Report on the public consultation on European e-Inclusion Policy

June 2009

e-inclusion
Be part of it!

European Commission
Information Society and Media

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1. Executive summary

A public consultation was launched on 4 March 2009 through the European Commission's interactive Internet platform "Your voice". It closed on 6 April 2009 and its main objective was to gather views on the role of e-Inclusion in the future European strategy on the information society that will succeed the "i2010"[1] initiative. The survey was also aimed at gathering opinions on European programmes and activities supporting e-Inclusion and cooperation modalities between European Commission services and relevant stakeholders regarding e-Inclusion activities.
Overall, 103 responses were received. They represent various stakeholder groups, including public authorities (26,2%), non-for-profit academic or research organisations (26,2%), individual academics or researchers (19,4%), commercial operators or industry associations(11,7%), users organisations (5,8%), private individuals (4,9%). Some stakeholders also sent position papers.

Among those who responded to this consultation, there was a general understanding that European policy on e-inclusion is useful and should be continued and enhanced in post 'i2010' initiative. There was an overwhelming consensus that in a context of financial and economic crisis greater e-Inclusion also generates systemic innovation, new business models and new modalities for service delivery. Respondents provided valuable inputs defining the future possible e-inclusion policies and dissemination activities.

Key results

- ICTs can have a significant impact on education and learning patterns, employment and economic situation and social participation and interaction;
- Usability and user-friendliness of internet websites remains an important barrier to fully inclusive internet services;
- Mobile telephones, mobile devices and the internet are most relevant ICT services and products that can improve e-inclusion;
- Digital competences and lowly educated people should be perceived as the priority target for e-inclusion activities;
- Financial crisis will have negative consequences relating to e-Inclusion activities; current financial situation should be used as a stimulus to use ICTs more effectively;
- National and regional authorities and providers of public services are the most capable of introducing positive developments in e-inclusion;
- Improvements in e-inclusion will require cross-sector and international collaboration;
- Social inclusion, equality policy, education policy and employment policy are the most relevant European policies in relation to e-Inclusion;
- Information society policy should address wider social issues, even where the ICT component is not central, and pursue a comprehensive e-inclusion agenda.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm

2. Introduction

e-Inclusion relates to the gap between certain socio-demographic groups and the average population regarding the usage of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) - the narrower the gap, the greater the level of e-Inclusion of the referred groups.

The importance of e-Inclusion was recognised in the 'i2010' initiative[2]; Member States, the European Commission, industry, and NGOs representing users have undertaken several actions to advance e-Inclusion. A landmark was the 2006 Ministerial "Riga Declaration" on ICT for an inclusive information society[3], which set concrete targets for Internet usage and availability, digital literacy, and accessibility of ICT by 2010.

In 2007, the European Commission launched the ***i2010 e-Inclusion Initiative***[4] to raise political awareness on e-Inclusion, encourage replication of e-Inclusion success stories throughout the EU, and pave the way for future actions.

Thanks to research on e-Accessibility, ICT in support of the elderly, or e-Health, key advances are generated for the benefit of weaker users, which also provide breakthroughs in consumer and electronics and mainstream technologies.[5]
Many interesting activities are being promoted by local and regional authorities as well as by civil society organisations and business stakeholders. The e-Inclusion Awards[6] demonstrated the breadth and depth of these commendable efforts as well as their potential for unleashing social and economic change needed for future growth.
However, e-Inclusion is not yet a "mission accomplished" (40% of the EU population do not fully benefit from the information society). If current trends continue, it will be very difficult to achieve most of the Riga targets at overall EU level, although there are wide divergences across Europe and some regions are performing well. Social differences in ICT use persist and in some cases are even widening.

Following the Riga Declaration, the vision is to design and implement e-Inclusion policies, and support initiatives, aimed at empowering the individual. With people as a focal point technology can help achieve wide social and economic gains. In the "post-i2010" European policy on the Information Society e-Inclusion should continue to have an important place, as part of a demand-driven approach seeking to stimulate growth while fostering social cohesion. The goal of this consultation was to collect the views and different perspectives on future European strategy on the e-Inclusion policy.

3. Challenges

3.1. Impact of ICT on socio-economic challenges

Respondents were asked to identify the key socioeconomic challenges influenced by the ICTs. There is an overall agreement among contributors that there are **three areas where ICTs are of the highest importance**:

- **Education and learning patterns,**
- **Employment, economic and working patterns, globalisation,**
- **Social participation and interaction, access to information**.

2 http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/strategy/index_en.htm

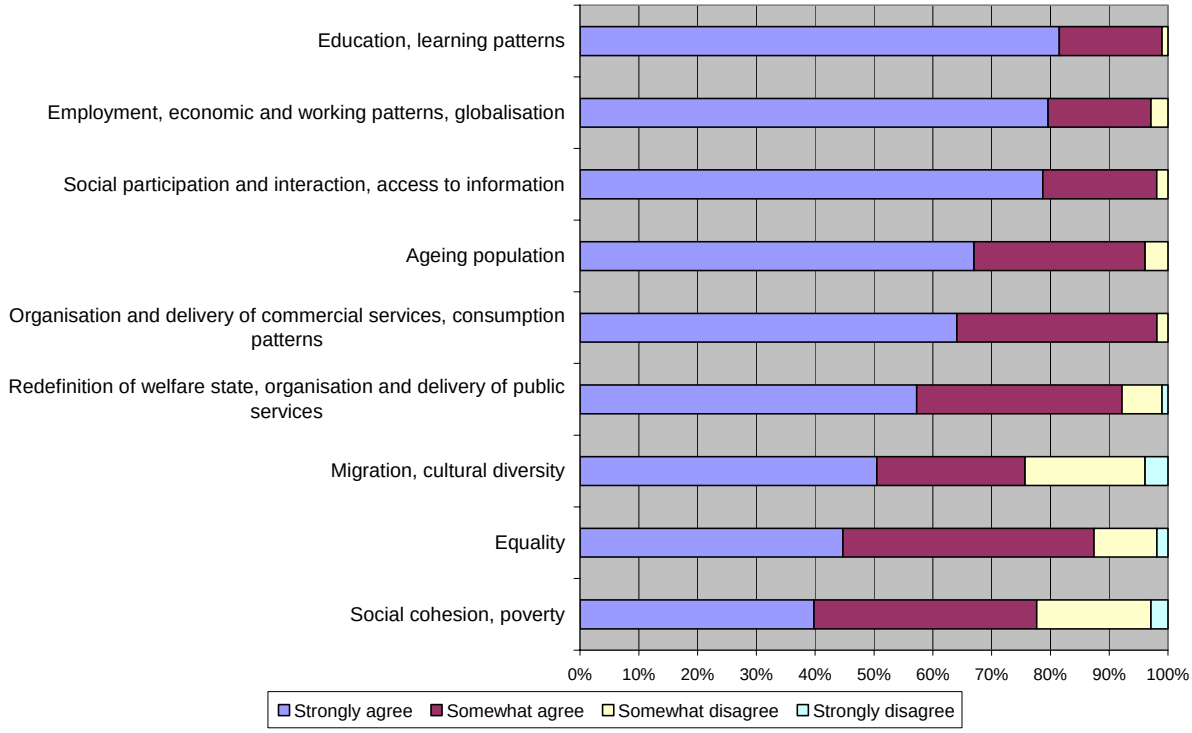
3 Riga Ministerial conference "ICT for an Inclusive Society" (11-13.6.2006).

4 COM(2007) 694 final

5 European Commission, 2008, Be Part of It (brochure), http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/docs/be_part_of_it.pdf

6 http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/e-inclusion/2008/exhibition/awards/index_en.htm

Figure 1. ICT can have a significant impact on the following socioeconomic challenges.



Almost half of the respondents decided to identify additional key challenges impacted by the ICTs, which were not mentioned in the list. Contributors listed a range of **missing areas** they believed should be also taken into consideration from the point of view of e-inclusion policy. Top of the list was **"Integration of persons with disabilities"**. The following quote represents the common perspective of various stakeholders who pointed this area:

> *"Access to the Information Society is a fundamental right for older and disabled users to live independently and fully participate in society on an equitable basis with their peers. ICT represent a real opportunity to combat isolation and social exclusion. They play a crucial role in the everyday life of older people and persons with disabilities, who use it to a higher extent than people in general, and ICT represent gateways to education, work and leisure. They enable older and disabled users to include all parts of social life."*

An additional **key challenge** identified by large group of respondents was **"Climate change and energy efficiency"**. Several contributors mentioned also health care as a field where the development of ICTs can be of great importance. Others pointed to additional areas such us: regional and rural development, the development of social bonds and community sharing, e-administration and e-government.

3.2. Reasons for the persistence of digital divides

In spite of rapid ICT uptake in last years various digital divides persist and evolve into different forms of digital exclusion. In order to define the main reasons of the persistence of digital divides respondents were asked to select up to three most important issues. There is a common understanding (68,9 %) that **usability and user-friendliness of internet websites remains an important barrier to fully inclusive internet services**. Two additional barriers – the lack of awareness of available possibilities or lack of interest and the cost of ICT services and products – are perceived as equally important problems causing digital divides.

Table 1. What are the main reasons for the persistence of digital divides?

Usability and user-friendliness remains a big barrier	68,90%
Relevance: People are unaware of the available possibilities and potential benefits, or are not interested	59,20%
Affordability: The cost of ICT services and products are a barrier	55,30%
Availability: Getting access to ICT remains a problem	30,10%
Interoperability of ICT services systems and devices is often a problem	26,20%
Other:	19,40%
Physical accessibility is insufficient	13,60%

Note: Respondents were asked to select up to three reasons and/or define others.

Over and above these aspects, further issues that may warrant attention were indicated in the comments made. Most of the comments concerned the **low level of digital literacy**, **the lack of necessary skills** that is a serious obstacle. One representative of final user's organisation pointed out the lack of European legislative framework to ensure web-accessibility for disabled users.

> *"A big concern is that many internal ICT systems in work places are not accessible so they exclude people with* disabilities *from work. The only solution to combat exclusion is to include accessibility and usability in legislation and encourage design for all at a European and global level."*

3.3. Technologies most relevant to improve e-Inclusion

Asked to point out ICT services and products that are most relevant to improve e-inclusion the majority of contributors indicated **mobile telephones and mobile devices**. (67%). The second important service is the **internet**, with 65% of contributors who have identified it as a tool that improves e-inclusion. **Personal computers** are in the third place chosen by 43% of respondents.

Table 2. Which ICT services and products you consider most relevant to improve e-Inclusion?

Mobile telephones and other mobile devices	67%
The web	65%
Personal computers	42,70%
Home equipment with embedded ICT	27,20%
Television	23,30%
Other:	18,40%
Self-service electronic terminals	14,60%
Office equipment with embedded ICT	9,70%
Fixed telephones	4,90%

Note: Respondents were asked to select up to three services and/or define others.

The consultation provided free text space to respondents to elaborate in more detail on the technologies relevant to improve e-Inclusion. The following common threads can be identified:

Technologies relevant to improve e-Inclusion:

- The important and most relevant problem is having web standards fully implemented on a range of devices by the main players in order to assure the interoperability between services and devices.
- Particular attention should be given to accessibility of office equipment and systems, as it remains the main barrier for workers with disabilities to get a job.
- Mobile devices have great penetration and great acceptance of people with functional diversity and therefore may act as a device for access to affordable services for the knowledge society. Similarly, transaction terminals such as ATMs (automated teller machines) and public kiosks for e-government services are a priority on accessibility.
- Digital TV and especially the internet are key services, which are relevant to support e-Inclusion.
- It is necessary to enhance the accessibility of mobile devices, interoperability and intelligent environments. Multimodality in this area (with special attention to the inclusion of haptic information) is listed as one of the technological advances that may offer new avenues for accessibility.
- e-Inclusion needs to be able to utilise the most common forms of technology, namely the ones that people use, carry, and regularly upgrade (i.e. mobile phones) where the networks among people are self-generated and can be extensive, and capable of crossing social and economic divides.

3.4. Financial crisis and e-Inclusion activities

Respondents were also encouraged to comment on how the financial crisis affects e-inclusion activities.
Many contributors agreed that the **financial crisis will have negative consequences relating to e-Inclusion activities**.

> *"In these* difficult *financial times with mounting budget deficits, rising unemployment and difficulties for families to tie both ends, there could be an increase of exclusion from ICT services and products for families that need to focus their financial resources on food, housing etc."*

Respondents have expressed the concern that **due to the crisis public spending on e-inclusion initiatives will be reduced**. In addition, there will be greater pressure to demonstrate value for money in public e-Inclusion programmes. Moreover companies facing financial difficulties will be less likely to invest in products or services with lower take up. Respondents fear that in these circumstances disabled people can be the "easy" victims who will pay for the crisis.
Yet, some of the contributors suggest that **current financial situation should be used as a stimulus to use ICTs more effectively** as it can be one of the solutions to the impending careers gap and the loss of tax revenue due to unemployment and increase in benefits. The falling prices of the ICT equipment should be treated as an opportunity to close digital divides.
Several contributors believe that **e-inclusion policies should be strengthened in this time of financial crisis** in order to ensure social inclusion of everyone into the Information Society. Therefore e-inclusion must be supported by all European institutions and governments in order to ensure employment opportunities.

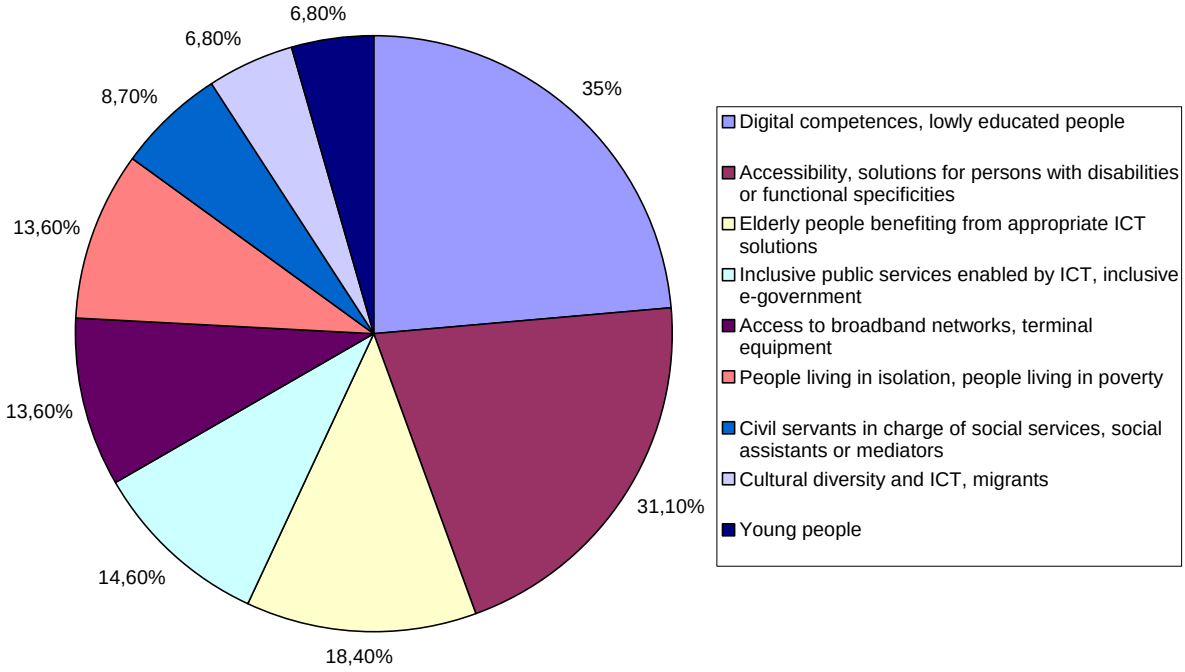
> *"The financial crisis will make it more difficult for many people to afford computers, subscription fees and broadband access to the Web. On the other hand, the EC's actions in this area (e.g., extending broadband to all by 2010) could mitigate or offset the impact of the financial crisis. Training the e-excluded on how to use the new technologies and especially navigating around the Web is super important. Community centres equipped with computers and broadband access could be helpful as an interim measure, but the greatest socio-economic potential will be achieved when everyone has their own computer and connection to the Web. Why couldn't schools be opened after school hours so that the e-excluded could be given classes or lessons in IT use?"*

4. Priorities

4.1. Priority topics and target groups

As for the topic areas or socio-demographic groups that require most attention of e-inclusion policy over one third of the respondents (35%) agreed that **digital competences and lowly educated people should be perceived as the priority target** for e-inclusion activities. The second almost equally important area is **accessibility** and finding solutions for persons with disabilities or functional specificities. The third priority topic indicated by the respondents (18,4%) are **elderly people** who can benefit from appropriate ICT solutions.

Table 3. Which topics areas/socio-demographic groups require most attention?



Note: Respondents were asked to rank three options by priority. The above graph presents highest ranked topics.

4.2. Responsibilities and influence

The contributors were asked to identify the players that have the most direct influence in improving e-inclusion. Respondents could select up to three players. Almost **two thirds of the respondents pointed to national and regional authorities and providers of public services** as those most capable of introducing positive developments in this area. The second important group of players are **providers of ICT services and products**. Half of the respondents underlie the role of **international and European authorities**, who can have significant impact on e-inclusion. Local authorities and NGOs dealing with target socio-demographic groups are perceived as important players by more than one third of respondents.

Among the respondents who provided comments in the free text area there is an understating that **the improvements in e-inclusion will require cross-level and international collaboration**.

> *"No single body can be responsible. Commerce and government must both contribute resources to create viable solutions. EU and International bodies contribute significantly raising political awareness."*

Representatives of **public administration** underlined the **necessity of cross border cooperation between administration** to enforce development of simple and user friendly services.

NGO's stressed that they **should be perceived as partners in promoting e inclusion**, because they interact closely with target socio-demographic groups and are independent of commercial and corporate sector interference. In their opinion best e-inclusion results can be achieved through NGO and governmental and/or corporate sector collaboration.

Table 4. Which players can have the most direct influence in improving e-Inclusion?

National and regional authorities, providers of public services or services of general interest	70,90%
Providers of ICT services and products	57,30%
International and European authorities	50,50%
Local authorities	43,70%
NGOs dealing with target socio-demographic groups	38,80%
Providers of other services, e.g. commercial services	17,50%
Other	6,80%

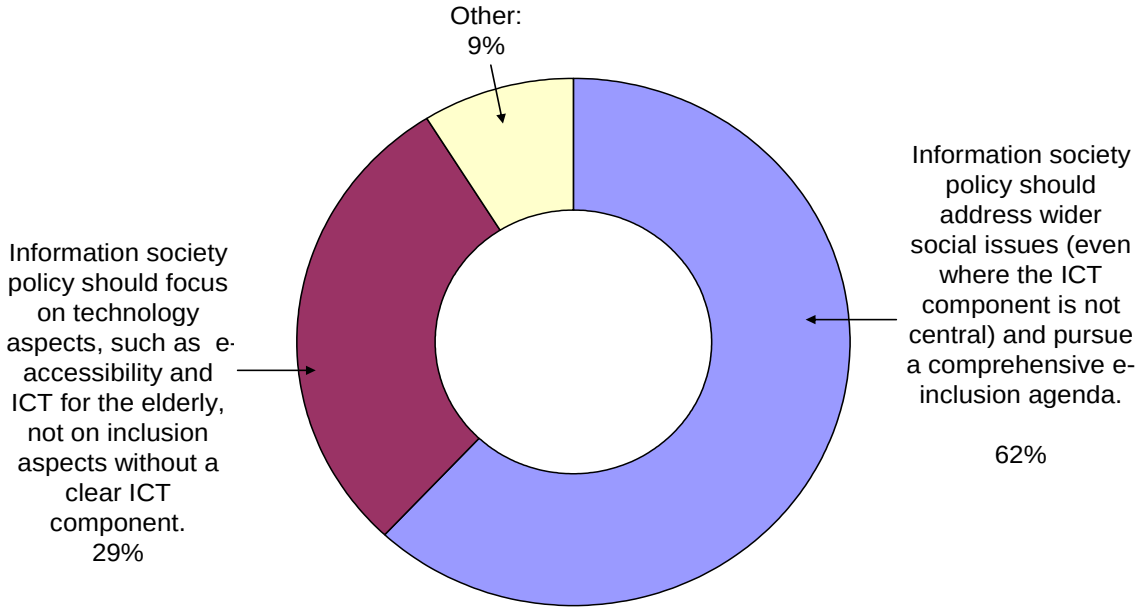
Note: Respondents were asked to select up to three options.

5. e-Inclusion actions

5.1. Focus of information society policy

The majority of the respondents (61, 2%) agree that **information society policy should address wider social issues, even where the ICT component is not central, and pursue a comprehensive e-inclusion agenda**. One third of the contributors would prefer the policy to focus on technological aspects such as e-accessibility and ICT for the elderly.

Figure 2. What should be the focus of information society policy?



Note: Only one answer was possible.

5.2. European added value

As far as the added value of e-inclusion actions at a European level is concerned one third of the respondents **find financial support to innovation and deployment the most valuable**. Many agree (20%) that **better coordination of efforts by many actors** may be an important asset of actions at a European level. Several contributors also mention the **value of exchange of good practice, measuring and comparing progress**.

Table 5. European added value. Where do you think actions at a European level can add most value?

Financial support to innovation and deployment	32%
Coordination of efforts by many actors	20,40%
Measure and compare progress, exchange good practices	17,50%
Awareness	12,60%
Other	10,70%
Legal certainty	5,80%
Not much value from European action, e-inclusion action is mainly a local affair	0%

Note: Only one answer was possible.

5.3. Information society versus other European policies

Asked about the most relevant European policies in relation to e-Inclusion the respondents point out to **social inclusion, equality policy, education policy and employment policy**.

Table 6. Which are the most relevant European policies in relation to e-Inclusion?

Social inclusion, equality policy	82,50%
Education policy	66%
Employment policy	36,90%
Consumer rights policy	25,20%
Enterprise, support to SMEs policy	22,30%
Regional cohesion policy	19,40%

Note: Respondents were asked to select up to three policies.

5.4. Coordination with authorities and other stakeholders

Contributors were also asked to enumerate the coordination mechanisms that are most relevant for European actions on e-Inclusion. The list of proposed actions included: organizing ad-hoc of informal groups and meetings on specific topics, organising conferences and events, exchange of good practice, EU working groups, official committees deciding on EU programmes with national representatives, reinforcement of coordination between the European commission and other partners. Over one half of respondents thought that **the approaches were equally useful and must complement each other**.

Table 7. Which coordination mechanism(s) do you find most relevant for European actions on e-Inclusion?

All these approaches are equally useful and must complement each other	53,40%
Reinforce coordination between the European Commission and relay or 'multiplier' agents (e.g. European or local NGOs, public-private platforms, etc) in order to achieve greater impact on the ground	18,40%
Exchange of good practice, studies, benchmarking, etc	14,60%
Other:	4,90%
Conference and events	2,90%
Official committees deciding on EU programmes (e.g. on EU funding for ICT research and deployment), with national representatives	1,90%
Ad-hoc or informal groups and meetings on specific topics (e.g. web accessibility)	1%
EU Council working groups	1%
Not useful to coordinate e-inclusion activities between the European Commission and national or local authorities, the topic is too wide and vague; approaches are very divergent across Europe	1%

Note: Only one answer was possible.

Comments from free text space received in this context were manifold.

Common threads on coordination with authorities and other stakeholders:

- The EU can set levels of expectations by taking best practice and encouraging other member states to aspire to this standard. It's most important role is influencing national/regional government in this regard. EU should also apply an approach that gives an equal role to social science as it does to ICT expertise
- Legal clarity across Europe is needed to ensure that vendors and developers do not use inconsistency as a delaying tactic for not implementing accessibility. That is why the EU should regulate accessibility and pricing of ICT related services and products in the same manner as it has regulated roaming charges in order to avoid abuse and protect consumers. The Commission should propose a general e-accessibility Directive addressing the areas that are not covered by specific legislation.
- In order to achieve good cooperation between European Commission services and relevant stakeholders regarding e-Inclusion activities, it would be necessary to establish a "civil inclusion office" in each Member State that would provide information, collect and disseminate best practices, build international connections.
- Small scale grants for resources and services across borders would immensely facilitate progress in communication and co-ordination. Small scale projects requiring low levels of funding are also more likely to be sustainable into the future as well.
- Measures should also be taken to put in place minimum ICT services and products at highly affordable prices or free of charge in certain conditions.
- The EU should foster the development of public internet access points across Europe. Training programs at such access points should be available for those with low digital literacy. Programs for training at home should also be developed. Finally, the EU could help promote multilingual websites.

- Technical issues are a good start, but not sufficient. e-Inclusion is not only about including people into information society, but into society. In the second step of the European e-inclusion policy, social issues need to be addressed. Both components have to play together.
- "Intermediaries": social workers, in particular, should receive rigorous training and qualifications (academic) and regular information quality in order to implement effectively the use of ICT by individuals on their own.
- Advice to end users and their representatives is currently fragmented by live stage, context and disability. The establishment of a network of advisors in e-Accessibility for users across Europe could be based upon linking of existing national services and networks together to ensure that national and regional information is shared to the benefit of all.

5.5. Strategic guidance and awareness

Respondents were asked if, in their opinion, the policy on e-inclusion in general and on specific topics is useful and known. They were also asked to give their impressions on dissemination efforts of the European Commission in 2008 ('e-Inclusion: be part of it!").
There was almost universal agreement that **European policy on e-inclusion in general and on specific topics is useful and well-known** by a wide range of stakeholders. The **dissemination efforts** of the EC such as the Vienna conference and the "e-inclusion: "Be Part of It!" campaign[7] **were considered effective**. However the majority of comments indicated that the **e-inclusion topics are known especially to those previously involved in the development and improvement of an inclusive Information Society**. Actors at local and regional level and the society at large might be less aware of these activities.

Respondents listed a range of possible **improvements** that could make the e-inclusion dissemination efforts more targeted and successful.

Comments on dissemination activities:

- There should be closer cooperation between the EU, ICT service and products providers and local NGOs/organisations/institutions dealing more closely with e-inclusion at their level. Local NGOs should be involved in the dissemination process in order to achieve higher awareness rate and quality control. Focus on local authorities is needed. The resources can be best funnelled through the charities and NGOs who can deliver ICTs to people really needing it.
- The range of activity conducted by the EC needs to become more flexible. We need more targeted actions, penetrating local level. Smaller, more focused exhibitions, conferences, training courses should be organized and financed.
- It is important to clarify different aspects of e-inclusion such as e-accessibility and digital literacy, otherwise the messages we want to put across are blurred.
- Knowledge of European e-inclusion awards winners does not spread wide enough, it reaches those who already are convinced of the importance of the issue. Smaller events focusing on specific areas can be an asset.
- There should be a European consortium of associations of users and organizations that work in the field of e-inclusion. They could build a database of best practices and ongoing activities.
- Dissemination efforts could be improved by concentrating on thematic approaches (aging, etc ...) and relying on the activities already undertaken by national organisations

7 "e-Inclusion: Be Part of It!" was a campaign that ran over the year 2008 to promote participation in the information society of everyone, regardless of individual or social disadvantages. The campaign was part of the European e-Inclusion Initiative, which seeks to build on all existing e-Inclusion activities and identify synergies between them and improvements in overall e-Inclusion impact.
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/bepartofit/index_en.htm

5.6. Support to ICT research and innovation

Respondents expressed their opinions on topics that deserve special attention in future from the EU research programme. They listed a range of interesting research problems that could be tackled in the future. Many stated **the need for social research to underpin the agenda of e-inclusion research topics**.

Topics for future EU research programme:

- Development of mainstream accessible ICT products and services shall be a priority. It is worthwhile to focus on technologies while they are being developed to make them accessible right from the outset is worthwhile.
- Development of specific ICTs, services and internet connection schemes which are accessible and affordable to various vulnerable groups and address their special needs.
- Ethical implications of using ICTs (esp. information sharing among diverse agencies).
- Creation of a European single market for assistive technologies.
- Better training is required for people designing and developing ICT products and services in line with the Design for All and universal design principles. Such curricula should incorporate teaching about European standards related to e- and web-accessibility.
- Language tools enabling users the access to multilingual content.
- Research in multimodality (a concept that allows telephony subscribers to move seamlessly between different modes of interaction, from visual to voice to touch, according to changes in context or user preference), interactive digital television.
- Access to audiovisual content, electronic books, network of accessible ATM terminals with ICT services. Technologies should be accessible from the start.
- Integrating a gender perspective un every single phase of the innovation process
- Sustainability and energy efficiency, cognitive systems, ambient intelligence
- Research on inclusive, user-driven innovations
- Systems, products and services to support "independent living"; development of "digital ecosystems" to support lifelong learning and work; advanced systems and products for improving access to health care information, services and medical professionals.

5.7. Support to deployment

Respondents were asked to enumerate the topics that deserve special attention in future from the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme-ICT policy support programme.
According to contributors several topics should deserve special attention to the CIP ICT PSP.

Topics that should deserve special attention to the CIP ICT PSP:

- Accessibility and interoperability of technologies (web accessibility, accessibility of self-services terminals, including ATMs, public kiosks, social networking systems, telecare and telemedicine products and services)
- The development of a middleware for ubiquitous integration of technical aids
- The deployment of more user-centric, public ICT services, for instance self service portals, re-use of already stored information on customers and users of public services, more “intelligent” and customised applications on the web.
- Promotion of ICT skills, both end-user and professional, that support enhanced productivity and innovation among SMEs.
- Making sure that there are creative applications being created around social services in the same way that they are being created in entertainment. This would drive demand and need, which would lead to investment in infrastructure.

5.8. Legislation and standards

Contributors enumerated the topics that should be addressed in future through legislation and standardisation. Among dozens of recommendations we can identify the following common threads.

Legal/standardisation topics that should be addressed in future:

- Common European standards for accessible web sites, work applications, terminal equipment, etc. are urgently needed. The ensuing standards should be made mandatory as soon as possible after the final approval in the EU. Horizontal e-accessibility legislation is the adequate tool to address and deliver accessibility to all users, including people with disabilities. This is a key instrument to achieve a fully inclusive Information Society. Binding legislation and standards should be seen as complimentary instruments, not as two different ways of working. The legislation should lay down a framework which is sustainable given the rapid developments in the ICT sector. The standards should then be evolving tools that can ensure the implementation of the legislation
- Public internet access points and the conditions to access such facilities need to be addressed at EU level to avoid any discrimination.
- The interoperability and compatibility of applications, programs etc should be subject to rules and regulations. One of the obstacles to fighting efficiently e-inclusion is the lack of compatibility between newer websites, documents, and programs with older software.
- Promote access to broadband and integration devices for vulnerable sections of the population - EU legislation on universal service in electronic communication: Every person who so requests should be provided with a broadband connection to the internet. The content of this universal service should be adapted to developments in telecommunications. EU legislation on universal service allows everyone who so requests to be provided with those services essential for participation in society and already available to the great majority of citizens, either by the market or in the case of market failure by public intervention. The government should provide what cannot be offered by the market (for example: provide the necessary resources to give every student the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of ICT).
- Public procurement of accessible ICT goods and services
- Framework for accessible eLearning including public virtual learning platforms
- Introduction of open source tools to protect children online (e.g. filtering tools). These tools should be provided for free to every family and have to be easy to activate. The compulsory introduction of a kids e-ID would be an asset.

5.9. Other instruments

Respondents had the opportunity to express their opinions on other support instruments, such as **benchmarking, exchange of good practices or direct European financial support for local actions**.

There was common agreement that **these instruments are fundamental, but must derive from a consensus building approach with local, regional, national players**, otherwise they won't be successful. Benchmarking and exchange of good practices are perceived as valuable instruments, but they cannot replace legal obligations or standardisation effects. They will represent very good tools once the European legal and standardisation framework will have been put in place.

Some respondents stressed the **necessity of transparency and accountability of management of EU resources**, particularly in the face of economic crisis. Certification was proposed as a tool to measure project's quality. One contributor pointed out that application procedures for EU funding are very complicated at the moment. Simplification of these procedures would mean a lot to NGO's with less experience in fundraising work. There was also a suggestion that digital divide and digital literacy could be integrated into structural funds and expand its scope to all regions.

5.10. Opinions

In the final section of the consultation contributors could give their general opinions on information society policy and e-Inclusion. Some of the suggestions presented in position papers sent along with the consultation were also included in this section.

Many stated that **it is a challenge to define general strategies concerning Europe at large, as different countries seem to be representing unequal levels of digital competence and implementation of e-inclusion**. These discrepancies are especially visible between new and old Member States. Therefore one respondent suggested that there is a need for post "i2010" initiative which will take into consideration the different pace of development in different countries.

Several respondents stressed the need to study the relationship between social inclusion and e-inclusion.

> *"These two concepts are in a very complex reciprocal relationship, where e-inclusion is seen as a RESULT of social exclusion and as a FACTOR that will aggravate the other dimensions of social exclusion. In addition, while social inclusion (and exclusion) is relatively* stable*, the e-inclusion is much more dynamic".*

In this context the issue of constantly monitoring the digital divide and social inequalities was frequently mentioned. Digital literacy, which should be considered as an important factor influencing digital divide should be closely monitored.

> *"A decade ago, the prevailing view was that the supply of computers in schools and public areas would diminish the digital divide. Gradually, this precarious view gave away to the view of broadband coverage narrowing the digital gap. While broadband coverage is a necessary precondition of the Information Society it is equally important that people are equipped with the necessary skills to avail of the benefits of technology. Governments should not expect that the 'invisible hand' will cure the high levels of digital illiteracy in some countries."*

Additional comments mentioned also the problem that information society policy is much too often still seen as mere ICT policy. Information Society is the society around us, as a whole, and ICT is only one element in it, though an important one. Too little is discussed still about new social structures of information society. ICT has made them possible but ICT is also only the starting point.

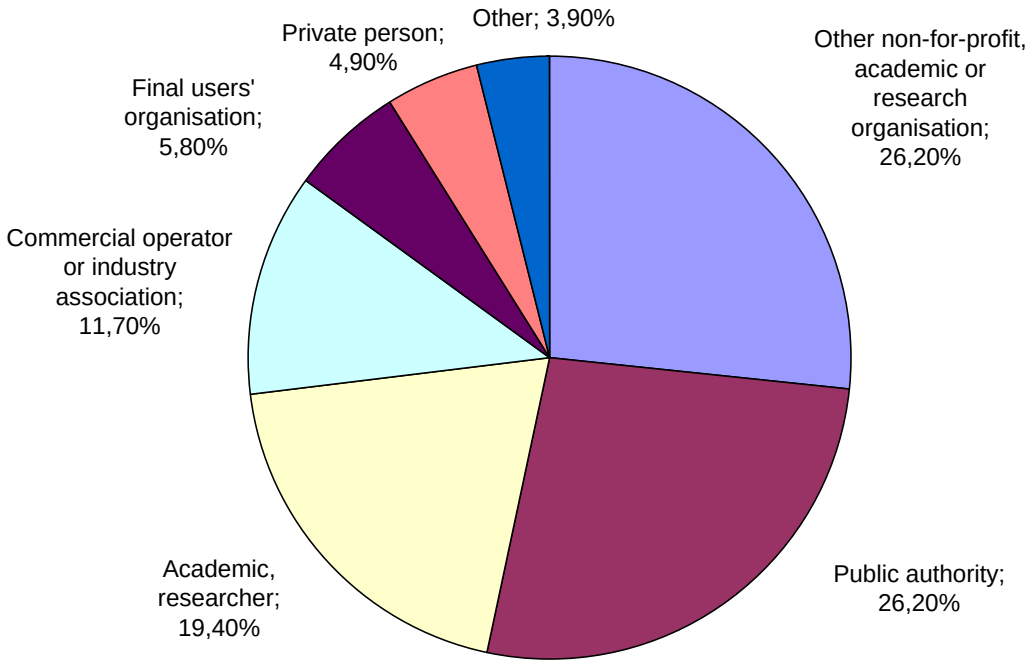
One of the recurring subjects mentioned by the respondents is **the need for e-inclusion policy and practice to stay focused on the daily lives of people with disabilities or other limiting condition**. Some contributors indicated, that at present too many of the actions are too far removed from impact that can be perceived by end users. It was suggested that the Commission should review its funding mechanisms and realign a proportion funds to accelerate short term projects with significant impact.

> *"The development of the information society also contains threats, such as increasing inequality among citizens, a weakening of information security and the protection of privacy, and difficulties in adapting to an increasingly technical operating environment. At their most critical, threats are directed at social and economic efficiency, because modern societies are increasingly dependent on information and communications technology and systems. An information society policy must also be able to respond to these challenges. Information society development must be promoted in all areas. The challenge for all societies* ***is to take full advantage of the opportunities brought by technological development*** *and to avoid the pitfalls, such as excluding certain groups from information society services".*

6. Profile of respondents

Overall, 103 responses were received. As summarised below, the survey covered a wide range of stakeholder groups. With 26,2% each, public authorities and non-for-profit academic or research organisations represent two largest groups of respondents. They are followed by individual academics or researchers (19,4%). Commercial operators or industry associations cover 11,7% of the contributors. The smallest groups of respondents were users organisations (5,8%) and private individuals (4,9%). 11 stakeholders also sent position papers.

Table 8. Profile of respondents (n=103)



In terms of geographic coverage, respondents were located in 24 European Members States. In addition, responses were received from 10 European organisations.

Table 9. Location of respondents (n=103)

European level	10
More than 15 contributions	United Kingdom
More than 10 contributions	Austria, Spain
More than 5 contributions	Norway, Germany, Finland, France
More than 2 contributions	Sweden, Italy, Denmark, Greece, Belgium
Two contributions	Czech Republic, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland,
One contribution	Slovenia, Slovakia, Ireland, Hungary, Cyprus

7. Annex

7.1. List of respondents that agreed to disclosure

1. ISPA – Internet Service Providers Austria
2. Bob Hopgood
3. Martin Schmalzried, COFACE (Confederation Of Family Organisations In The European Union)
4. The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority
5. AGE (the European Older People's Platform), ANEC (the European consumer voice in standardisation), EDF (European Disability Forum)
6. Dan Pescod, Royal National Institute of Blind People
7. Disabled Peoples Organisations Denmark (DPOD)
8. David Banes, AbilityNet
9. Frank Mockler, Programme Development Manager ECDL Foundation - Dublin and Nikos Ioannou, EU Affairs Manager ECDL Foundation - Brussels
10. Renata Brožková and Jiří Průša, Ministry of the Interior, Czech Republic
11. Philippe Bourqui, Président de l'Association Internet pour tous ! Dirigeant de CLAP-Publishing
12. R. Ignacio Madrid, Fundosa Teleservicios S.A. (Technosite)
13. Bárbara Martín, Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles (ONCE)
14. José Angel Martinez Usero. Consorcio INREDIS.
15. The European Blind Union (EBU)
16. Annelies Mervielde, Gezinsbond vzw
17. Bettina Kann, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Digitale Bibliothek
18. Norwegian Agency for Public Management and eGovernment
19. State Institute of Information Technology, Lithuania
20. National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP), Greece
21. Vox - Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning
22. Gabor Dombi, Secretary General, Forum of Hungarian IT Organization for Information Society
23. Gema Maestro, APIF MOVIQUITY S.A.
24. Fédération des Particuliers-Employeurs de France (FEPEM)
25. Rickard Domeij, Council of Sweden at the Institute of language and folklore)
26. Klaus-Peter Wegge, Siemens AG
27. Heike Schuster-James, Birmingham City Council
28. Jan Franke, EUROCITIES
29. Ministerium für Land und Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft, Austria
30. Alberto Andreu Pinillos, Telefonica S.A.
31. Mario Batusic, Institut Integriert Studieren Johannes Kepler Universität
32. Gill Whitney, Head of Design for All Research Group Middlesex University EDeAN UK NCC
33. Sören Aalykke, Danish Centre for Assistive Technology
34. Steve Barnard, HFT
35. Vesna Dolnicar, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences
36. Stéphanie Lucien-Brun, Handicap International Programme France - Centre icom' www.hi-france.org
37. Agne Kavaliauskiene, Information Society Development Committee, Lithuania
38. Valentina Michalkova
39. Juan-Pablo Lázaro-Ramos, ITACA
40. European Centre for Women and Technology (ECWT)
41. Antonio Remartinez, IBERNEX Ingenieria SL
42. Ian Forbes, fig one solutions
43. Kurt Woletz, UAS Technikum Wien, Vienna, Austria
44. Elisabeth Hechl, Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz
45. AICO EDV-Beratung GmbH
46. Rupert Lemmel-Seedorf, Austrian Computer Society
47. Günter Mühlberger, University Innsbruck Library
48. Cyberhus
49. Tore Langemyr Larsen, Seniornett Norge, Norway
50. Janne Aaltonen, Logica
51. David Gehle, Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg
52. Kari Anne Flaa, Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted
53. Iosif Klironomos, FORTH-ICS, Greece
54. Päivi Tahkokallio, Tahkokallio Design+
55. Digital Birmingham

56. Clara Grigore, Societe Generale
57. Thomas Delahais, Euréval
58. Department Of Information Technology Services, Cyprus
59. Ana Rurac, Università pedagogica statale "Ion Creanga", Chisinau, Moldova
60. Jean Bell, University of Stirling, Department of nursing and midwifery
61. Ron Colombo, The Malta Society of the Blind
62. Bernard Agius, MCA, Malta
63. Rikke Syberg, RoboBraille - Synscenter Refsnaes
64. Martin Cantor, South Yorkshire Public Sector e-Forum
65. David Wright, Trilateral Research & Consulting LLP
66. Ersin Biçer
67. Helen McQuillan, Dublin Institutte of Technology
68. Anne Alitolppa-Niitamo, The Family Federation of Finland
69. Karel Van Isacker, PhoenixKM BVBA
70. Carlo Donati, Ministero del Lavoro, della Salute e delle Politiche Sociali, Italy
71. Paula Morais, Learn4U Consultoria Lda

7.2. List of position papers

Table 10. Position papers

European respondents	2
United Kingdom	2
Denmark	2
France	1
Spain	1
Hungary	1
Total	**9**

List of public position papers (published online along with this report at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/survey/index_en.htm)

1. Confederation Of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) (EU)
2. EUROCITIES (EU)
3. South Yorkshire Public Sector e-Forum (UK)
4. Abilitynet (UK)
5. Cyberhus (DK)
6. Internet pour tous ! / Clap-Publishing (FR)
7. Inredis (ES)
8. Inforum (Forum of Hungarian IT Organisations for Information Society) (HU)

7.3. Questionaire

SURVEY ON EUROPEAN E-INCLUSION POLICY

Section 1: Respondent Profile

1.1. Your name and organisation

……

1.2 Disclosure

If you have provided details in previous question, do you agree to these being disclosed as a respondent to this survey?

☐ Yes
☐ No

1.3. Professional category

In the context of your response to this survey, how would you classify yourself?

☐ Academic, researcher
☐ Commercial operator or industry association
☐ Final users' organisation
☐ Other non-for-profit, academic or research organisation
☐ Private person
☐ Public authority
☐ Other: (please give details)

1.4. Country/countries (or 'international ')

……...

1.5. Supporting position paper(s)

Other than replying to this survey, are you submitting position paper(s)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Section 2: e-Inclusion in General

2.1. socio-economic challenges

ICT can have a significant impact on the following socioeconomic challenges:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Ageing population	☐	☐	☐	☐
Education, learning patterns	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employment, economic and working patterns, globalisation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Equality	☐	☐	☐	☐
Migration, cultural diversity	☐	☐	☐	☐
Redefinition of family and community patterns	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organisation and delivery of commercial services, consumption patterns	☐	☐	☐	☐
Redefinition of welfare state, organisation and delivery of public services	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social cohesion, poverty	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social participation and interaction, access to information	☐	☐	☐	☐

Are any other key challenges impacted by the ICTs? (Please give details)

……

2.2. Reasons for the persistence of digital divides

What are the main reasons for the persistence of digital divides? (Please select up to three and/or define others).

☐ Affordability: The cost of ICT services and products are a barrier
☐ Availability: Getting access to ICT remains a problem
☐ Relevance: People are unaware of the available possibilities and potential benefits, or are not interested
☐ Interoperability of ICT services systems and devices is often a problem
☐ Physical accessibility is insufficient
☐ Usability and user-friendliness remains a big barrier
☐ Other: (Please give details)

2.3. Technologies

Which ICT services and products you consider most relevant to improve e-Inclusion? (Please select up to three and/or define others)

- ☐ Fixed telephones
- ☐ Home equipment with embedded ICT
- ☐ Mobile telephones and other mobile devices
- ☐ Office equipment with embedded ICT
- ☐ Personal computers
- ☐ Self-service electronic terminals
- ☐ Television
- ☐ The web
- ☐ Other: (Please give details)

2.4. Your opinions

Please elaborate on your responses to the previous questions as appropriate.
In addition, you are invited to comment on how the financial crisis affects e-Inclusion activities.

Section 3: e-Inclusion policy

3.1. Priority topics and target groups

Which topics areas /socio-demographic groups require most attention? Please rank THREE by priority.

- ☐ Digital competences, lowly educated people
- ☐ Cultural diversity and ICT, migrants
- ☐ Civil servants in charge of social services, social assistants or mediators
- ☐ Access to broadband networks, terminal equipment
- ☐ Accessibility, solutions for persons with disabilities or functional specificities
- ☐ Elderly people benefiting from appropriate ICT solutions
- ☐ Inclusive public services enabled by ICT, inclusive e-government
- ☐ People living in isolation, people living in poverty
- ☐ Young people

3.2. Responsibilities and influence

Which players can have the most direct influence in improving e-Inclusion? (Please select up to three and/or define others).

- ☐ International and European authorities
- ☐ Local authorities
- ☐ National and regional authorities, providers of public services or services of general interest
- ☐ NGOs dealing with target socio-demographic groups
- ☐ Providers of ICT services and products
- ☐ Providers of other services, e.g. commercial services
- ☐ Other: (Please give details)

3.3. Your opinions

Please elaborate on your responses to the previous questions as appropriate.

Section 4: European action on e-Inclusion

4.1 European added value

Where do you think actions at a European level can add most value? (Only one answer is possible).

- ☐ Awareness
- ☐ Coordination of efforts by many actors
- ☐ Financial support to innovation and deployment
- ☐ Legal certainty
- ☐ Measure and compare progress, exchange good practices
- ☐ Not much value from European action, e-Inclusion action is mainly a local affair
- ☐ Other: (Please give details)

4.2 Information society versus other European policies

Which are the most relevant European policies in relation to e-Inclusion? (Please select up to three).

- ☐ Consumer rights policy
- ☐ Education policy
- ☐ Employment policy
- ☐ Enterprise, support to SMEs policy
- ☐ Regional cohesion policy
- ☐ Social inclusion, equality policy

4.2 What should be the focus information society policy? (only one answer is possible).

- ☐ Information society policy should focus on technology aspects, such as e-accessibility and ICT for the elderly, not on inclusion aspects without a clear ICT component.
- ☐ Information society policy should address wider social issues (even where the ICT component is not central) and pursue a comprehensive e-Inclusion agenda.
- ☐ Other: (Please give details)

4.3 Your opinions

Your opinions on the European added value. Please elaborate on your responses to the previous questions as appropriate.

Section 5: Information society policy and e-Inclusion

5.1 Strategic guidance and awareness

Do you think European policy on e-Inclusion in general and on specific topics (e.g. e-accessibility, ICT for ageing) is useful and known? What do you think of the dissemination efforts of the European Commission in 2008 ('e-Inclusion: be part of it!' campaign, Vienna ministerial conference, European e-Inclusion awards). What could be improved? Please explain.

5.2 Coordination with authorities and other stakeholders

Which coordination mechanism(s) do you find most relevant for European actions on e-Inclusion? (Only one answer is possible).

- ☐ Ad-hoc or informal groups and meetings on specific topics (e.g. web accessibility)
- ☐ Conference and events
- ☐ Exchange of good practice, studies, benchmarking, etc
- ☐ EU Council working groups
- ☐ Official committees deciding on EU programmes (e.g. on EU funding for ICT research and deployment), with national representatives
- ☐ Reinforce coordination between the European Commission and relay or 'multiplier' agents (e.g. European or local NGOs, public-private platforms, etc) in order to achieve greater impact on the ground
- ☐ All these approaches are equally useful and must complement each other
- ☐ Not useful to coordinate e-Inclusion activities between the European Commission and national or local authorities, the topic is too wide and vague; approaches are very divergent across Europe
- ☐ Other: (Please give details)

5.3 Support to ICT research and innovation

Which topics do you think deserve special attention in future from the EU research programme?

- - Systems, products and services to support "independent living"; - Development of "digital ecosystems" to support lifelong learning and work; - Advanced systems and products for improving access to health care information, services and medical professionals.
- e-Accessibility
- Digital inclusion in relation to social and economic and financial inclusion Mentoring and engagement methodologies
- Social research needs to underpin this agenda - not only technological research. Special attention should be given to social innovation and collaboration and research partnerships between different stakeholders. attention should be paid to giving strategic support to partnerships and funding to allow NGOs to participate as full partners, rather than provising 'end users'for trials.
- Adaptations of hard and software for people with disabilities
- family perspective to e-inclusion
- Mobile devices Intelligent Virtual agents
- Researching ICT support for people with learning disabilities

5.4 Support to deployment

Which topics do you think deserve special attention in future from the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme-ICT policy support programme?

5.5 Legislation and standards

Are there topics that should be addressed in future through legislation and standardisation?

5.6 Other instruments

What is your opinion on other support instruments, such as Benchmarking, exchange of good practices, Direct European financial support (e.g. through regional or social funds) for local actions?

5.7 Your opinions

Any other opinions on Information society policy and e-Inclusion.

Section 6: Anything Else?

Is there any other issue you would like to mention regarding European action on e-Inclusion: priorities, implementation approaches, coordination between stakeholders, etc?