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PART I

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

eInclusion revisited: The Local Dimension of the Information Society

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Executive Summary

More and more Europeans, from a wider range of social groups, are using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). But there are still differences in usage, both between Member States and when looking at regions, urban and rural locations, socio-economic and age criteria and, of course, gender. In some cases, the gaps are getting smaller (e.g. in the case of gender) and give rise to hope that over time they may disappear altogether. However for others, particularly for people with low levels of income and education, there are few signs that the gaps are narrowing, exacerbating their exclusion from society.

eInclusion is just one aspect of the broader range of policies designed to promote social inclusion and cohesion. While exclusion from the Information Society does not by itself necessarily lead to social exclusion, it is broadly true that the socially excluded tend to have limited access to ICT. Policies to promote eInclusion can form part of a wider mix of policies to promote social inclusion and can be a first gateway to inclusion for certain groups. However there has so far been little European evaluation of the effectiveness of policies to promote eInclusion or of their effect on broader social inclusion. The High Level Group of Member States' Experts on the Employment and Social Dimensions of the Information Society (ESDIS) calls for the establishment of indicators to assess the impact of such policies and recommends a more sustained effort for the collection and dissemination of good practices.

ICT was initially trumpeted as a means which by itself would overcome the disadvantages faced by rural and peripheral regions. But in practice, ICT, and in particular broadband access to the Internet, has initially been adopted in major cities, only slowly flowing out to peripheral towns, villages and rural locations, aggravating the division between urban and rural areas. More equal access can foster both economic growth and the improvement of living and working conditions in rural and peripheral areas, but will require concerted public policy efforts, at national and regional levels, to promote a network of public access points, linked to initiatives to promote the training of users and to ensure that services and content are provided on the Internet which meet people's real needs.

The Internet offers considerable scope to promote inclusion at local level and the vast majority of eInclusion projects take place there. It can be used to connect local actors to each other and to larger national organisations; to deliver services; and to involve local people in designing policy interventions. ICT has the capacity to build social capital and by doing so to make policy interventions more effective.

This paper is the result of co-operation between the Commission services and ESDIS. The Commission would like to thank the members of the group for their contributions, and particularly for the conclusions drawn by ESDIS in sections A.4, B.4, C.4 and in part D.

Introduction

I. Background, rationale and tools

This report **follows up:**

- the first specific **report on eInclusion**¹ by ESDIS (2001), which presented a series of good practices, highlighted key aspects and proposed a number of recommendations;
- the **Council Resolution** on "e-Inclusion"² (October 2001), which built on the ESDIS report, calling, among other things, for the monitoring and analysis of progress in the field;
- the **ESDIS work programme for 2003**, which envisages eInclusion as a field of activity, with a special attention on **regional/local cohesion**.

The **aim** of the report is to analyse **how the situation has evolved** in two years' time; to address the **key components of eInclusion**, as well as the processes of technology appropriation which can lead to enhanced **social inclusion**; to focus on solutions and ways **for eInclusion and local development / regional cohesion to combine successfully**.

The **working tools** for drafting and finalising the report are **Data**: Eurobarometer surveys in the EU 25 and Candidate Countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey)³, other national, EU-wide and international studies, surveys, research project; **good practices** provided by Member States and ESDIS+ Countries; **contributions by Member States** in terms of **comments and suggestions** on the aspects to focus particularly on, on the analysis and on the conclusions.

II. The policy framework

Today's **political context** for e-Inclusion initiatives is particularly pertinent. **2001** saw the **first Joint Inclusion Report** based on the national action plans for social inclusion submitted and discussed by Member States. **2003** saw the **second Joint Inclusion Report**, followed by the **Joint Memoranda on Social Inclusion** submitted by the Accessing Countries.

In 2001 the EU was in the midst of the **eEurope 2002 Action Plan**. This had put a special focus on the need to ensure that people with disabilities were fully included in the Information Society. And 2003 was the **Year of People with Disabilities** with **eAccessibility** a major theme within it.

Today we are mid way into the Action Plan⁴ entitled "**e-Europe 2005 : An information society for all**". Approved at the Seville European Council in June 2002, the Council

¹ "e-Inclusion - The Information Society's potential for social inclusion in Europe" - Commission Staff Working Document SEC(2001)1428 - http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/knowledge_society/eincl_en.pdf

² "e-Inclusion - exploiting the opportunities of the information society for social inclusion" - http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/knowledge_society/res_eincl_en.pdf

³ The Eurobarometer 59.2 survey covered the EU 15 Member States and the Eurobarometer 2003.3 covered the New Member States respectively (which were still candidate for accession in 2003), as well as Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, which are Candidate Countries at the time this report is published and are referred to as such in the text. Croatia was not covered in the survey, as it had not yet applied for EU membership in 2003.

⁴ COM (2002) 263 Final, Brussels 28/05/2002

Resolution implementing it underlines the vital importance of an inclusive approach (e-Inclusion) by all stakeholders "(p.3)⁵. The Seville Council also focused on **eLearning** and paved the way for the subsequent adoption of a multiannual programme (2004 to 2006) for the effective integration of ICT in education and training systems in Europe. On the eve of **enlargement** to a European Union of 25 and more Member States, the **eEurope+ 2001-2003** Action Plan – targeting effective implementation of the Information Society in acceding and candidate countries - has come to its completion.

On the global stage, the **United Nations World Summit on the Information Society** has had a key meeting in Geneva in December 2003⁶. Digital divides are the central issue. And of course the **Lisbon goal** of a dynamic and competitive knowledge based society for greater social cohesion is still an overarching objective. It is precisely in this context – and in view of the future objective process – that the subject of the present paper acquires its full significance.

III. The focus of the report

A) a survey based analysis of the 2001 – 2003 evolution in digital inclusion

Part A analyses what has happened in Europe since 2001 with respect to e-Inclusion, on the basis of recent **survey findings**. The **main trends** of ICT penetration and use in European societies, including New Member States and Candidate Countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey), are identified, with particular attention to the existing and emerging **gaps**. On the basis of available empirical evidence, the following main questions are addressed: Is the **European Knowledge Society more "inclusive"** now than it was two years ago? What likely future **scenarios** can be expected and what kind of **public intervention** do they call for?

B) a paradigm shift; from eInclusion to processes of ICTs appropriation in "everyday life" of European citizens

Part B reviews the main lines along which the various "digital divides" have been tackled by **eInclusion strategies** in the EU so far. How to assess their impact on **digital** as well as **social participation** and **quality of life** of the European citizens, particularly the most vulnerable ones? This report tries to draw lessons from European and international **actions** and **good practices**. It also advances suggestions concerning the adoption of new **analytical tools** – such as an "everyday life" approach to technology appropriation - for catching the relevant socio-technical phenomena at the current stage of ICT diffusion in the EU.

C) the local and regional dimension of the knowledge society: social inclusion and social cohesion issues;

Both the **European Employment Strategy** and the **Strategy for Social Inclusion** have long stressed the importance of local implementation. The Information Society has also been given a clear priority in the new programming phase of **European Regional policy** (2000-2006)⁷. In Part C, a survey of the current **"geographical" patterns** of eInclusion is carried out, along the urban/rural divide and across regions, as well as an analysis of **eInclusion dynamics at the local and community level**, with a focus on their potential for enhancing social integration, political participation, cultural identity, as well as interactions between local and global levels.

⁵ Council Resolution on the implementation of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan (2003/ C 28/02)

⁶ 10-12 December 2003 – see: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/>

⁷ see : http://www.europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/regional/index_en.htm

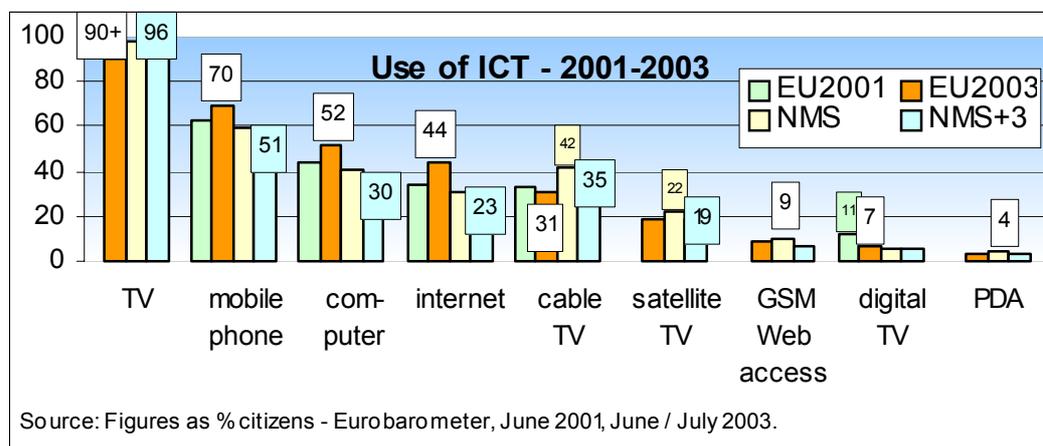
PART A:

ICTs access and use in the EU 2001-2003: main trends and gaps

A.1 - A snapshot of the "new media" landscape in an enlarged Europe

According to the latest Eurobarometer data⁸ (59.2 - Summer 2003), **television** is an almost ubiquitous medium in all Member States and Candidate Countries. The penetration of **mobile phones** is very high in the EU 15 (70 %), probably not far from saturation, while still growing in the New Member States as well as in Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. Given the potential of advanced mobile services, this indicates a promising avenue for the expansion of the Information Society.

Slightly more than half of the EU 15 population uses a **computer** in 2003, while only 30 % of the citizens in New Member States and Candidate Countries (RO,BG,TR) do so. With respect to 2001, **internet penetration in the EU 15** - when measured in terms of internet users as percentage of the total population - has **globally increased from 34,3 % to 43,5 %**; this trend has affected all considered age groups and socio-economic categories, although to different extents (see section below).

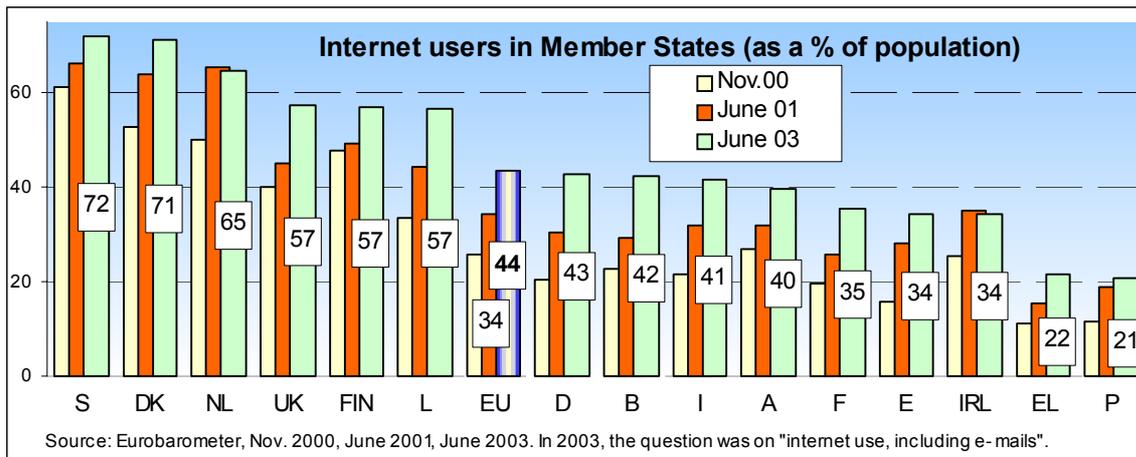


The picture is obviously much more diversified if statistics at country level, and especially at regional level and along the rural/urban divide are considered. In fact, **big disparities** characterise the "**geographical**" distribution of access and use of ICT across Europe

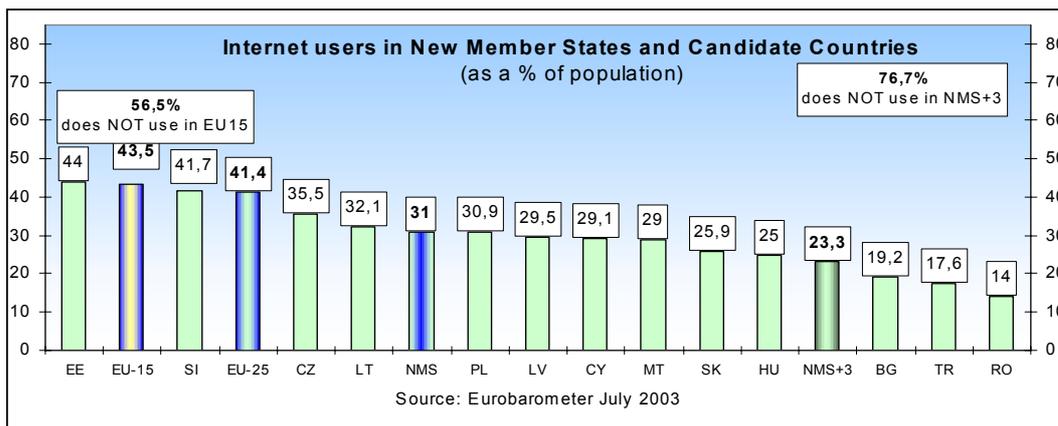
Luxembourg and the UK now join the Nordic countries and Netherlands in scoring an Internet access rate above – or much above - the 50 % threshold. A group of countries – such as Italy, Belgium, Austria, Germany are positioned around the EU average; Ireland, Spain and France still have a lower than average access rate (~35%), together with Portugal and Greece (~21%).

⁸ The statistical data presented in this paper are mostly based on the Eurobarometer 59.2 / 2003 survey (face-to-face interviews) and have been cross-referenced with national and European data. Possible differences in methods of data collection among European and national surveys can lead to some differences in results. Readers might also wish to consult data available from Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/pls/portal>) and the e-Business Watch (<http://www.ebusiness-watch.org/>). The Eurobarometer survey covered the EU 15 and the New Member States (which were still candidate for accession in 2003), as well as Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, which are Candidate Countries at the time this report is published and are referred to as such in the text. Croatia was not covered in the survey, as it had not yet applied for EU membership in 2003.

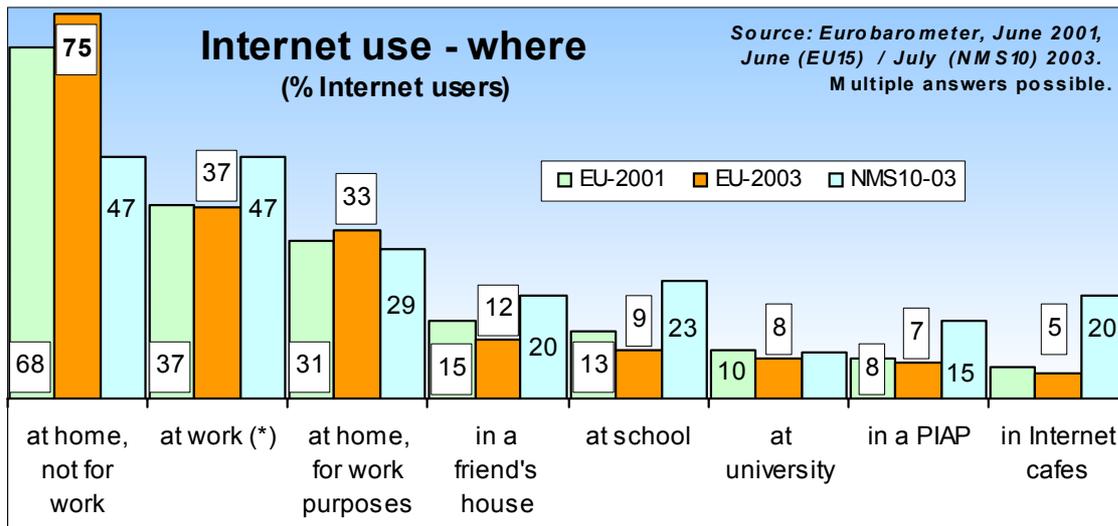
Between 2001 and 2003, the growth in Internet penetration in the UK, Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium and France has been higher than the European average (+ 10-12 % points).



Thirty-one percent of respondents from the 2004 new Members States use the Internet in 2003; Estonians score with 44% the highest penetration rate - comparable to the EU 15 average - closely followed by Slovenia with 41 %. Lowest internet access is found in Candidate Countries (Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey).

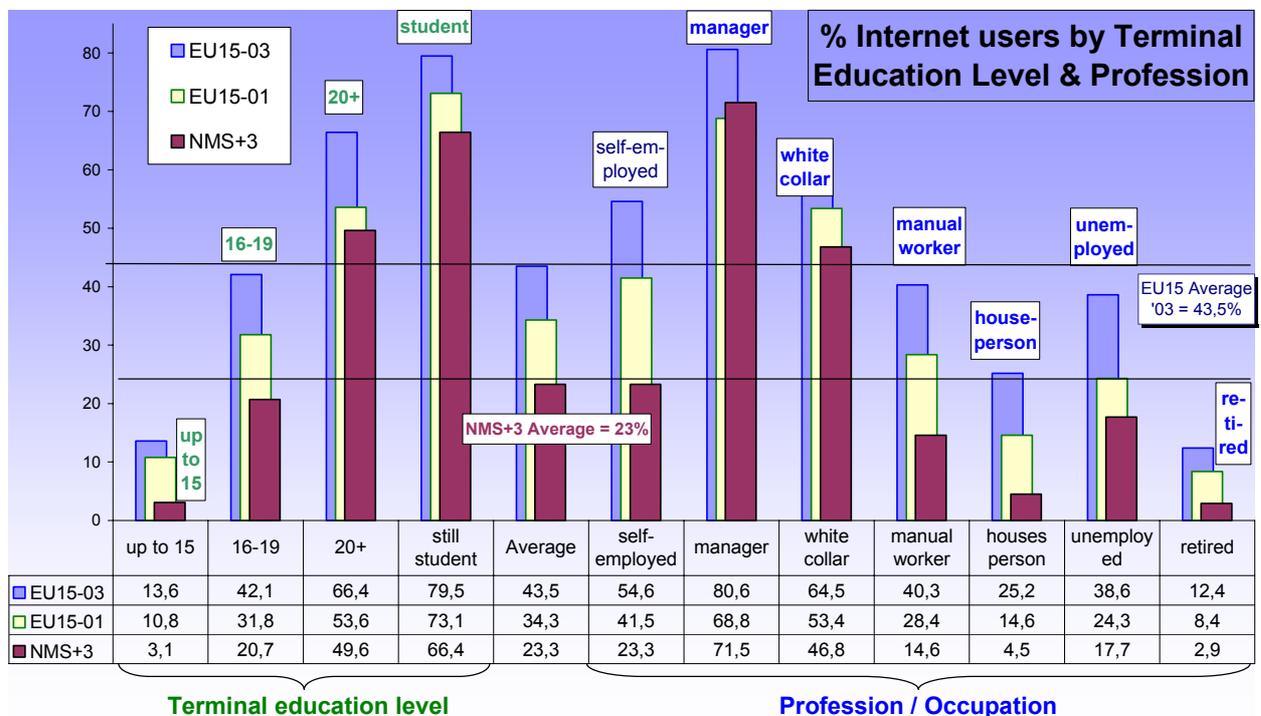


Penetration of Internet use "at home" is still growing in the EU 15 area, affecting 75% of the citizens online. 33 % of them use Internet at home for work purposes, while "only" 37 % use Internet at work (figure unchanged with respect to 2001). Conversely, 47% of Internet users in the New Member States – and 40 % in the Candidate Countries (RO,BG, TR)– go online at home; 47 % and 40 % of them, respectively, do it at work: the pattern is considerably different than in the EU 15. As a matter of fact, lower access rates at home are partly counterbalanced by higher use "in a friend's house", at school, at PIAPs and in Internet cafes.



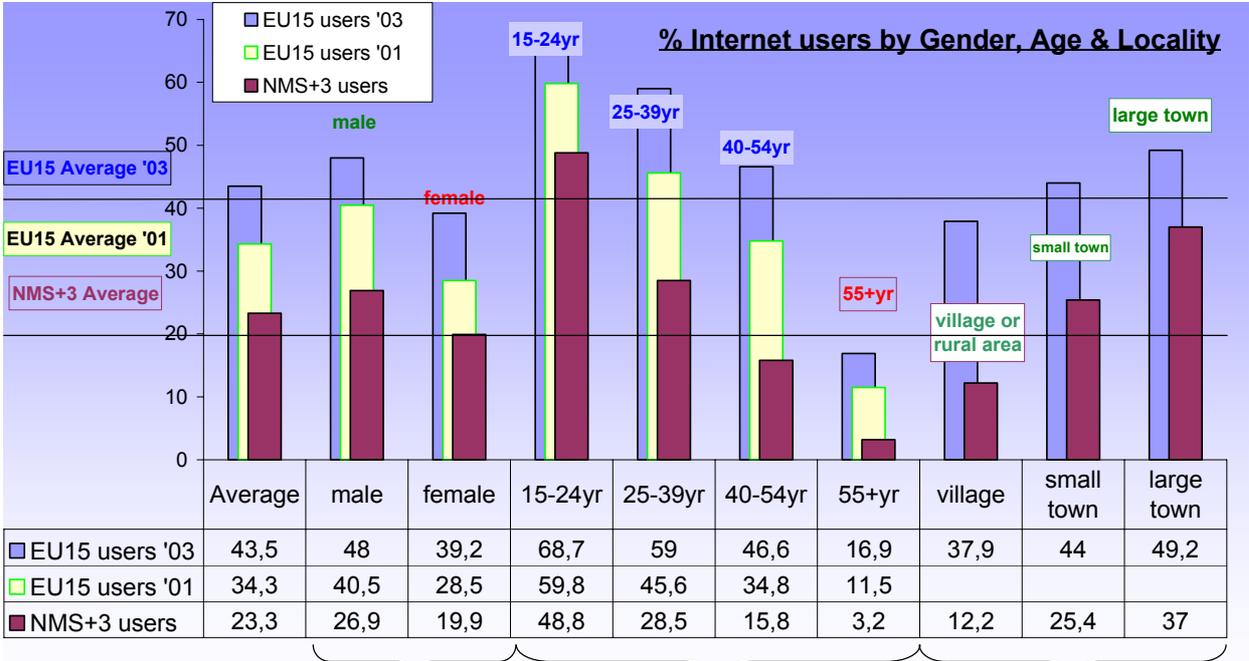
A.2 - Evolution of Internet use: the trends (by socioeconomic & demographic criteria)

As seen in the previous section, **Internet penetration is rapidly increasing** in the EU 15; this trend has affected all considered age groups and socio-economic categories, although to different extents. In particular, the increase in access rate has been higher for women than for men, thus showing a trend toward bridging the existing "gender divide" within the digital divide. Moreover, access has proportionally increased more among unemployed and self-employed people with respect to populations belonging to other occupation-related categories. On the other side, Internet penetration among **housepersons**, especially women, **older citizens**, **retired people** and in **rural areas** is clearly lagging behind.



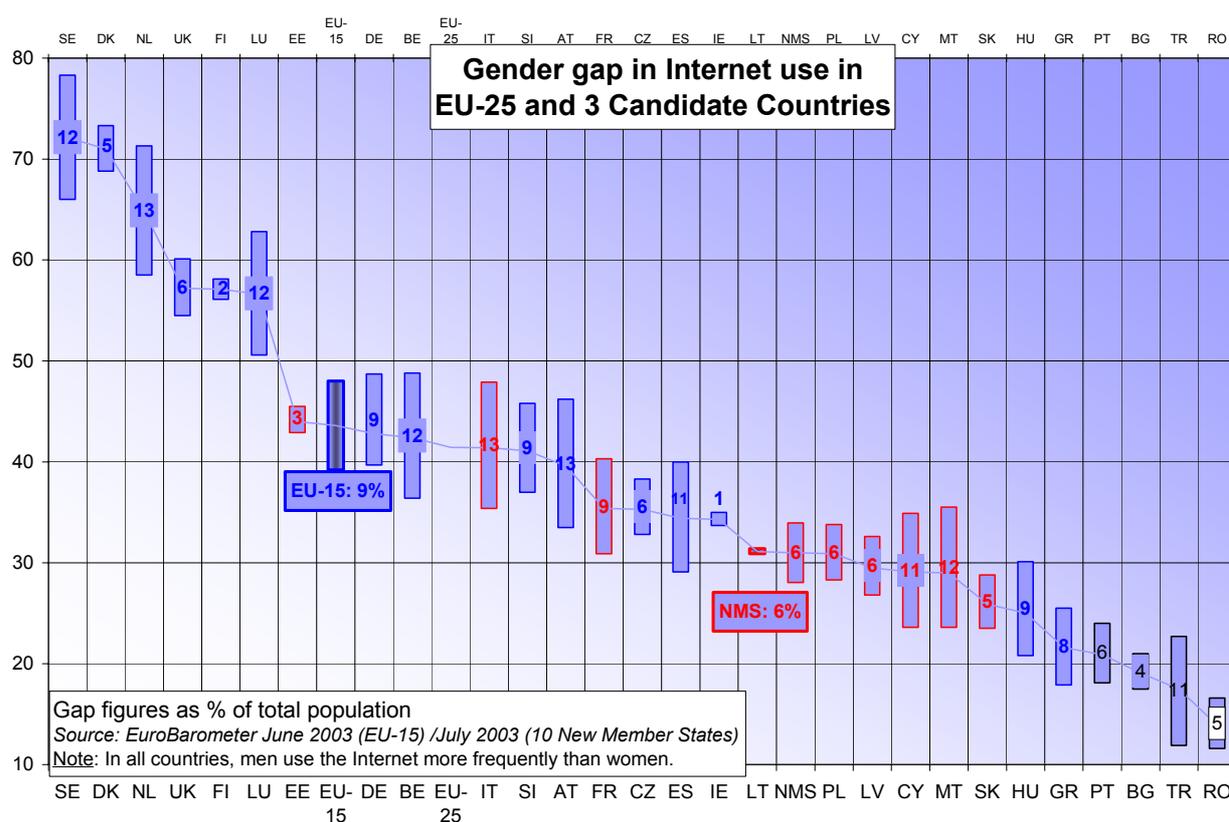
Source: Eurobarometer
July 2001 (EU15-01), June 2003 (EU15-03), July 2003 (NMS+3)

However, in general terms, higher **Internet use** seems to remain clearly and consistently related to higher educational level and occupational status. Gender, age and rural vs. urban location are other important determinants of access to the "cyberspace". The socio-economic and demographic patterns are similar across the EU 25 zone and over time, even if average penetration rates are higher in the EU 15.



Source: Eurobarometer
 July 2001 (EU15-01), June 2003 (EU15-03), July 2003 (NMS+3)

A.3 - Evolution of internet use: the gaps



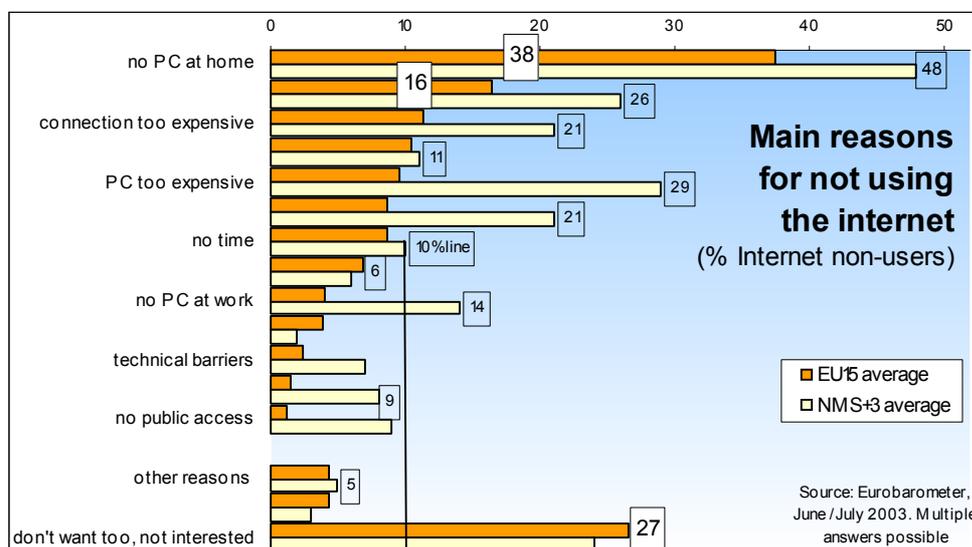
When the **five major determinants of gaps** – seen as "percentage variation from the national average" – are compared in the EU 15 area, **education, age and income** appear to be the most important variables along which the "digital divide" is configured. **Gender** related and **geographical factors** (rural/urban divide) show a still relevant, but relatively lesser influence on exclusion from Internet use.

The biggest gaps are to be found in the countries which already score the lowest EU 15 rate of Internet penetration (Greece, Portugal, Spain); regional gaps are also wider in these Member States. Conversely, the countries with the highest Internet penetration (Sweden, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Denmark) have also the most cohesive information society. The identified gaps appear to follow the patterns of technology penetration foreseen by innovation diffusion theories; this issue will be dealt with in detail at the last section of Part A – *Summary and conclusions*.

A somehow different picture emerges from the data collected in the New Member States and in Candidate Countries (RO, BG, TR). The gaps are roughly distributed along the same configuration observed in the EU 15 area – nevertheless, they are relatively wider, particularly with respect to **income** related and **geographical** factors. In Bulgaria and Romania (showing the lowest Internet penetration and the largest gaps) the **rural** divide is almost as important as the other divides. Generally speaking, the (emerging) Information Society in the New Member States and Candidate Countries is relatively more polarised than in the EU 15 zone; the divides are comparatively wider, even in areas showing an Internet penetration rate close to the EU 15 average (Estonia, Slovenia).

Some additional insights can be provided by the **subjectively identified reasons for non-use**: the **non availability of a PC at home**, combined with **lack of access** at work or at Public

Access Points; the **high cost** of PC ownership and of Internet connection; the **complexity** of the technology and the **lack of basic skills** account for the main identified barriers: **income** and **education** related factors emerge again as major determinants of digital exclusion. Almost 30 % of the non users in the EU 25 do not want to go online, or are not interested in doing so. Lack of awareness, lack of time, language barriers and unavailability of useful content are identified as other important obstacles to ICT use.



A.4 - Summary and conclusions drawn by ESDIS

The picture presented above – coherent with the findings of other European and international surveys - seems to confirm the patterns predicted by widely accredited innovation **diffusion theories**⁹, according to which *access to technology is eventually extended to the vast majority of people, but with a different timeframe for different "groups"*.

However, there are reasons to believe that - because of the specificity of these media – the way ICT penetrates society is different than the patterns other technologies follows. Above all, ICTs represent an essential resource for individual and social development in the knowledge based society. As ICT diffusion progresses along existing socio-economic and demographic breaklines, **the exclusion from access and use can reinforce the relative disadvantage which originally caused the exclusion itself**. Conversely, the fact of taking advantage of the opportunities offered by ICT based contents and services can enhance the potential for social participation and **"empowerment"**.

Even if ICT penetration is actually progressing in the EU 25 - as we have assessed on the basis of available data - the **risk** that Europe will evolve toward a more **polarised**, instead of a more **inclusive knowledge society** is still very present.

The current configuration of the digital gaps – and their determinants - acquires therefore its full significance in relation to the **key question** from the **policy** viewpoint: which is the likely **evolution over time** of the different divides? Are they **narrowing** or **widening** in a medium/long term perspective? Which **alternative scenarios** are to be envisaged?

⁹ see e.g. : "Diffusion of Innovations" by Everett M. Roger – The Free Press - 1995

Three possible evolution patterns have been identified¹⁰, which summarise schematically the main positions currently upheld in the international debate:

- Scenario I: some delay between social groups; groups will catch up in the medium term; **digital divide is merely a temporary issue**;
- Scenario II: considerable delay between social groups; groups will catch up in long/very long term; but short ICT innovation circles generate consecutive diffusion processes; **digital divide is an issue of ever evolving delays**;
- Scenario III: considerable delay between social groups; groups will not catch up in long / very long term; not even basic participation of parts of the population. **Digital divide remains an issue of delay and exclusion**

The evidence on EU level, based on the data presented in this report but also on state-of-the-art empirical research, may support the following conclusions: **different gaps** may undergo a **different evolution**. The **gender divide** can be considered a temporary issue (the gap has been almost, or completely overcome in some (new) Member States, such as Lithuania, Ireland, Finland, Estonia and Denmark). **Older population** seems to catch up albeit at slower pace; among other things, the effect of more digitally aware age cohorts progressively entering this category has to be considered.

However, the very slow development concerning **low income** and **less educated groups** may correspond to scenario II or III type: a history of **ever evolving delays** and/or permanent exclusion¹¹. The link between **digital** and **socio-economic inclusion** appears therefore to be structural. Not only it points to the need for effective **public intervention** supporting a more cohesive Knowledge Society in Europe (the digital divide could eventually lead to a society fragmented into distinct, and disconnected, "multi-speed" societies)¹²; it also calls for an appropriate interplay and convergence between **eInclusion** and **social inclusion** / **social cohesion** policies. Eurobarometer data also seem to confirm the SIBIS project finding¹³ that **countries** that only **later** reach certain **ICT diffusion levels** have to bear **more inequality** in ICT adoption: this should be born in mind when considering eInclusion strategies for the "**laggards**" among EU 15 Member States as well as for **New Members** and **Candidate Countries**.

For a more detailed analysis of the enlarged EU picture, we refer to the "[Eurobarometer 2003.3 – Public Opinion in the Candidate Countries](#)" publication: [Information and Communication Technology](#), while the **rural vs. urban** and **regional aspects** in ICT diffusion are approached in Part C of this report. Additional statistics – derived from the Eurobarometer 59.2 survey - are provided in Annex III.

¹⁰ Janus Workshop "The Digital Divide: Opportunities and Threats at the Verge of EU Enlargement" – presentation by Tobias Hüsing, Empirica – 23 Jan 2003 - <http://www.janus-eu.org/Temp2/index-f.htm>

¹¹ The relevant variables behind the income and education gaps are likely to be related and would justify further research through a multi-variable analysis.

¹² The digital Divide in the European enlarged Economic Scenario: an Assessment of the socio-economic Effects" - p. 44 – Report for ESA by P. Cohendet, Univ. Louis Pasteur, Strasbourg - 2003

¹³ see footnote n.8 above

PART B:

From eInclusion to ICTs appropriation in the "everyday life" of European citizens

B.1 - eInclusion policies: tackling the "divides"

While penetration of new technologies is mainly driven by market forces, **public policies** have the task of **guaranteeing** as broad as possible **access** to the enabling capacities of ICTs.

At **EU level**, the political guidelines laid down by the European Council for the **fight against poverty and social exclusion**¹⁴ set the objective *"to exploit fully the potential of the knowledge based society and of new information and communication technologies, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities"* in order to prevent the risk of exclusion, while the **eEurope 2005 Action Plan: An information society for all** aims at *"giving everyone the opportunity to participate in the global information society"*. The development of key competencies in ICT – a crucial factor for digital inclusion – is addressed in the Commission **Action Plan to promote Skills and Mobility**, while the **eLearning programme** focuses on ICT's contribution to learning, especially for those who, due to their geographical location, socio-economic situation or special needs, do not have easy access to traditional education and training.

All **Member States** are implementing **eInclusion policies**¹⁵, in the framework of their Information Society strategies as well as of their social policies. New Member States highlighted in their **Social Inclusion Memoranda** their ongoing and/or planned actions for promoting digital inclusion.

Two broad approaches are followed, often complementing each other¹⁶: a number of initiatives aim at the **overall population** (policies for raising awareness and providing computer literacy, as well as access to common infrastructures of knowledge - e.g. creation of public access points in libraries, community centres, cyber cafés; provision of internet connection to all educational institution, integration of ICTs in school curricula at all educational level, development of eLearning and tele-education etc.); other measures **target specific groups** at risk of exclusion, such as younger people in situation of disadvantage, women, low-income/ unemployed/ retired people/ older citizens, etc..

UK experience would suggest that non PC based approaches are necessary to reach the more disadvantaged or excluded people. So UK approaches have embraced delivery through digital TV and through innovative use of mobile telephones The Scottish Executive has launched an interactive Digital Television pilot to test the public service delivery potential of the channel since lower income households in Scotland are much more likely to have digital television than they are to have access to the internet.

Provision of ICTs access and services to the **disabled** has been particularly focused in the last few years – and especially in 2003 - by all national governments. European initiatives in this field have stimulated the adoption of WAI guidelines for public web sites and the engagement

¹⁴ see objective 2 (a) in Annex I to the "Fight against poverty and social exclusion: common objectives for the second round of national Action Plans" endorsed by the Council in November 2002

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/counciltext_en.pdf

¹⁵ see National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion 2003-2005

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/index_en.htm

¹⁶ see Joint Report on Social Inclusion 2003 – p. 75 to 78

in developing universal design for **e-accessibility**. Specific measures targeting eInclusion in **rural** and otherwise **remote areas** are also in the agenda of various Member States (see Part C).

Spain has launched a number of initiatives recently which address the use of ICT to get people into jobs: the National Action Plan for Accessibility 2004-2012 adopted in July 2003 explicitly cites the use of new technologies to help people with disabilities; the National Plan I+D+I 2004-2007 also seeks to ensure ICTs are used to include disadvantaged people in employment.

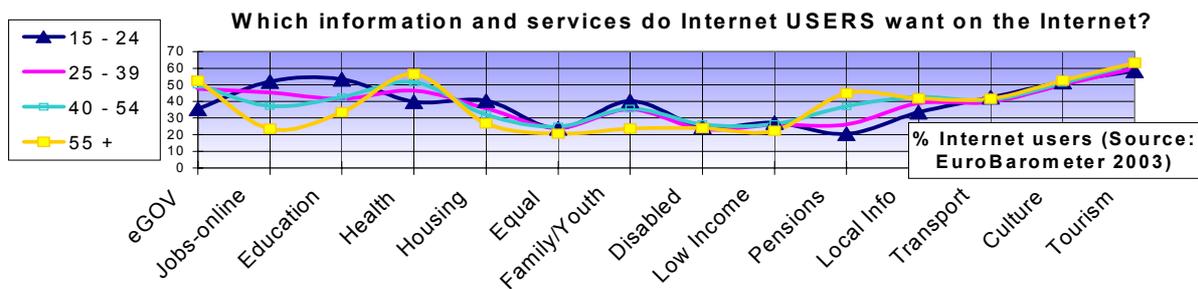
ICTs are also used as tools **supporting services for job search, orientation and vocational training**; provision of ICTs skills for socio-professional integration of groups at risk of exclusion is implemented by most EU countries. Moreover, new open and flexible forms of **learning supported by new ICTs** (e-learning) are progressively used for re-qualification of workers, training of people under temporary contracts, adult education. Education and training at all levels are key elements in determining the quality of the infrastructural support for successful sustainable diffusion of ICT; the implementation of Lifelong Learning is particularly pertinent in this respect.

The use of ICT to include those who would otherwise be at great risk of social exclusion is seen directly in the project "Training for Life" (www.trainingforlife.org). One part seeks to get youngsters, and others, many whom have several social handicaps, who have dropped out of journal education to want to obtain ICT skills. With these skills they are then encouraged to work in a social enterprise to gain experience and other necessary skills for employment in quality jobs.

The involvement of different **stakeholders** in eInclusion initiatives – public instances, civil society, private sector, research institutions and the users themselves – is a **positive trend** which is beneficial not only to eInclusion but also to general social cohesion.

Access being a means and not an aim in itself, the opportunities potentially offered by the knowledge society reside very much in the – universal – provision of online **contents and services**. At European level, supply has been stimulated – as foreseen by the Europe 2005 Action Plan – in the fields of **e-Government, e-Health, e-Learning and e-Business**. The **eContent** and the **Digicult** programmes aim at promoting multicultural digital environments, as well as access to European culture through ICTs. At national level, various efforts have been made by public and private actors in the provision of digital content. However, these efforts are **hardly quantifiable**, both in the sense of the provision and of the actual fruition by users of the online contents and facilities

EuroBarometer 2003 data can offer an insight on which information and services **users declare to want** on the Internet. Tourism, culture, transport, local information, health and education seem to be the most popular contents. Some variations by age are evident, especially affecting younger and older people (under 24 or over 55). Of course, quantitative data give only a partial insight into the quality aspects of Internet use (the impact for the individual's life). For example, health information is more often sought when people (young or older) or somebody close to them is sick. Therefore contextualisation is important to understand the impact of eInclusion on various categories of individuals.



From the eInclusion point of view, the issue of providing suitable digital content for **low income** and otherwise "**underserved**" people and communities is little researched and calls for more attention by policy makers and other stakeholders. Main **barriers** seem related to literacy, language, lack of cultural diversity, lack of local content. According to US studies¹⁷, adults want *practical information focusing on local community (such as local jobs and housing listing); information at basic literacy level, content for non English speakers and cultural spaces about ethnic and local cultural interests*. Children and youth want *participation and self-expression, interactivity, multimedia, youth friendly tutorials*. Both adults and youth want **easier searching and usability, encouragement and involvement**

It has to be noted here that, besides serving an "informational" function - related to contents - computer-based systems are progressively becoming a tool for **communication, collaboration and social interaction**.¹⁸ The context of use is also changing; traditional uses are complemented by **residential and nomadic** ones, penetrating a wider range of activities and environments. ICTs are also used in different ways, for different purposes, by an increasingly **diversified** range of "**user groups**". To the extent that computing becomes indispensable for participation to the knowledge society, issues like these – which will be handled more in depth in the following section of this report – become crucial for targeting, and **re-defining, effective strategies for eInclusion**, ultimately meant to support **social inclusion** processes.

However, a consensus is emerging on the fact that, catching the **emerging phenomena** in the evolution of the knowledge society – by definition "a moving target" – requires an enhancement of the monitoring methods generally used so far. As pointed out in the Joint Inclusion Report 2003, it is regrettable that the **effectiveness** of currently implemented **eInclusion policies** at national level cannot be really evaluated, as Member States are still far from relying on coherent sets of **indicators** for benchmarking it. As a consequence, the overall impact on eInclusion strategies, especially on the wider aims related to **economic, social and cultural inclusion**, can hardly be assessed.

¹⁷ "Online Content for Low-income and Underserved Americans: the Digital Divide's New Frontier" – a Publication of The Children's Partnership - http://www.childrenspartnership.org/pub/low_income/

¹⁸ BEEP – Best e-Europe Practices – Final project report <http://www.beep-eu.org/Documents/D11-3%20public%20final.pdf>

A more refined set of **quantitative indicators** – coupled with new **qualitative approaches** – should serve the purpose of measuring, beyond issues of access, the **quality and intensity of ICT use**, as well as its **impact** on both **digital and social participation**. If benchmarking data refer to people with disabilities, it should moreover be considered that "disability" in Europe is not uniformly defined.

On the other hand, a **good-practices** based approach has shown its usefulness so far - also in the context of the ESDIS work. Collecting and exchanging good/best practices in a **coordinated way** at European level becomes even more crucial in view of the exponential increase of eInclusion experiences carried out at national, regional and especially local level by different actors. The activities implemented within European project such as BEEP or SIGIS¹⁹ (IST Programme) are worth continuing and further developing, with a specific emphasis on the elaboration of **guidelines and assessment frameworks**.

B.2 - Digital and social inclusion; impacts on "everyday life" processes

Qualitative research – as defined and carried out in European project such as EMTEL²⁰ - is based on three main methodological approaches, namely focusing on:

- **"domestication" processes**, the appropriation of the technology by the user in everyday life processes;
- the **user's potential to influence innovation** – the user's use and understanding of the technology are seen to have consequences on the design and production of the technology itself ("social construction of technology");
- the **blurring of boundaries**, such as the ones separating work and home, real and virtual, public and private, local/national/transnational sphere

Desk research, semi-structured in depth interviews, ethnographic methods, are relied upon for analysing the knowledge society from the point of view of "human agency", following trajectories in appropriation processes of ICTs and drawing consequences for the individual, **in/exclusion, social participation and well-being**. Combining findings from qualitative research and quantitative trends could allow policy makers to assess more correctly the potential - and the actual - impact of ICTs for social, cultural and economic development. This seems even more crucial in the light of the **structural link between social and digital exclusion** focused in part A of this report – and the need to address it in a coordinated fashion at policy level.

The conclusions of EMTEL deliverables²¹ point to the fact that technology is NOT seen as an absolute condition guaranteeing inclusion, even if its inclusion potential for "less able" people is clearly there. ICTs are actually experienced as an opportunity to be active, structure one's life and create new social relationships; employment is seen as more accessible. However, **subjective experience** related to ICT is quite **different in different contexts**. The three

¹⁹ BEEP - <http://www.beep-eu.org/> ; SIGIS – Strategies of Inclusion: Gender and the Information Society - <http://www.rcss.ed.ac.uk/sigis/>

²⁰ EMTEL - European Media Technology and Everyday Network - <http://www.emtel2.org/>

²¹ EMTEL - Final deliverable - "Inclusion and Exclusion in the Information society" by K.Brants & V. Friessen - p.13

groups studied ²²– elderly, unemployed, disabled - vary substantially in their perception of ICT, their expectation and their actual "appropriation" of it. In fact, one lesson for policy makers is that **the focus on access or on improvement of skills is not enough to promote socio-economic inclusion**. It is also necessary to know **how ICT is experienced** in the context of people's everyday life in order to define adequate policy strategies.

In fact, if attention is given to multi-dimensional, relational, contextual aspects of technology use, **policy making** becomes **more complex** and less evident. This may lead to less policy and more **governance**, to a focus on small-groups and **creation of opportunity structures**. Informal arrangements should be strengthened by some form of financial support.

Along the line of going beyond the usual discourses and assumptions on eInclusion and the "benefits" of Internet access, other empirical studies – e.g. within the e-Living project²³ - have focused on issues such as **Information society technologies, social capital and quality of life**. Analysis of longitudinal, survey based data collected in six countries from 2001 to 2002, shows that **simplistic conceptions** of ISTs contributing to overall quality of life **are misplaced**. In none of the countries considered did acquiring a mobile phone, Internet access or broadband Internet have any positive effect on the overall – subjectively perceived – well-being. In some countries a negative relationship was found (!). However, when the focus is set on the "*satisfaction with communication with friends*", some emerging evidence shows that ISTs can in fact contribute to this element of quality of life. Given the recent history of ISTs in supporting interpersonal communication, the project conclusions stress the need of further exploration in this area. This leads us to the topic dealt with in the next section.

B.3 - "Society goes technical, software goes social"

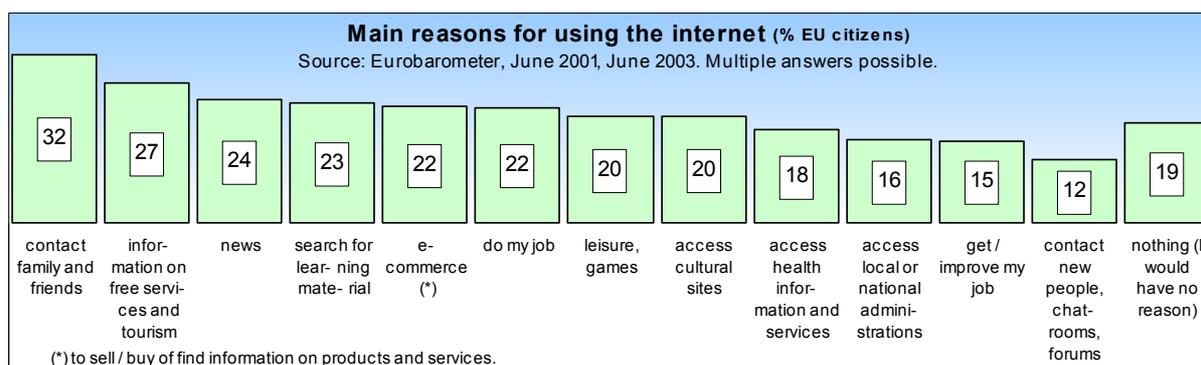
"Social software" broadly refers to a whole range of applications which are meant to expand the **communicative** and **networking function** of the Internet²⁴, beyond the capabilities offered by traditional email and instant messaging systems as well as traditional group discussion facilities. Example of social software are *group filtering mechanisms* (such as reputation systems), new *group publishing software* such as weblogs and wikis, or *introducer systems* - web sites designed to introduce people, either for business, dating or just common interest.

It already resulted from European and international surveys that using e-mail for keeping in touch with family and friends represented one of the most powerful drivers of Internet access. As a matter of fact, this finding was an input to the debate which started around the mid-nineties around the likely **social impact of new ICTs**. Was Internet contributing to an identified trend toward individualism, loss of community involvement, ultimately social isolation? Or was it a cure for these social "diseases", creating opportunities for online interaction and counterbalancing the decay of traditional forms of sociability?

²² EMTEL –" ICT and social inclusion in the everyday life of less abled people" – by Dorothée Durieux - LENTIC

²³ e-Living D11 4.b – "Information Society Technologies, Social Capital and Quality of Life" - p.24 - <http://www.eurescom.de/e-living/deliverables/e-liv-D11.4b-Final.pdf>

²⁴ "You Don't Know Me, but... Social Capital & Social Software" – by W. Davies - iSociety – Work Foundation http://theworkfoundation.com/research/isociety/social_capital_main.jsp - see Introduction , p. 4



Early findings²⁵ seemed to confirm the fears of a negative impact of Internet on social participation, therefore on the available stock of social capital and – ultimately - on **social cohesion**. However, this rather radical position was soon corrected by subsequent research results²⁶, showing that – if anything – Internet was just emphasizing trends already present in specific contexts, either in the sense of increasing or diminishing the existing amount of social connectedness.

The preoccupation for a relative loss of importance of the geographical local community and of face-to-face relationships in the Internet age²⁷ was opposed by a rival vision²⁸ of "social connection", now normally found in **social networks built around individuals** sharing with other people common attitudes and interests rather than – or in addition to – physical location.

On-line communities – supported by appropriate software tools - have been steadily spreading and continue to grow. However, the boundaries between on-line and off-line networks have also increasingly blurred, in such a way that the "virtual" and the "real" **social links** are intertwined at different levels and often **reinforce each other in everyday life**. Participation to these emerging social, as well as technological networks is obviously a means for fostering digital as well as **social inclusion**.

While the topic of on- and off-line communities will be handled specifically in Part C of this report, it is emphasized here:

- the relevance of this network based perspective for digging up the relationships between ICT penetration and social capital/ social cohesion – focusing therefore on mainstream society rather than on its "margins";
- the potential that this same perspective holds for eInclusion measures; embedding the provision of ICTs access within socio-technical networks means building both social and digital participation through technology appropriation practices.

²⁵ see N. Nie & L. Erbring (2000) "Internet and Society: A Preliminary Report", Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society

²⁶ see S. Kiesler, R. Kraut, J. Cummings, B. Boneva, V. Helgeson, A. Crawford (2002) "Internet Evolution and Social Impact", Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society - <http://www.stanford.edu/group/siqss/itandsociety/>

²⁷ see R. Putnam, (1995) "Bowling Alone: America's declining social capital" *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 6.1

²⁸ see B. Wellman et al, "Capitalizing on the Net: Social Contact, Civic Engagement and Sense of Community" in B. Wellman & C. Haythornwaite (eds.) (2002), *The Internet and Everyday Life*, Blackwell

B.4 - Summary and conclusions drawn by ESDIS

Various **policies** at European, national and sub-national level have been tackling during the 2001-2003 period the digital gaps highlighted in part A of this report, pointing to problems of **exclusion from ICT access** – and from the related **opportunities** - requiring public intervention. Measures targeting the **overall population**, as well as **specific groups** within it, have been implemented. The **absence of a coherent set of indicators** at national level for benchmarking the impact of eInclusion policies is regrettable and should be tackled as a major **barrier**, jeopardizing the possibility of monitoring progress and improving the effectiveness of public spending.

Digital and social participation clearly appear as closely **intertwined** in a society which becomes progressively "technical", where technology increasingly serves communication and networking purposes, and where the boundaries between on- and offline activities are fading away. The importance of providing **suitable digital contents** and services – taking into account the needs and interests of various "groups" – is only paralleled by the relevance of exploiting the new forms of sociability and connectedness, made possible by new "social software", for targeting both **social inclusion** and **social cohesion** in the knowledge society.

However, new methods and approaches are needed for catching emerging phenomena of a changing, increasingly technology reliant society. **Qualitative research** on ICT appropriation in the **everyday life** of European citizens can add a crucial dimension to the picture delivered by the current **quantitative indicators** (themselves to be upgraded). A subjective, user centered perspective provides policy makers with important clues on the real – as opposed to assumed – ICT impact on people at risk of exclusion. The **focus on access and skills is in fact not enough to promote socio-economic inclusion**; adequate policy measures should take into account **how ICT is experienced** in the context of people's everyday life. Along this line, focusing on the impact of ICT on social capital, individual well-being and quality of life can help making the connection between technology adoption and general **social participation** and **cohesion**, approaching society at its "center" in addition to focusing on its "margins".

PART C:

The local and regional dimension of the knowledge society: social inclusion and social cohesion issues

C.1 - Center and periphery in the Information Age – regional issues

Agglomeration and de-agglomeration of production are commonly identified as the two opposite forces determining **economic geography** over time.²⁹ *Bursts of innovation* create a requirement for high levels of complex and unfamiliar coordination - thus generating *bursts of agglomeration*; on the other hand, the subsequent transformation of complex coordination tasks into *routine activities*, which can be moved to remote but cheaper locations, drives the *dispersion* of production.

Internet makes routine some coordination tasks; at the same time, it creates a host of new unfamiliar activities. It **generates** therefore **forces for both agglomeration and dispersion**. It was assumed that Internet would have somehow *suspended the force for agglomeration allowing remote coordination of new and unfamiliar activities* – thus affecting the center/periphery dialectics in the Information Age; however, empirical data show that this is not happening, "distance is not dead". Instead, a geography of **highly packed agglomerations** is emerging, where **intellectual and innovative industries are concentrated**.³⁰ The importance of face-to-face interactions – and of *mutual understanding and trust* - in the production and distribution of new and/or complex ideas is hardly affected by the availability of ICT mediated communication. Non-codifiable and ambiguous **knowledge** still needs a **context** making it understandable and transferable, a shared background which only significant amounts of **co-presence** may contribute to build among people.

While **metropolitan areas** – centers of immaterial intellectual production - are enjoying **stronger economic growth** than the rest of the economy and reinforcing their leading position, **regions** are likely to experience **mixed effects** in the Information Age. They can become the location for *mobile production activities* and *routine intellectual labor*, or the *logistical* platform for the massive exchange of goods that the Internet is making possible. However, only **regions with high physical density of skills and specialized firms** can be competitive in higher order activities related to innovation and creativity.³¹

The knowledge economy defines new comparative advantages for regions; the so-called "**learning regions**", or "**creative localities**", are typically characterised by interactions between competent actors, on- and offline local networks linked to other networks elsewhere, knowledge rich environments, acceptance of risk taking, quality human capital, opportunities for knowledge spill-over, entrepreneurial vitality.³²

²⁹ "The Economic Geography of the Internet Age" – Edward. E. Leamer & Michael Storper – UCCLA – 2001 <http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/research/ciber/wponline/pdf/00-13.pdf>

³⁰ "The Rise of the Creative Class" by Richard Florida – Basic Books - 2002

³¹ BEEP – Best e-Europe Practices – Final project report - see note 15

³² "These factors are already addressed by research policy. A new pilot initiative ("Regions of Knowledge") was launched in 2003 with a budget of EUR 2.5 million, aiming at supporting experimental actions involving networks of European regions (with the active involvement of universities, research centres and the business community) so as to create "knowledge regions" which could serve as models for the implementation of the Lisbon strategy at the regional level. Moreover, the Sixth Framework Programme (2000 - 2006) through the Networks of Excellence and the Integrated Projects, aims at improving the links between more central and peripheral scientific centres adding to the EU's overall innovative capacity,

Big disparities among regions – especially among central and peripheral ones - still characterize in fact the European scenario and call for strong public intervention. Imbalances in terms of **ICT take up and usage** are part of the picture. They can negatively impact regional development, both in terms of economic and social cohesion. The risk of increasing geographical polarisation is even higher in New Member States and Candidate Countries, as seen in Part A of this report.

On the **supply side**, ICTs can³³ increase the locational choice of firms, make available new, high skilled jobs and introduce new ways of working at regional level. On the **"citizen" side**, the availability and diffusion of ICTs has the potential for improving public services (e-Government, e-Health), general quality of life, employment opportunities and social equity. Even more importantly, ICTs have the potential to promote *human capital building*, if matched with appropriate educational strategies. In fact, *lifelong learning* and *eLearning* are mutually reinforcing, especially as far as the regional dimension of distance learning is concerned. Moreover, the availability of skills and qualifications, especially in ICT, can attract high tech direct investment, triggering a virtuous circle in regional development.

The need to promote *regional territorial identity* is often experienced by regional actors as just as great as the need to promote *economic growth, social/digital inclusion and environmental sustainability*, through an **integrated and synergetic approach**. While location is still vital, new types of **interplay between the local and the global**, including the **role of ICT** in this, represent the main elements of a new regional agenda.

Monitoring regional evolution in the information society is vital for policy makers at all levels. Efforts in this sense are carried out by dedicated, EU sponsored research initiatives such as BISER and SIBIS³⁴. EuroBarometer 2003 survey data for regions are provided in Annex II of this report. **Good practices** at regional level are collected within the BEEP³⁵ project, as well as by ESDIS.

Findings based on SIBIS³⁶ 2002 data, disaggregated at regional level, are summarised here below (preliminary analysis of EuroBarometer 2003 data confirm similar trends):

- densely populated regions, and those where service sector is dominant in economy activity, appear to be much more likely to use the Internet; the difference is even more pronounced in terms of quality of access (broadband internet available at home);
- the size of the digital divide between regions, measured through a composite indicator (DIDIX) combining ICT access and use, appears to be substantial, with agriculture dominated regions reaching only half the European average;³⁷

combating the brain drain from less favoured to more prosperous regions and reinforcing the role of regions in the creation of the ERA.”

³³ I. Milicevic and K. Gareis – "Disparities in ICT Take-up and Usage Between EU Regions" – p. 1 http://www.biser-eu.com/resultsdoc/3%20-%20Nesis_paper.pdf

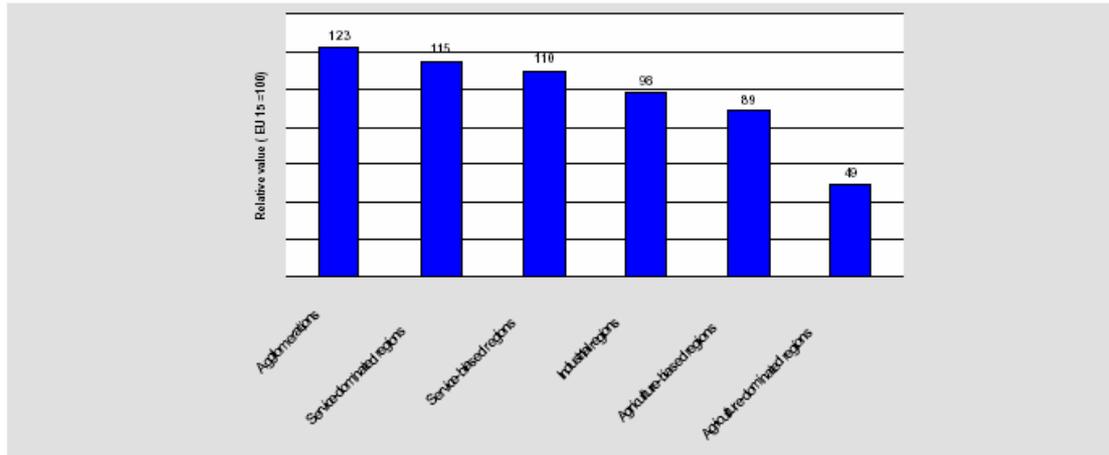
³⁴ BISER - Benchmarking the Information Society: e-Europe Indicators for European Regions ; SIBIS – Statistical Indicators benchmarking the Information Society

³⁵ BEEP – see note 15

³⁶ Milicevic/Gareis – ibidem, p. 4 -12

³⁷ Milicevic/Gareis – ibidem – p. 7 – figure 3.3

Figure 3-3. Relative digital divide based on access and use of ICTs , by region type



Source: SIBIS General Population Survey, 2002

- patterns of ICT use depend on region type; e.g. teleworking is still much more prevalent in high population density areas and in service dominated regions; online residents from traditionally less advanced regions appear to be less likely to engage in online purchasing and even more so in online financial transactions; the regional disadvantage seems to have less impact on online searching for health related information.

In general terms, it appears that **those regions that are already more advanced** are also **better positioned to gain any additional advantage** associated with the advent of the Information Society. More backward regions are slower in taking up ICTs, perpetuating their relative disadvantage.

Regional **actors** – including regional administrators, private sector, civil society – are becoming increasingly aware of knowledge society issues, are creating **partnerships** and **networks** (ICT supported !), carrying out activities, implementing dedicated measures. They are also increasingly **representing the regional knowledge society perspective in the wider political arena**.

An optimal **co-ordination** between European, national and regional level initiatives – as well as among different regions, including the systematic exchange of good practices – is deemed **crucial** for the success of the regional IS implementation

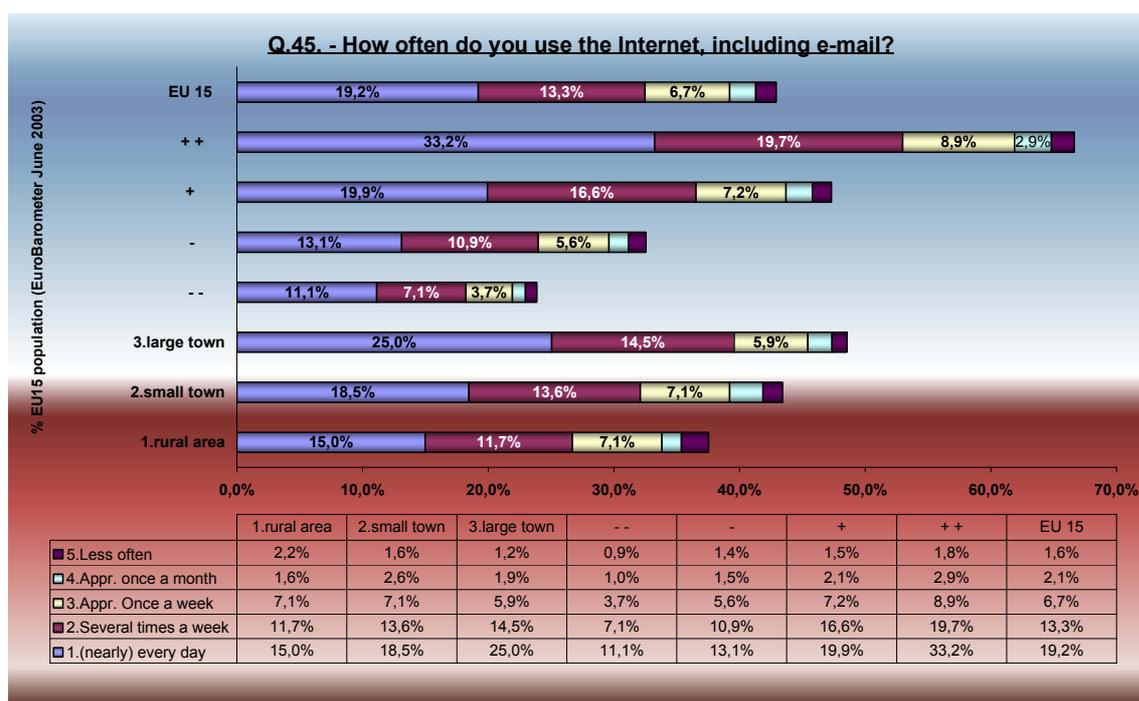
Finally, the **rural/urban divide**³⁸ can be considered in the light of the **center/periphery** dichotomy, which has been addressed in this section; moreover, it cuts across the regional dimension, as seen in the case of "agricultural regions". **Rural regions** of Europe (EU 15) correspond to about **80% of the European area** and **22% of the European population**. ICTs are usually *adopted first in central cities and slowly disperse in peripheral cities and rural areas*. Following this pattern, the digital divide has in most cases aggravated the already existing divide between rural and urban regions. Adoption by rural businesses of emerging ICTs might be inhibited by the lack of technical/education/skills infrastructure in the local market town or municipality.

³⁸ The digital Divide in the European enlarged Economic Scenario: an Assessment of the socio-economic Effects – Report for ESA by P.Cohendet, Univ. Louis Pasteur – Strasbourg - 2003 (p. 52 – 56)

Additionally, new technologies show **gaping new divisions**, as is occurring with **broadband access**. The effect of the digital divide for rural areas cannot be overstated; lack of access to ICT may be devastating to economic development, quality of life and even survival. The setting up of a dense network of **Public Internet Access Points** can represent a first step toward the provision of access to online information and services – as well as to communication and networking facilities – badly needed in isolated or remote areas.

España.es, Spain's new Information Society plan for the period 2004-2006 which replaces Plan INFO XXI specifies the advantages to be obtained by integrating regional collectives. (see www.red.es)

Frequency of Internet access by income level and locality in EU 15



C.2 - The increasing importance of the local dimension

As we have seen, many proponents of ICTs held that place and distance would become largely irrelevant. Of course, reality is quite different. People live in physical locations and communities. Social capital, the glue that holds societies together through shared norms, values, culture, habits and practices, trust and understanding, is created or built at the local level.

The European Employment Strategy has long stressed the importance of local³⁹ implementation. The recent Council Resolution on building social and human capital in the knowledge society⁴⁰ specifically calls on Member States "in the area of social cohesion to promote the positive role of the social economy, of local development initiatives and of local communities in social capital building". The local dimension is thus a key aspect of e-Inclusion policy and will be a special feature of the analysis.

A "**local system**" – as defined in this report - is characterised by the interactions between specific geopolitical, historical, socio-economic and cultural resources, and by unique modalities of making use of those resources for an **integrated development**.⁴¹ The local community embodies a set of values and norms, and shares accumulated knowledge, much of which is of "tacit" nature. This set of social relations and local knowledge – together with the modalities for reproducing existing competencies and resources - represent a factor of **endogenous growth**, innovation and competitiveness. In this context, "**inclusion**" can be seen as participation to local socio-economic processes, while **eInclusion** corresponds to access and use of new technologies for socially meaningful processes, including micro-governance (eGovernment).

As ICTs impinge upon the mechanisms of knowledge creation, management and sharing, they mediate the relationships between "tacit" knowledge and local competitiveness, as well as between the local and global sphere. The Net can be used for connecting local actors and delivering local services; however, the technology enables the mobilisation of a much wider and more sophisticated range of resources, linking to larger networks for wider social, cultural and economic opportunities.⁴²

The **vast majority of eInclusion initiatives are at a local level**. To some extent they are especially designed to foster local cohesion and development, but they are also a simple expression of the fact that people live and work locally. The desire to ensure the disadvantaged are included is often a local desire. European or national inclusion policies certainly have a key role but without complementary strong local initiatives these are doomed to fail.

Access to the local administrations is cited as one of the main reasons to use the Internet in the EU25. Around a quarter of EU citizens specifically said that they wanted to find information and services pertaining to the local community. Large numbers of local

³⁹ Most recent version: Council Decision 2003/578/EC of 22 July 2003 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (OJ L 197/13 of 5.8.2003, p. 13-21).

⁴⁰ Council Resolution 2003/C 175/02 of 15 July 2003 on Social and Human Capital - Building social and human capital in the knowledge society: learning, work, social cohesion and gender (OJ C 175/3 of 24.7.2003, p. 3-6).

⁴¹ see "Modelli Locali di Sviluppo" by Garofoli G. – Angeli ed. - 1991

⁴² "Flexible Networking, ICTS and Local Economic Development" by Michael Gurstein; see FirstMonday http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue4_2/gurstein/index.html

administrations have set up websites and interactive online services specifically to foster social inclusion. Many of these have been set up in recent months.

*Three examples from Italy show the range of such initiatives: the Commune of Rome set up in October 2003, together with Microsoft, an initiative to get those over 60 online specifically to combat loneliness and marginalization (see www.comune.roma.it); the Region of Lazio set up a scheme in September 2003 to promote the ECDL as a means to increase digital skills among those not using the Internet (see www.regione.lazio.it); and the Region of Umbria launched a scheme, also in September 2003 entitled *senso@Iteno* (alternating one-way street) with aims to improve its services and seek citizens views on its initiatives.*

Some countries' national plans explicitly cite the importance of local implementation being aware of the "glocal" nature of the knowledge society: the access is to global knowledge but the use is local.

C.3 - Technologies and communities

Part A has addressed the development of "social software", supporting networking and connectedness online, as well as the emergence of a wide range of communities - based upon online as well as offline communication - as a concomitant phenomenon.

Communities are **social entities whose actors share common needs, interests, or practices**: they constitute the basic units of social experience⁴³. Within a global knowledge-based society, communities play a **pivotal role**. Problems such as new forms of political participation and civic engagement, the maintenance of cultural identities, or the integration of minorities need to be tackled on the community level. Moreover, communities also reshape the processes of learning and sharing knowledge in and among organizations.⁴⁴

As with any community, there are two different online communities: the local online community - or the Local Net - and the online community of interest.⁴⁵ The distinction between the two forms is that the former operates within physical boundaries based upon common location, the latter within social boundaries based upon common interest.

Community networking projects – **Local Nets** – "bring local people together to discuss their community issues and opportunities, learn about Internet technology, and decide upon and create services to address these community needs and opportunities"⁴⁶ A specific feature of Local Nets is represented by the effort to **include all members of the community** – including disadvantaged groups - and not just traditional computer users. Access to the net is usually provided for free or is heavily subsidised, either in community centers, Internet Cafes, or in people's homes.⁴⁷ **Digital and social inclusion** are therefore simultaneously promoted. Moreover, by fostering social contacts and cooperation, Local Nets provide a framework for developing social capital in the community, strengthening social cohesion at local level. **Good practices and case studies** provide the empirical evidence for the social impact of Local Nets

⁴³ Proceedings of the First international conference on Communities and technologies; C&T 2003 - <http://www-winfo.uni-siegen.de/wulf/CT2003/>

⁴⁴ "ICT and Social Capital in the Knowledge society" – Report on a Joint DG JRC/DG Employment Workshop – IPTS, Sevilla - November 2003

⁴⁵ "The Internet, Social capital and the local Community" – PhD – Sara Ferlander – Un. Of Stirling <http://www.crdlt.stir.ac.uk/publications.htm>

⁴⁶ Association for Community Networking - <http://www.afcn.org/>

⁴⁷ see 37

in the knowledge based society. Lessons can be drawn from these experiences for designing community based measures supporting "*participation of all*" in the Information Age.

C.4 - Summary and conclusions drawn by ESDIS

Big disparities among regions – especially among central and peripheral ones – characterise the European scenario; imbalances in term of **ICT take up and usage** are part of the picture. Empirical data point to the fact that **more advanced regions** are also **better positioned to gain any additional advantage** associated with the advent of the Information Society. More backward regions are slower in taking up ICTs, perpetuating their relative disadvantage.

ICTs are usually **adopted first in central cities and slowly disperse in peripheral cities and rural areas**. Following this pattern, the digital divide has aggravated the already existing divide between rural and urban regions. Additionally, new technologies show **gaping new divisions**, as is occurring with broadband access.

Policies at European, national and regional level are addressing regional development in the knowledge society. A **strong coordination** among these policies and among all actors is essential for the success of regional IS implementation. While the provision of **appropriate infrastructure** and **Public Internet Access Points** to isolated, less densely populated or remote regions remains an essential precondition for **digital cohesion** in Europe, only a **synergetic, holistic approach** can foster economic growth as well as quality of life, social equity and environmental sustainability at regional level. New types of **interplay between the local and the global**, including the **role of ICT** in this, represent the main elements of a new regional agenda.

At local level, "**inclusion**" can be seen as participation to local socio-economic processes, while **eInclusion** corresponds to access and use of new technologies for socially meaningful processes, including micro-governance (eGovernment). The Net can be used for connecting local actors and delivering local services; however, the technology enables the mobilisation of a much wider range of resources, linking to larger networks for increased social, cultural and economic opportunities.⁴⁸

The vast majority of eInclusion initiatives take place at a local level. To some extent they are especially designed to foster local cohesion and development, but they are also a simple expression of the fact that people live and work locally. Community networking projects – such as **Local Nets** - bring new opportunities for both **digital** and **social inclusion** – as well as for social capital building - in the Information Age. They represent a model for designing policy interventions aimed at fostering "*participation of all*" in our increasingly networked society.

⁴⁸ "Flexible Networking, ICTS and Local Economic Development" by Michael Gurstein; see FirstMonday http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue4_2/gurstein/index.html

PART D: CONCLUSIONS DRAWN BY ESDIS

- The comparison of 2001 and 2003 Eurobarometer data survey (see Part A) show that the **participation of European citizens in the Knowledge Society** – measured in terms of Internet access and use - **is constantly progressing** and extending to larger shares of the population; however, imbalances in ICT penetration still persist and gaps are noticeable across Member States, regions and urban/rural locations, as well as across socio-economic and demographic criteria characterising different groups. **Coordinated public intervention at different levels** – European, national, regional, local – **as well as the constant commitment and synergy of the main relevant players**: governments, private sector and civil society in its various forms, **are still needed to ensure the evolution toward a more sustainable and inclusive Knowledge Society**;
- Various policies and strategies have been implemented so far ; however, their impact on eInclusion – as well as on social inclusion – is not easily identified due to the lack, or relative inadequacy, of indicators and measurements, in spite of efforts made in this sense; the Knowledge Society is by definition a "moving target": progress in benchmarking in terms of access and (intensity of) use should be coupled with an analysis of the quality of digital participation and its impact on social inclusion and general quality of life. Statistical methods can be integrated with qualitative/ethnographic approaches; good practices should be more systematically collected, evaluated, disseminated and shared, in order to capitalise on lessons learned and build on them for designing more effective and targeted set of initiatives.
- Provision of adequate infrastructure and technology – especially to underserved or remote areas and groups at risk of exclusion – is crucial for guaranteeing European standards of social inclusion and **regional cohesion**; an **uneven broadband** deployment by telecom providers **risks creating new dangerous divides if it doesn't support full access to socially relevant services (eHealth, eGovernment, eLearning) by the groups who most need it**. Access to digital contents and services conceived on a high usability level – as well as the skills needed for profitably using them – should be made available to everybody, intensifying efforts to establish a **dense network of public access points adequately equipped and staffed for guidance and support**.
- Socially relevant access and use of ICTs depends on the level of digital and general literacy of users as well as on the availability of online contents and services responding to their specific needs. Currently implemented measures for skills acquisition should be continued and enhanced - especially for reaching the groups most at risk of exclusion. On the other side, efforts should be intensified for the identification and creation of relevant content for different categories of citizens, including low-income and underserved communities, as well as for removing the barriers preventing the less educated, older and disabled people, as well as minorities, from accessing these contents.
- **The success of strategies for digital and social inclusion is largely dependent on a context-based approach**, whereby targeted groups are considered within their geographical, social and cultural environment; this is consistent with the exponential growth of **local level initiatives, connecting communities and offering online information, services, support and interaction opportunities to its members**. Offline and online activities seem not to be competing, but in fact complementary to each other **and providing wider opportunities for social participation to a larger proportion of people**; moreover, the virtual dimension allows the linkage of **local interests with a global vision** and therefore extends the contacts with a more ample and diversified range of individuals, groups, organisations. eInclusion measures should build upon this trend and target local and community based development with an holistic approach.

Annex 1 - Web references (June 2004)

<i>EU Policy Background</i>	
Building the Knowledge Society: Social and Human Capital Interactions – Commission Staff Working Document - SEC (2003)652	http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/knowledge_society/shc_en.pdf
Building social and human capital in the knowledge society: learning, work, social cohesion and gender - Council Resolution 2003/C 175/02	http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/archive/2003/c_17520030724en.html
e-Europe+ 2003 Action Plan –June 2001 A Co-operative effort by the Candidate Countries to implement the Information Society in Europe	http://europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/international/regulatory/eeuropeplus/index_en.htm
e-Europe 2005 Action Plan: An information society for all -COM (2002) 263 Final	http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2005/index_en.htm
e-Inclusion - The Information Society's potential for social inclusion in Europe Commission Staff Working Document SEC(2001)1428	http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/knowledge_society/eincl_en.pdf
e-Inclusion - exploiting the opportunities of the information society for social inclusion - Council Resolution (2001/C 292/02)	http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/knowledge_society/res_eincl_en.pdf
Europe's Regions and the Information Society	http://www.europa.eu.int/information_society/regwor/reg/index_en.htm

Fight against poverty and social exclusion: common objectives for the second round of national Action Plans - endorsed by the Council in November 2002	http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/counciltext_en.pdf
Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States - Council Decision 2003/578/EC	http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2003/l_197/l_19720030805en00130021.pdf
Joint Report on Social Inclusion summarising the results of the examination of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion 2003-2005 – SEC (2003) 1425	http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/com_2003_773_jir_en.pdf
National Action Plans for Social Inclusion 2003-2005	http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2001/jun/napsincl2001_en.html
Social Inclusion Process	http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/index_en.htm

<i>EU sponsored research</i>	
BEEP - Best e- Europe Practices Project – IST Programme	http://www.beep-eu.org/
BISER - Benchmarking the Information Society: e-Europe Indicators for European Regions Project – IST Programme	http://www.biser-eu.com/
e-Living – Life in a Digital Europe Project – IST Programme	http://www.eurescom.de/e-living/
EMTEL - European Media Technology and Everyday Network – Improving Human Potential Programme	http://www.emtel2.org/
JANUS – Joint Analytical Network for using Socio-economic Research	http://www.janus-eu.org/Temp2/index-f.htm
SIBIS – Statistical Indicators benchmarking the Information Society Project – IST Programme	www.sibis-eu.org/
SIGIS – Strategies of Inclusion: Gender and the Information Society Project – IST Programme	http://www.rcss.ed.ac.uk/sigis/
<i>Events</i>	
First international conference on Communities and technologies; C&T 2003	http://www-winfo.uni-siegen.de/wulf/CT2003/

ICT and Social Capital in the Knowledge society – Report on a Joint DG JRC/DG Employment Workshop, IPTS, Seville – 3-4 November 2003	http://fiste.jrc.es/download/eur21064en.pdf
"The Digital Divide: Opportunities and Threats at the Verge of EU Enlargement" Janus Workshop – Brussels, 23 Jan 2003	http://www.janus-eu.org/Documents/JANUS_workshop_report_23_Jan_2004.pdf
World Summit on the information Society	http://www.itu.int/wsis/
<i>Books, articles, studies, other sources quoted</i>	
Association for Community Networking	http://www.afcn.org/
"Bowling Alone: America's declining social capital" by R. Putnam, (1995) <i>Journal of Democracy</i> Vol. 6.1	http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/assoc/bowling.html
"Capitalizing on the Net: Social Contact, Civic Engagement and Sense of Community" in B. Wellman & C. Haythornwaite (eds.) (2002), <i>The Internet and Everyday Life</i> , Blackwell	http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/publications/interneteverydaytoc/everyday-blurb-toc.htm http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/publications/interneteverydaytoc/everyday-blurb-toc.htm
"Disparities in ICT Take-up and Usage Between EU Regions" by I. Milicevic and K. Gareis – BISER Project	http://www.biser-eu.com/resultsdoc/3%20-%20Nesis_paper.pdf
"Diffusion of Innovations" by Everett M. Roger – The Free Press – 1995	http://www.getabstract.com/www/general/en/ShowAbstract.jsp?dataId=3250

<p>"Flexible Networking, ICTS and Local Economic Development" by Michael Gurstein, FirstMonday</p>	<p>http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue4_2/gurstein/index.html</p>
<p>"Internet and Society: A Preliminary Report", by N. Nie & L. Erbring, Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society (2000)</p>	<p>http://www.stanford.edu/group/siqss/Press_Release/Preliminary_Report.pdf</p>
<p>"Internet Evolution and Social Impact" by S.Kiesler, R.Kraut, J.Cummings, B.Boneva, V.Helgeson, A. Crawford, Carnegie Mellon University (2001)</p>	<p>http://homenet.hcii.cs.cmu.edu/progress/ebusinesspaper.pdf</p>
<p>"Modelli Locali di Sviluppo" by Garofoli G. – Angeli ed. – 1991</p>	<p>http://www.mulino.it/edizioni/volumi/scheda_volume.php?vista=scheda&ISBNART=09566-7</p>
<p>"Online Content for Low-income and Underserved Americans: the Digital Divide's New Frontier" – a Publication of The Children's Partnership</p>	<p>http://www.childrenspartnership.org/pub/low_income/</p>
<p>"The Digital Divide in the European enlarged Economic Scenario: an Assessment of the socio-economic Effects" – Report for ESA by P. Cohendet, Univ. Louis Pasteur, Strasbourg – 2003</p>	<p>http://telecom.esa.int/telecom/media/document/digdiv220903final.pdf</p>
<p>"The Economic Geography of the Internet Age" by Edward. E.Leamer & MichaelStorper – UCCLA – 2001</p>	<p>http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/research/ciber/wponline/pdf/00-13.pdf</p>
<p>"The Internet, Social capital and the local Community" – PhD by Sara Ferlander – University of Stirling</p>	<p>http://www.crdlt.stir.ac.uk/publications.htm</p>

"The Rise of the Creative Class" by Richard Florida – Basic Books – 2002	http://www.creativeclass.org/
"You Don't Know Me, but... Social Capital & Social Software" – by W. Davies - Work Foundation (2003)	http://theworkfoundation.com/research/isociety/social_capital_main.jsp

Annex 2: Background paper - Practices⁴⁹

- (1) Local and regional level
- (2) National level
- (3) eAccessibility
- (4) Gender

1. Local and regional level

Belgium

- The “**Seneffe l’interactive**” project started in 1997 in the town of Seneffe (Hainaut) and was developed along three main axes:
 - (a) the creation of “citizens spaces” for free broadband Internet access, provision of training and other community activities;
 - (b) the availability of local public services online on the Town Council web site;
 - (c) the setting up of a number of PIAPs in different public building and large enterprises around the town for quick access to public services online.
<http://www.seneffe.be/>
- The Région de Bruxelles-Capitale Project was launched in 2003 for the provision of broadband Internet access - with the necessary equipment and helpdesk support - to all primary and secondary schools of the region.
- The **Technofutur 3** Project, carried out in the **Région de Charleroi** (Wallonie-Belgique) and jointly supported by the Wallonie Region and the Social Fund, aims at awareness creation, high level training and knowledge dissemination in the field of ICT in for the modernisation of regional economy - <http://www.technofutur3.be/>
- The **ESNET** Network promotes in the **regions of Wallonia, Brussels and Flanders** the appropriation of ITC by NGOs and other actors in the field of social economy, supporting at the same time initiatives for fighting different forms of digital divide - <http://www.esnet.be/index.php>
- The city of **Leuven** organises ICT training activities available for free to unemployed people.
- The **Plan mobilisateur pour les TIC en Région wallonne (PMTIC)** - <http://www.pmtic.net/modules/freecontent/index.php?id=3> - aims at awareness raising and training provision in the ICT field for unemployed people satisfying specific criteria. Specialised centres of the Université de Liège (project coordinator) and of the Université Libre de Bruxelles provide the required expertise.

⁴⁹ The document includes only information provided by ESDIS representatives in the framework of the elaboration of the “eInclusion revisited: the local dimension of the information Society” report.

- The publication “**Pratiquer l’e-inclusion**”, available online at http://www.internet-observatory.be/internet_observatory/actualities/pdf/report_e-inclusion_fr.pdf, is a collection of eInclusion instruments, initiatives and practices at federal and regional level in Belgium, coordinated by ESNET with the support of the Belgian Government - S.P.P. Integration Sociale.

Denmark

- The **Regional IT Drive** for the regions of Jutland and Funen was launched in 2002 with the aim of disseminating knowledge about advanced IT and the use of IT within the business community. Four regional IT research and development centres have been established, in Århus, Sønderborg, Odense and Aalborg, to strengthen collaboration between universities and businesses. As an element of the IT Drive, the Government has established an IT corridor to support concrete, innovative IT development projects carried out jointly between knowledge institutions and companies in Jutland and Funen.

Germany

- **IT-LandFrauen** : The three-year pilot project "new media for women in rural areas" (<http://www.landportal.de/index1.html>) contributes to equal participation of women in rural regions in the economy and the labor market. The project aims at fighting the digital divide between urban and rural areas by developing IT competencies of women in the targeted regions, providing them with the ability to market their products and services on the web. The project is cofinanced by the European Social Fund.

The networks established under the BMBF programme "**Learning Regions – Providing Support for Networks**" (http://www.lernende-regionen.info/dlr/5_37_118.php) combines the provision of digital literacy with the teaching of specific subjects and the development of opportunities for the labour market and everyday life for people in the targeted areas . Women wishing to re-join the labour market after a period of parental leave are particularly concerned by some of these actions.

Italy

- **Regional Competence Centres for eGovernment and the information Society:** the RCCs' main task is to provide assistance and support to the Region and Local Authorities in the implementation of policies for the Information Society and eGovernment at a local level. The RCCs' activities in this domain are defined and managed at the local level, and vary with respect to the policy aims and approaches of each Region. Part of the technical assistance is obviously related also to the implementation of the national eGovernment plan, and to its operational implications for Local Authorities. The development of the RCCs was targeted by a specific project to be carried out in the period 2002/2003 with regional and national resources and the participation of local authorities, experts and a coordinating central team.(see <http://www.crcitalia.it/>)
- The Roma City Council has launched the initiative “**Nonni su Internet**” (Grandparents on Internet) providing 600 Roman citizens “over 60” with free ICT training for six months; the skills acquired should allow these citizens to make use of Internet also as a means for fighting social isolation (www.comu.roma.it)

- The Lazio region is setting up an interregional project with the Lombardia, Veneto and Piemonte regions for the provision of digital literacy through the implementation of ECDL (www.regione.lazio.it)
- The Umbria region, has launched the “**Senso@lternato**” project, which implements an interactive e-mail information service to the citizens on local government activities (www.crumbria.it).
- The Bologna City Council has announced that 50% of the city dwellers uses Internet and that the City Council website is visited 300.000 times every day.

Spain

- The **Digital Cities Programme** 2001-2006 aims at implementing broadband based services such as e-government, e-learning, e-health, e-commerce and e-work at town level; it also supports the development of online applications in the field of culture, tourism, leisure activities and for groups with special needs. One city in each Comunidad Autonoma is targeted as a starting point, as well as the towns of Ceuta and Melilla.
- The **Forintel Pymes XXI** project, launched in 2001, aims at providing ICT training to 4000 employees of SMEs based in town of 2000 to 50.000 inhabitants belonging to regions Objective 1. In 2002, 2000 employees were trained, 40% of them through learning modules online.
- The project for **Telecommunication Training of Workers in North-East Spain** (also in the framework of the Forintel programme) targets 3.690 employees of SMEs lagging behind in the adoption of Information Society technologies and based in three regions Objective 1 (Castilla y Leon, Asturias and Galicia)
- The project **Red Conecta**, launched in 2001 within the Profit programme, supports the implementation of a platform and a methodology for providing digital literacy to groups at risk of exclusion. 24 Conecta centers are currently operational in different towns belonging to various Comunidades Autonomas; 3000 people have participated to the project in its first year of activity.
- The Region of Extremadura (www.rte-extremadura.org) launched the project **GnuLinex** (www.linex.org - FLOSS: Open Source Software) to stimulate the Information Society with a double aim: 1) to contribute to the development of the Educational Technological Network, with a ratio of two computers per pupil in all the classrooms of the educational centres, as well as 2) a socio-economic aim through the circulation of free software in Extremadura, via the "Elimination of Technological Illiteracy Plan", the SMES and the Administration.
- The existence of a complete software package that can be copied, amended and distributed freely and without any legal restriction, contributes to avoiding economic barriers as the high cost of the licences of software. The lifting of such barriers already is providing benefits to the first companies that have known how to discover in Free Open Source Software new business opportunities.

In 2004, the Region of Extremadura was awarded by the European Commission (DG Regional Policy) the Prize for Regional Innovation in the category "Information Society" for the FLOSS software system "GnuLinux".

United Kingdom

- The Scottish Executive has launched an **interactive Digital Television** pilot to test the public service delivery potential of the channel since lower income households in Scotland are much more likely to have digital television than they are to have access to the internet. Recent data presented shows that UK-wide, 28 % of the DE social group use the internet anywhere but that 38% have a digital TV. (The equivalent figures for the AB social grouping are 74% using the internet anywhere and 41% of citizens having a digital tv). The Scottish Executive is also conducting SMS and Mobile phone pilots.
- The **Angus 50+ project** aims to encourage people in the 50+ age group to use IT and increase access to services and information. The project builds on the Dialogue Youth initiative, and will include issuing smartcards and a handbook to all those over 50 in Angus and developing a website targeted at that age group.
- The Scottish Executive is already funding a pilot project "**Renewing e-democracy**" in Stirlingshire to test the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support Community Councils to engage with their communities and participate in government decision-making and to facilitate the renewal of democracy at the community level.
- The Scottish Executive's **Public Internet Access Point (PIAP) initiative** aims to put free or low cost internet access into venues where people already go as part of their everyday lives e.g. shops, pubs/hotels, community centres, post offices. There are now over 750 venues in Scotland in addition to other public access networks such as the People's Network in public libraries.
- Other projects include work with the Scottish Libraries and Information Council to develop qualifications in information seeking skills and citizenship, and to develop enhanced public internet access points trialling Wi-Fi broadband and accessibility kit;

The Scottish Executive has also supported the production and distribution of a basic skills course on CD-ROM, 'Internet made Easy' which proved very popular and which has now also been made available to other regions

2. National level

Belgium

- The « Services fédéraux des affaires scientifiques, techniques et culturelles » (SSTC) adopted a multiannual programme 2001-2006 for supporting the development of the Information Society through the adoption and use of ICTs in a number of targeted sectors. The project Up Case - <http://www.upcase.be/index.php?module=htmlpages&func=display&pid=12> (User Platform and Collaborative Applications for the Social Economy Sector) – supports

the adoption of web-based free software by non-profit associations intending to create their own collaborative site.

See publication “Pratiquer l’e-inclusion”, available online at http://www.internet-observatory.be/internet_observatory/actualities/pdf/report_e-inclusion_fr.pdf.

The document is collection of eInclusion instruments, initiatives and practices at federal and regional level in Belgium, coordinated by ESNET with the support of the Belgian Government - S.P.P. Integration Sociale.

Czech Republic

- In order to build a fully-fledged **e-Government** allowing all citizens and residents a fast and simple communication with the state authorities the Ministry of Informatics has provided the central address for public services: <http://portal.gov.cz>.

The portal of the public administration is working in testing phase, people can get there e.g. web pages of all Labour Offices (Job centers and Unemployment benefits and State Social Support), European Job Mobility Portal, Access to Registers of Economic Entities, all ministries etc., on web pages of state authorities you can access forms to download, on-line forms and to a lesser extent even full electronic case handling.

- The **Libraries Act** requires that all libraries providing public library and information services should be able to provide services over the Internet before the end of 2006. During 2004 about 1700 libraries are going to be connected to the Internet and consequently about 76% of the population will live in a place where a library offers public Internet access.

Estonia

- In 1996-2000, as part of a Government-supported project ‘**Tiger Leap**’, all schools in Estonia were computerised and connected to the Internet. Today, training in ICT is compulsory at every level of formal education. It is also being increasingly used in labour market programmes for the unemployed
http://www.tiigrihype.ee/eng/tiiger_pluss/strateegia.html (2001-2005)
- A public-private partnership project ‘**Look@world**’ aims at providing free basic ITC courses for 100 .000 non-users, targeting 50-74-year-olds and blue-collar workers. The initiative is also intended to double the current number of Public Internet Access Points. The project thus helps to ensure access to the Internet and on- line services for people who cannot afford to pay for training and use of ICT. - <http://www.vaatamaailma.ee/>

Finland

- On 29 January 2004, the Finnish Government adopted a resolution on **the national broadband strategy**. The strategy is an essential element of the Government’s information society policy. According to the national broadband strategy, the aim is that **every Finn will have access to high-speed, easy-to-use and affordable data transfer connections by the end of 2005** - by then there would be one million broadband subscriptions in Finland. The target is that Finland will become a European leader in the availability and use of high-speed telecommunications.

- **National strategy for education, training and research in the information society 2000 – 2004:** the Finnish strategy for raising the level of knowledge is the wide application of information and communication technologies in education and research. The growing competence requirements of the information society will be met by systematically developing the prerequisites of lifelong learning. Citizens will have access to network and new media services if they so desire. **Each citizen will have an electronic mail address by the year 2004.**

Germany

- In 1999 Germany started the programme “**Informationsgesellschaft für alle**” (Information Society for All), addressing the groups most affected by the digital divide. Various sustainable activities have been started by this programme - and by the initiative D21 - concerning PIAPs, PC education, Internet at school, etc. The federal government itself has started the Initiative “Bund online 2005”, which supports the process of eGovernment introduction and development.

Italy

- Different strategies are being implemented for supporting technological innovation and the development of an inclusive Information Society. Among the many ongoing initiatives: the **Plan for Digital Innovation of Enterprises**; the campaign “**PC to young people**” - within the programme “**Fly with Internet**” - which targeted 572.000 teen-agers in 2003, including 277.000 girls, and which foresees, besides a bonus for the purchase of a PC, a free training course for the preparation of the ECDL test; the initiative “**PCs to the teachers**”, which will continue in 2004 for a further penetration of ICT in didactic activities. Specific measures will also support the diffusion of digital terrestrial TV, broadband access, as well as strategic projects in the eGovernment and advanced IT fields. The development of a national statistical database for the monitoring of ICT penetration in Italy has also been announced.

Spain

- “**España.es**” is the new Information Society plan for the period 2004-2006, which replaces the previous Plan INFO XXI. It is characterised by the particular attention given to the advantages obtained by integrating regional collectivities into the Information Society (see www.red.es); along this line, it foresees – through the programme **Navega.es** - the creation of 2000 additional PIAPs in rural areas, with the objective of providing broadband access – as well as adequate training - to all municipalities of 500 to 10.000 inhabitants, promoting social and territorial cohesion.
- The **National eInclusion Plan 2003-2005** combines initiatives for geographical inclusion – in the framework of the Comunidades Autonomas and the Local Administrations – with sectorial initiatives supporting the access to ICTs by people at risk of exclusion, by ONGs, in rural areas and for training and employment search.
- Within the **National Plan I+D+I** the strategic lines **eInclusion** and **eCare** are related to the National eInclusion Plan, but particularly focus rural implementation and integration into the health care system respectively.

- The law regulating the “**Information Society Services and eCommerce**” binds the main telecom operator to submit a plan of technological implementation of the network for accessing the fixed telephony network, in substitution of cellular phone coverage; this is in conformance with of the principle of considering Internet access as “universal service”. On this basis, it is expected that Internet access will be available to 100% of the population by the end of 2004.

United Kingdom

- Through e-learning, **learndirect** (<http://www.learndirect.co.uk/>) is changing the way that individuals and businesses learn. The overall strategy is to widen participation in learning through the use of new technologies and e-learning. Learning materials are delivered on-line, over the Internet in bite-sized chunks, to provide learning at a time, pace and place to suit individual needs. The aim is to inspire existing learners to develop their skills further; win over new and excluded learners, and transform the accessibility of learning in everyday life and work.

The network currently numbers over 2,000 learndirect centres grouped into a number of "Hubs", offering more than 500 courses covering a variety of areas including IT skills, business and technical skills and the basics of reading, writing and numbers. In 2003-04 learndirect reached nearly 500,000 learners.

- The **National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal** (published 2001) cited the expansion of community based learning and ICT skills as a policy objective and made the following commitments:
 - (1) to establish 6,000 UK online centres by 2002;
 - (2) that every public library should have internet access (where practical) by 2002;
 - (3) that the national strategy for adult basic skills should improve the basic skills of 750,000 adults.

3. eAccessibility

Belgium

- The Belgian Federal Administration Portal (<http://www.belgium.be/eportal/index.jsp>) was awarded in December 2003 the quality label *blindsurfer* (<http://www.blindsurfer.be/>), which provides visually and hearing impaired persons with the certainty that a Website is easily accessible for them. The Walloon Region is committed to implementing the European recommendations in the field of eAccessibility, extending the *blindsurfer* requirements to all existing public websites.

Germany

- In the Federal law on Equal opportunities for people with disabilities (**Bundesbehindertengleichstellungsgesetz** - BGG, in force since 1.5.2001) barrier free information technology has become a special issue. BGG §11 and the decree BITV set the legal basis and the standards for a barrier free internet in the public sector. In consequence, the “Länder” have started to produce similar legislation within their own areas of responsibility. The revision of the copyright law has allowed the availability of documents in alternative formats under certain conditions for persons with disabilities.
- One interesting example of “best practice” is provided by the police in NRW, which presented a new web site with high accessibility, also including basic information in German sign language for deaf people. www.polizei.nrw.de. (For other Barrier free information technology project see www.abi-projekt.de and www.BIK-online.de)

Italy

- Specific initiatives have been launched in 2003, including the streamlining of procedures for the **tax free purchase of a PC** by people with disabilities and the removal of physical as well as **digital barriers** to access by disabled people.

Spain

- **The National Plan for Accessibility 2004-2012** aims at reaching the following main objectives: reinforcing the paradigm of “**design for all**” and implementing it in new environments, products and services; establishing accessibility as a basic criterion for the quality of public administration; establishing a system for the promotion of accessibility and its implementation countrywide; adapting existing environments, products and services to the “design for all” criteria; **promoting accessibility to new technologies**. Moreover, the currently implemented Information Society programmes include and prioritise projects aiming at the integration of people with disabilities.
- The project **Red sorda** has been launched within the Profit programme by the Spanish Confederation of People with Hearing Impairments. It aims at creating a gateway to the Information Society for people affected by this specific disability. In 2003, the creation of 26 local networks and 5 tele-centres was targeted, a wider offer of distant learning activities, the setting up of an information system for the care of elderly and disabled people. The translation into Sign Language of the programme Internet para Todos (Internet for All) and its dissemination was also foreseen.

United Kingdom

- The The Cybrarian Project's vision is “to assist in decreasing the digital divide by facilitating access to the internet and to learning opportunities for those who currently do not, or cannot, use the internet because of a lack of skills or confidence or because of physical or cognitive disabilities”. Through innovative use of new technology the Cybrarian project aims to develop and market a search and interaction facility that will help people to overcome the barriers they face (due to lack of confidence, lack of skills and/or lack of motivation) in using online services. (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/cybrarianproject>)

4. Gender

Belgium

- The **ADA** project aims to create a network for exchange, reflection and initiation in the field of gender and ICT. It encompasses four main lines of action: raising awareness, information, research and development, training (www.ada-online.be/)
- The **Electronica** project has the goal to raise awareness on the issue of gender and ICT among all actors involved, including entrepreneurs. Co-financed by the Social Fund, it is run in co-operation with training associations and with **ADA** (http://www.ada-online.org/frada/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=63&var_recherche=electronica)

Germany

- **IT-LandFrauen**: The three-year pilot project "new media for women in rural areas" (<http://www.landportal.de/index1.html>) contributes to equal participation of women in rural regions to the economy and the labour market. The project aims at fighting the digital divide between urban and rural areas by developing IT competencies of women in rural regions, providing them with the ability of marketing their products and services on the web.
- The “**Gender-Mainstreaming-Sonderauswertung des (N)ONLINER Atlas 2003: Internetnutzung von Frauen und Männern in Deutschland**” (2003 Atlas of the Internet Usage of Men and Women in Germany – <http://www.frauen-technik-impulse.de/n-onliner>) is a survey carried out by the “Frauen geben Technik neue Impulse e.V.” (Women give New Impetus to Technology) association – in collaboration with the D21 Initiative and TNS Emnid - on digital participation and digital divide in German regions as related to gender, income, educational level, employment status, age. Considering the persisting gender divide across all other criteria considered, the Federal Government has launched a number of measures for enhancing the participation of women to the Information Society and Technology.

Spain

- In 2004 the (then) Ministry of Science and Technology (currently Ministry of Industry, Tourism signed an agreement with the Institute of Women (<http://www.mtas.es/mujer/default.htm> - Ministry of Work and Social Affairs) aiming to promote a series of **actions eliminating digital illiteracy** in Internet and facilitating the knowledge on services of the Information and Telecommunication Society. The target group is the collective of Spanish women, but especially those at risk of exclusion. Training will be carried out through 8 "telecentros" managed by that Institute of Women distributed on the whole national territory.

Annex 3: Statistical annex

See separate document (part II)