues related to e-inclusion.

By organising the current workshop on the main ethical issues in the field of e-inclusion, the European Commission would like to start a dialogue with all relevant stakeholders with regard to the question, what will be the ethical issues in a five years perspective, as regards the citizens concerned, the industry, and society at large.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE WORKSHOP

The main objective of this workshop is to provide a platform for initial discussions in the following areas:

- major ethical issues in a five years terms as seen by all stakeholders - from the technology perspective, from the perspective of the research community and from the perspective of the society;
- needs for information, exchange of best practices, experience building, and other means to increase awareness, understanding, and guidance;
- identification of roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in action related to improving the handling of ethics and e-Inclusion.
- elements for "code of best practices".

The workshop shall be considered as a first step in initiating a deeper discussion on ethics and e-inclusion and will be followed by a second one in May 2008 where a larger number of all stakeholders will be invited to participate and a high-level panel discussion as a part of the i2010 Conference under the Slovenian Presidency will as well take place.

3. STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

3.1. Introductory presentations

In order to stimulate the discussions, **four** introductory presentations will be given. These presentations will not exceed 15 minutes and will raise issues, but not yet aim to provide answers.

- Introduction to the main issues related to ethics and e-inclusion with a special emphasis on:
 - Understanding the users – people at risk of exclusion; understanding the stakeholders involved;
 - informed consent, e.g. as regards elderly or disabled persons (esp. those with a mental disability); when is consent informed; when is the consent freely given.
 - how the methods for systems development balance ethical, economic and technological considerations;
 - organizational responsibility to safeguard privacy rights as more information about individuals is held electronically; risks to misuse ICT given the increasing dependence of organizations on it and the organizational duty to minimize such risks;
 - ICT and changes in organizations - the full impact of such change needs to be considered and, if possible, in advance, and the way the advent of the global information society raises new issues for organizations in how they operate, compete, co-operate, and comply with legislation;
 - how to cope with the enormous and rapid change in ICT, and how to early recognize and address the ethical issues that each advance brings;
 - specific ethical aspects in relation to ICT and elderly people; marginalized young people; ICT and cultural minorities; persons with disabilities; the "forced" use of e-government services by individuals.
 - And finally, conceptual framework(s) for ICT, ethics and inclusion.

- Current EU activities on ethics and ICT research;
- Viewpoints of the respective stakeholders;
- Future policy and practice perspectives.

3.2. Discussion topics

- Which are the key issues related to ethics and e-inclusion. Which will be the ethical issues related to ICT and e-inclusion in five years term from the perspective of the technology, the research community and the society;
- How shall these issues be addressed;
- How to elaborate common ethical approaches;
- Shall we work towards guidance for ethics and e-inclusion with chapters on ageing, culture, social marginalisation of young people and minorities? Is there a need for such guidance?
- Further priorities and policy strategies that policy-makers may wish to promote in the future context of responsible European governance of research and innovation.

3.3 Workshop conclusions

The main conclusions and recommendations of the workshop will be recorded in a workshop report to be made publicly available and which will help the Commission preparing future actions in this area.