

Webcast

Session PS8 Using ICT to Embrace Cultural Diversity in Europe

The session focused on the role of ICT in reinforcing the strengths of Europe's cultural diversity and overcome the digital divide that affects migrants and minorities.

David Broster, Head of Unit, European Commission, DG INFSO, stressed that Europe enjoys rich and diverse culture which is its unique strength. However, individuals and communities, in particular migrant and minority groups, encounter barriers to access diverse cultural contents and to affirm their cultural identity via ICT.

In view of the multifaceted topic of cultural diversity the session recognized that no single action can meet all the challenges. **It is imperative that the key challenges of ICT inclusion of migrants and minorities as users and producers of cultural contents gain centrality and remain on the policy agenda.** ICT creates opportunities but it is through contents, rather than just technology, that the awareness of benefits of ICT, motivation to use it and empowerment of users, can be achieved.

In order to increase ICT access and motivation of potential users there is need to:

- Develop schemes which promote and distribute diverse and culturally relevant creative content.
- Counterbalance the negative aspects of internet use for incitement to hatred towards migrants and minorities.
- The best way to valorise cultural diversity is through local and regional level actions. In this context local authorities should pro-actively reach out to migrants and minority groups.
- Setting target dates to eliminate the digital divide at the local and regional level should be a priority and an immediate action to be taken.
- At the national level mapping of needs and identification of vulnerable groups in view of their empowerment in terms of access to skills, employment, government and cultural content is a desirable action.
- In order to recognize and valorise diversity it is necessary to understand differences, promote mutual respect and conciliate differences that may appear as obstacles.
- ICT provides opportunities to enhance language and professional skills of immigrants in their host society. It also needs to build in the native language into content creation to enhance citizens' participation.
- Mobilization and cooperation of the key stakeholders, local authorities, industry, cultural actors and civil society is a necessary requirement for effective ICT inclusion of the most vulnerable groups. In particular in some New Member

States civil society and especially grass-root organizations can be relevant new active contributors.

Three dimensions were put forward as challenges: recognizing needs and dealing with them at the local and regional level, addressing corporate dimensions of diversity, and exploring the art and media as expressions of creativity and communication.

John O'Flaherty, Technical Director, MAC - National Microelectronics Application Centre, Ireland, explained the deficit in the participation of migrants in the local democracy. One of the key lessons learnt from the eTEN project eParticipate is that the ICT solutions proposed need to be simple and easy to use. The project experiences also show some of the barriers in access and use of ICT that minorities face, such as affordability, lack of awareness and motivation. The eParticipate project was given as good practice in cost-effective online multivideo service that enhances awareness, trust and access, and has high impact and meets increasing expectations of users.

Nicole Chandrashekara, Executive Director, UBS Group HR, Global Diversity, presented the viewpoints on how ICT impacts diversity. The Group Diversity Structure stems from the business needs determined by the broad diversity of employers spread across the globe, and their client base. The conceptualization of diversity is multifaceted. ICT amplifies cultural differences which must be understood in order not to create the climate of mistrust. UBS is carrying out training, awareness and integration programmes in order to overcome this communication problem generated by the use of ICT in a culturally diverse business context.

Kuljit 'Kooj' Chuhan, Video & Digital Media Artist and Consultant, provided examples of how cultural diversity can be valorised by the use of ICT. New media and digital tools enhance the cultural democracy via the creation of art and access to it. ICT have the potential to valorise minority communities through artistic expression and communication of ancestral origins of migrants and keep the traditions alive by using digital tools. There is, however, much evidence that new media are discriminatory towards minorities. To overcome the barriers minority groups need to take the initiative and the lead role to promote cultural richness.

Ilze Brands Kehris, Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights, presented the NGO perspective and stressed the contentious issues of differences in concepts and notions in use in various countries to define migrants and minorities, and called for the broad approach in order to encapsulate all the groups, and in particular the critically vulnerable groups such as Roma, asylum seekers and refugees, and undocumented migrants. The importance of understanding multiple discriminations based on origin, gender, and age was underlined. ICT provide opportunities but content needs to be available in languages spoken by the vulnerable groups. NGO contribution is pivotal, in particular with respect to the deep understanding of real needs, but there is also scope for government action particularly regarding, data collection, analysis, and legislation.