



MC-eGov Study on Multi-channel Delivery Strategies and Sustainable Business Models for Public Services addressing Socially Disadvantaged Groups

Contract 30-CE-0161843/00-50
(January 2008 to February 2009)

Think Paper 3: Regulation and stimulation in Slovakia – public sector interventions for inclusive eGovernment

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November 2008

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper is focused on the relationship between regulation, policy, the ways in which they influence the construction of services for socially excluded people, the ways in which service interventions are provided to deliver services effectively to people, including example of concrete projects or initiatives as well as a short analysis of what is missing in this area and what should be done to improve the current situation. This is illustrated via the example of the Slovak Republic as a country, which is underperforming in the area of eGovernment service delivery and in inclusive eGovernment.

This paper is relevant to all the stakeholders who are involved in decision-making, preparation and implementation of strategy, regulations and policies in the areas relevant to services for socially excluded people, but also NGO representatives dealing with social inclusion while focusing also on the use of electronic services – especially if they are based in a country, which does not belong to “fore-runners” in inclusive eGovernment (which is also the case of Slovakia).

The paper starts with description of the situation in the areas related to social inclusion in the Slovak Republic. The social inclusion policy is quite well elaborated - as far as general social policy is concerned. But from the point of view of ICT applications, the situation is much worse. This is, of course, influenced also by the fact that in the area of Information Society development in general, and eGovernment implementation in particular, Slovakia is falling behind the EU average quite significantly. This applies also to the development of strategy, policy and regulatory framework – e.g. the National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010 was put in place, but a corresponding strategy exploring potential or elaborating application of ICT (including electronic services, not speaking about multi-channel approach) is lacking. Target groups that such a strategy should consider include unemployed, people in material need, the disabled, elderly, and minority groups (especially Roma population).

As far as the future development is concerned, a lot of hope is being put into the Structural Funds planned for the period 2007-2013 and the corresponding Operational Programmes (OP Information Society, OP Employment and Social Inclusion etc.). When looking at eInclusion and inclusive eGovernment topics, we can find some references in (and cross-references between) these operational programmes, but without a clear definition of responsibilities or concrete actions suggested. So there is a danger that this opportunity will be missed or at least underutilized.

The report also mentions some successful projects and NGO initiatives representing the “positive side” of the current situation. Especially, if the government and governmental initiatives will realize this potential and will focus on building partnerships with third parties and the existing good practices.

The annexes of the paper contain information on individual problem areas of inclusive eGovernment, relevant EU legislation, initiatives and R&D projects - this can serve as an information resource when fostering eInclusion and developing inclusive eGovernment services, but also .for benchmarking purposes, when comparing the situation on the country level (in this case in Slovakia) with the EU level.

In relation to the eGovernment initiatives recently started in Slovakia (to a great extent to be funded from the Structural Funds - the Operational Programme Information Society), the paper suggests to design specific actions focusing on services for socially excluded groups, e.g.:

- To develop specific policy and framework measures targeting eInclusion and inclusive eGovernment services (not only generic social exclusion measures); to define clear responsibilities for the individual actions; to set up a monitoring framework, including feedback from representatives of the target groups, and subsequently to adapt the process based on this feedback and the evolving social, legal, and technical environments;
- To ensure these policies include existing “third sector infrastructure” for developing complex multi-channel eGovernment service delivery, while involving non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as intermediaries;
- To build on the existing good practices within the country (e.g. services provided by NGOs on municipal and regional level) as well as in other countries (while also taking into account the cultural and social context of these good practices and adapting them correspondingly).

2.0 LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS AND INITIATIVES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

2.1 *The Social and Economic Context*

The legislation, regulations and initiatives being developed in the Slovak Republic respond to the general issues like declining population growth and ageing population, increasing demand on government services by the elderly and those suffering by other forms of exclusions (poverty, joblessness, disability etc.). According to the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion for 2008–2010, in spite of the fact that the economic situation and outlook for the near future is in general positive, there are some key concerns:

- 5.8% decrease in the natural population growth is expected;
- Proportion of the elderly in the Slovak population is growing;
- Median life expectancy at birth is still among the lowest among EU25;
- The employment rate in 2007 was only 60.7% (male 68.4%, female only 53.0%), which is still below the EU27 average (65.4%);
- The unemployment rate (11.1%) in 2007 was the lowest during last seven years, but it is still above the EU average (7.1%). In addition to that, there are huge differences between the regions;
- The poverty-risk rate was 11% (male 10%, female 11%). The relative poverty rates reflect income distribution within the country. In comparison with the previous years, the poverty-risk rate has significantly decreased, in comparison with the year 2005 by 2.8%, and in comparison with 2006 by 1.1%. The at-risk-of-poverty threshold in 2007 (7,394 SKK) was by 31% higher in comparison with the situation in 2005 (5,664 SKK), and by 16% higher than in 2006 (6,395 SKK). Based on the upper and lower quintile, i.e. the share of the sum of incomes of 20% of the persons with the highest incomes and 20% of the persons with the lowest incomes, this indicator for the year 2007 was 3.5%. Single-parent families (26%) and families with three or more children (26%) are at the highest risk of poverty.
- Children and young people under 17 years of age (17%) in Slovakia are at substantially higher risk of poverty than for example the elderly 65+ (8%). In case of the age group 18-64 the poverty-risk rate decreased by 2 percentage points.
- Other indicators, for example material deprivation are also used for comprehensive assessment of the poverty and social exclusion. In 2006 the extent of the material deprivation was 8.3%, while in 2005 it was 7.4%. Despite the year-on-year decrease of the material deprivation, a rise of the share of persons materially deprived below the poverty threshold has occurred. In 2006, 17.2% of people below the poverty threshold were materially deprived, while in 2005 it was 18.7%.
- In the case of the poverty, its reproduction from one generation to the next one is an issue. Lives of children are significantly influenced by circumstances of their parents' lives, for example by their education and income. The PISA results (in 2003) showed a significant correlation between children's results at school and their socio-economic background in Slovakia. The most significant factor affecting the risk of poverty in Slovakia is unemployment (45.1%), the unemployed males are somewhat more at risk (50.7%) than females (40.9%).
- Other groups at risk of the social exclusion include the disabled; particularly their participation in the social life and access to the labour market is an issue. As far as the integration of disabled persons into the labour market is concerned, positive trend in the number of the employed disabled persons was experienced in comparison with the year 2006. The year-on-

year growth of this figure was faster than the overall growth of the employment. From the total number of the employed persons in 2007, the disabled persons represented 1.3% and their number is decreasing on a year-on-year basis by about 1,400 persons, i.e. by 4.4%. At the same time a positive decrease of the registered disabled jobseekers was experienced in comparison with 2006.

- Minority groups - social group afflicted by multiple exclusion is marginalized Roma community. In the framework of the socio-graphic mapping (see the National reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion) 1,575 settlements were registered, 148 of which (from 120,000 to 150,000 residents) are considered segregated settlements, i.e. settlements located on the periphery of towns or villages, without access to running water etc. The share of the illegal housing in these settlements is more than 20%.

The share of expenditures (from the total GDP) on social protection in individual categories in 2005 was: 7% for pensions and survivors benefits; 4.8% for sickness benefits and health care, 1.5% for invalidity; 0.7% for unemployment, 1.9% for expenditure on families with children; and 0.5% on expenditures relating to housing and social exclusion. The target expenditure in 2005 for social protection represented 16.9% of the GDP. In comparison with 2004, this represents a year-on-year growth by 1.3 percentage points. According to the structure of social protection expenditure in 2005, the biggest share of the expenditures pertained to pensions and survivors benefits (42.5%) and sickness and health care (29.5%).

2.2 The Regulatory Framework

With the aim of providing a balanced approach to the main priorities and measures for social protection and inclusion, the Slovak Republic has developed a National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010. The report deals with the topic of social inclusion, pensions, health care and long-term care. The strategic approach applied in this report reflects the overall process of globalisation and demographic changes as well as related challenges in the area of economic growth, sustainability of public finances, raising employment, eliminating unemployment and promoting social inclusion.

Already in the recent years the Slovak Republic has undertaken major structural reform of the social system, pensions and health care, as well as in related fields such as management of public finances and taxes. The common objective is to promote social cohesion, gender equality and to create equal opportunities for socially disadvantaged groups of the population by means of adequate, accessible, financially sustainable, adaptable and effective social protection system and social inclusion policy.

Changes in the Act on Employment Services aim to create conditions for the labour market changes directed towards pro-gender and pro-family measures. As a positive step enabling more efficient solution of the issue of discrimination on the labour market the amendment to the Antidiscrimination Act can be taken. One of the new activities is the preparation of a National Strategy of the Slovak Republic for the Gender Equality. An important component of the support for gender equality is also support for harmonising family, personal and working life.

Support for the social cohesion is provided also by means of a system for **assistance in material need**. The state provides an applicant and the family with assistance for securing basic living conditions. It also helps people in supporting their active involvement where possible. This

system provides families not only with basic assistance in material need, but also with specific health-care, housing and protection allowances (for those who cannot work) and allowances supporting activation of persons in material need. Other tools are subsidies provided for food and school needs supporting education of children from a socially disadvantaged background, or from families in material need.

The activation elements in the system of assistance in material need are directed at supporting **the philosophy of active inclusion**. The assistance in material need and protection should have the nature of preventive measures and temporary solutions only in the case of those people who have a potential to work (to be “activated”). This measure requires that alongside with the social protection system, the active inclusion in the society is intensively supported by means of creating job opportunities supporting their return to the labour market. This also means initiating particular programmes supporting the employment growth, developing human resources and capacities necessary on the labour market (including support for education and preparation for the labour market), since education and paid employment are considered the most efficient prevention against the risk of poverty.

To achieve this objective, for a couple of recent years the Slovak Republic has been using not only structural reforms for supporting economic growth, but also a **broad spectrum of programmes for supporting the employment**. These programmes have included also programmes aimed at active labour market measures supporting disadvantaged groups of jobseekers. For this purpose the Slovak Republic has implemented a broad scope of financial instruments supported by the EU.

Social policy influences to a large degree health, which is an important determining factor for life opportunities. It is necessary to take further steps reducing persistent and substantial inequalities in provision of the health care. Planned measures of the Slovak government should lead to application of the health dimension into all relevant policies. The social protection can ensure equivalent access to the health care and prevention, including groups at risk of the social exclusion. The positive effects of the ongoing reforms of the pension system and health care can be seen in the area of social protection and the aid to people seeking asylum in Slovakia, which is provided in close cooperation with the migration authority, NGOs, church and charity organisations. The common aim is to create conditions securing basic human needs and protecting human rights of the asylum seekers. The conceptual solution for inclusion of the asylum seekers is based on a systematic approach, taking into account material and financial conditions, socio-economic development of individual regions in Slovakia, relevant legislation, the existing institutional basis and available qualified human resources.

In the framework of the integration strategy of the Slovak Republic, a thorough inclusion of the immigrants, by means of all general support instruments in the area of health care, housing, employment and other areas of social life, is promoted by the migration authority. On the level of towns and villages it is also necessary to create conditions for the integration of foreigners into society, primarily through the access to housing by means of social apartments. The immigrants are currently disadvantaged jobseekers. It is necessary to improve conditions for their employability, supporting thus their integration into the labour market. Financial assistance from the European Refugee Fund (ERF) is used for comprehensive integration of these target groups.

The employment supporting policies in synergy with the efficient social policy form the main pillars of the social inclusion system, e.g. the Programme Declaration of the Government, National Reform Programme and the National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

These principles are also included in relevant development programmes. In the programming period 2007-2013 the Slovak Republic has incorporated the philosophy of interconnecting employment support and support for active social inclusion into the Operational Programme **Employment and Social Inclusion**. Its overall objective focuses on four key aspects: supporting employment growth, strengthening the decrease of unemployment, creating tools for social inclusion and investing in capacity building. Its main objectives focus on supporting a growth in employment and reducing unemployment, whilst directed also at supporting social inclusion and raising employability of people at risk of the social exclusion from the labour market. A holistic approach to the active social inclusion policy represents a key tool for the support of growth and employment, going beyond the boundaries of the medium-term Lisbon Strategy, since these challenges will remain valid also after 2010.

In general, the Structural Funds, as the most important funding resource, will be used also for supporting de-institutionalisation and strengthening community services in the above mentioned areas.

Another important policy initiative of the Slovak government towards the elderly is the National Programme for Protection of the Elderly¹ (*“Národný program ochrany starších ľudí - NPOSĽ”*). “Protection” of the elderly within the social policy is meant as achievement of conditions of independent living, social participation and integration of the elderly into the society. This should be achieved via proper social, health and housing services and policies, educational policies, but also financial and employment policies.

2.3 The Information Society Context

The objectives of the Slovak Republic in the area of the **development of Information Society and inclusion** include, among others, inclusion of the disadvantaged groups into Information Society, ensuring widespread availability of the Internet and public administration services, as defined in the National Lisbon Strategy and relevant action plans. In October 2007 the Operational Programme Information Society (OPIS) was approved. The OPIS defines priority areas for informatisation of the Slovak society and financial resources (from the Structural Funds) allocated for individual priority areas.

Some activities defined in the Operational Programme Information Society go beyond “standard” social inclusion, for example the plan to digitise collections of the Slovakia cultural heritage. Creating a digital archive of documents of cultural heritage in text format and their digitisation will enable the disabled and the elderly to access these collections with the aid of assistive technologies or by their conversion into formats accessible for them (Braille, large print, narration).

¹ <http://www.employment.gov.sk/new/index.php?SMC=1>

Planned implementation of eGovernment services is aimed at efficient public administration services, including health and social care services. eInclusion measures include ensuring access for the disabled, including multi-language support and taking into account recommendations of the Web Accessibility Guidelines. Implementation will take into account also different socio-economic situation population groups in individual regions of Slovakia.

Within the horizontal activities defined in the OPIS, special educational programmes for marginalised Roma communities will take place. These training activities will be aimed at raising their computer literacy and IT skills using the “learning by doing” methodology. Furthermore, project of **multifunctional documentation information centre of the Roma culture in Slovakia** will be implemented in the framework of the Priority axis No. 2. This documentation resource centre should provide access to complex information on the history, life, traditions and culture of the Roma communities living in Slovakia.

3.0 SLOVAK INCLUSIVE EGOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The level of ICT deployment in the public administration in Slovakia is low compared with the EU average. This can be illustrated for example by the limited offer of electronic services. The development of e-services in Slovakia has reached only the initial stage of implementation of the Roadmap for the Introduction of 20 basic electronic Public Administration Services. Slovakia has reached approximately one third of the EU15 average (20% versus 56%) in this respect. The situation in eLearning, eCulture, eInclusion, eWork, eHealth, eTourism etc. is even worse. (based on the Eurostat data, DB Information Society, 10/2006).

From this point of view, it is clear that the development of inclusive eGovernment is at a very early stage of development in Slovakia. Although inclusive eGovernment is a part of the national strategy and related action plans, the reality, as far specific measures and initiatives are concerned, is not very encouraging. A small number of specific targeting initiatives is restricted to education for specific target groups focused only on ICT skills and usage of e-services. The support for inclusive eGovernment in the Slovak legislation is also very poor. In fact, only one act (the Act on Social Assistance) is particularly related to the „e“ character of the inclusion. The possibility of a positive change in this area can be seen mainly in opening specific calls on inclusive eGovernment under the relevant Operational programmes of the Structural Funds.

3.1 General funding schemes

The basis for e-infrastructure and electronic services for inclusive eGovernment is the Operational Programme Information Society, which is a reference document defining priorities in the area of eGovernment, digital cultural heritage, and broadband. It contains description of the horizontal management of information society projects in the programming period 2007-2013. The OPIS defines four priority axes and seven measures:

Priority axes and the corresponding measures:

1. Electronisation of public administration and development of electronic services
 - 1.1 Electronisation of public administration and development of electronic services on the central level
 - 1.2 Electronisation of public administration and development of electronic services on the municipal and regional level
2. Development of repository institutions and renewal of their national infrastructure
 - 2.1 Improvement of the system of acquisition, processing and protection of content from the resources of repository institutions
 - 2.2 Digitisation of the content of repository institutions, archiving and provision of access to digital data
3. Improvement of the broadband internet access
 - 3.1 Development of the broadband access infrastructure
4. Technical assistance
 - 4.1 Technical assistance for the MA OPIS

The only note on eInclusion and related electronic services is in the Measure 1.2 of the OPIS. It focuses on the informatisation of self-governing authorities and support for sustainable development of the ICT infrastructure and of the services provided and operated by regional and

municipal self-governing authorities. Informatisation of self-governing authorities is part of the architecture of integrated public administration services.

The measures under the Priority axis 1 will constitute a basis for introducing extended eGovernment services and their integration into the central public administration portal:

- in the eLearning area, supported under the OP Education;
- in the area of intelligent transport systems (eTransport), supported under the OP Transport and the Regional OP;
- in the area of environmental IS, supported under the OP Environment;
- in the area of electronisation of public administration services provided by self-governing authorities, supported under the OP Bratislava Region;
- in the area of eBusiness services, to be implemented under the OP Competitiveness and Economic Growth;
- in the area of employment and social inclusion (eSkills and eInclusion), supported under the OP Employment and Social Inclusion;
- in the area of informatisation of healthcare providers, supported under the OP Healthcare, with links to eHealth services.

According to the OPIS, the OP Employment and Social Inclusion (OP E&SI) directly supports **eInclusion and eSkills applications**. These applications will follow up on the OPIS eGovernment applications. If the recipient is from the public sector, it will become a part of the integrated architecture of PAIS (standards for public administration information systems). Although, there is no specific topic or focus on eInclusion and related electronic services in the OP E&SI, altogether OP E&SI, the OP Health and the OP Education can contribute to eInclusion and inclusive eGovernment. The OP Education will support education of excluded groups in the field of Information society through specific measures. The target groups are mainly unemployed, females returning to the labour market (e.g. after the maternity leave), Roma, and the disabled.

The OPIS framework respects the following four horizontal priorities (two of which specifically focus on inclusion) in conformity with the National Strategic Reference Framework for 2007–2013:

- 1) Marginalised Roma communities;
- 2) Equal opportunities;
- 3) Sustainable development;
- 4) Internet Information Society.

The objective of the horizontal priority addressing “Marginalised Roma Communities” (MRCs) is to increase the employment rate and educational level of persons belonging to MRCs and improve their living conditions. Creation of “integrated service points” under the OP Information Society will ensure a more flexible access to public administration services for all segments of the population. In combination with comprehensive projects targeting MRCs it can enhance support primarily for those applicants who – in line with the rules of co-ordination of the horizontal priority Marginalised Roma Communities – will obtain an approval for their local “comprehensive approach concept”. (i.e. the concept of economic and social inclusion of MRCs).

The possibility of using integrated service points will be extended in the context of comprehensive approach by the provision and/or use of professional assistance provided to MRCs under the Operational programme "Education", enhancing thus the synergic effect of the comprehensive approach. In the framework of implementing special educational programmes for MRCs, training courses will be organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The horizontal priority Equal Opportunities will be applied and monitored in all the Operational programmes.

The specific priority "Support for employment and social inclusion" focuses on equal opportunities on the labour market and, inter alia, pursues equal opportunities in the labour market access and integration of the disadvantaged groups, including support for mechanisms eliminating gender inequality on the labour market. The specific priority "Modern education for knowledge-based society" fosters equal opportunities by means of activities aimed at creating conditions for equal access to lifelong formal and informal education for all. Special attention is devoted to the issue of the disadvantaged groups.

The key objectives of the development of Information society in Slovakia are, in line with the strategic documents on Information Society development, information literacy, effective electronisation of public administration and accessibility of the Internet, which is the basis for all inclusive e-services.

3.2 Acts related to inclusive eGovernment

The Act on Social Assistance

This Act aims at social assistance provision, which is expected to reduce or overcome material or social poverty, provide basic life condition in natural environment, provide integration of the disadvantaged people into the society and prevent the deepening, repeating of disorders in psychical, physical and social development. Regarding eInclusion and related services, §59 of the Act focuses on financial contribution to the handicapped people for procurement of specific facilities. One of the facilities can be a personal computer, which can be used for electronic services. The primary objective is to help handicapped people by means of PC and special software to overcome barriers to education - but not in communication! That is why the contribution cannot be used for paying the internet connection fee. In reality and based on the interview with people working in relevant department of the government, this kind of contribution is very (ultra) rare and is approved only in unique (very special) cases.

The other Acts are more focused on general aspects of social inclusion, but can be applied also in the area of eGovernment.

The Antidiscrimination Act

On May 20, 2004 the Equal Treatment Act (Antidiscrimination Act) preventing discrimination and defining equal treatment in various areas was approved. This act is an amendment to the equal treatment principles' application and defines also legal protection measures if the equal treatment principles are violated. The equal treatment is based on the ban of discrimination for any reason in a person's execution of his/her rights and duties, as well as in passing measures protecting against discrimination. This act defines direct discrimination as any conduct or failure to act resulting in treating a person less favourably than another person in a comparable situation has been or would be treated. Indirect discrimination is defined as a seemingly neutral regulation,

decision, order or practice disadvantaging a person in comparison to another person, while a procedure justified by the fact that it follows a rightful interest and is necessary for meeting the interest, is not considered discrimination.

The Act on Equality between Females and Males

The aim of the Act (approved in 2004) is to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender and to promote equality between females and males, and for this purpose to improve the status of females particularly in their working life.

3.3 Projects and initiatives in Slovakia

Portal.gov.sk

The central portal of public administration, as the result of the initiative of the Slovak government and the Phare project "Transparency in Functioning of State administration and Public Self-administration", provides central and integrated access to information resources and public administration services. Information, required by the citizen, is often part of the government departments' web sites. The purpose of the central portal is to integrate information and services in a transparent and accessible way to the citizen. The required information is classified according to problem areas (e.g. a catalogue of life situations, target groups) and offers an easy orientation for users (for example, the disabled can easily find relevant information about their rights, compensations, etc.).

Infovek

The Infovek (The Information Age - <http://www.infovek.sk/english/index.html>) is a governmental initiative from 2001 focused on the informatisation of grammar and secondary schools in all Slovak regions. It supports projects focused not only on technology infrastructure, but also educational processes necessary for knowledge and information society. The project's result should be changed curricula, educational processes, methodologies, special facilities etc. - through the ICT implementation. This horizontal initiative supports also specialized schools for children with special needs, which do not have financial resources for ICT implementation, and schools in the underdeveloped regions with poor internet infrastructure providing also ICT training to the Roma community.

Internet for Education

The objective of the Internet for Education project within the Minerva strategic initiative (<http://www.ipv.gov.sk/ipv/>) is to support access to the broadband for young people through the state subvention for the period of two years. The purpose of this initiative is to improve computer and information literacy of young people. The project started in 2006 and finished in 2008 (the present government decided to discontinue the project). Continuation of the project is conditioned by evaluation of the project results (should be done in 2009). This initiative is again only a general measure for young people, but members of socially excluded groups could be also beneficiaries.

Educational Projects Targeting Socially Excluded Target Groups

PHARE: Strengthening employability through improving qualification and flexibility of labour force and advisory and requalification in the field of information and communication technologies.

The project was focused on requalification of vulnerable and excluded target groups – young unemployed people and women returning to the labour market. The requalification courses were focused on the area of e-business management and development of web page for businesses and electronic services.

EQUAL: “Uplatniť prácu svojich vlastných rúk” (Put Own Hands To Use)

The objective of this project was to increase employability of the disadvantaged groups by creating working groups, encouraging business activities, building up special incubators providing support for start-ups – craftsmen. Project web site: <http://www.plt.sk/upsvr/> (only in Slovak)

Internet – the new opportunities for deaf community on the labour market

The objective of this Phare project was to improve social inclusion of the deaf community through internet communication support, new educational and job advisory services, developing new signs in gesture language for ICT terms, specialized eLearning programme and teleworking support. Project web site:

http://akademia.exs.sk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=99 (in Slovak)

Projects of NGOs

As the state's support in this field is very limited, NGOs are playing an important role. Very often these projects are initiated by representatives of the given target group or their relatives. In case of successful promotional activities are these projects succeed to raise funding also from third parties (including the government). One of very interesting and successful initiatives is the project INFODOM (www.radost.sk), which cooperated also with the INFOVEK project.

INFODOM

Project INFODOM (<http://www.radost.sk/>) reacts to practical needs in the area of social inclusion of the handicapped children. It aims at improving information and communication needs in the community of parents of the handicapped children. The author of the project Ms. Zuzana Malisova started this project as her private initiative. Within few years, the project was mainly financed from contributions of 2% from the income tax of natural and legal entities (enabled by the Income Tax Act). From 2005 till 2008 it was supported also by the INFOVEK project. The main objective of the project is to provide information for parents of the handicapped children, e.g.:

- database of special educational institutions;
- information about social benefits and compensations;
- information about special compensation facilities and educational toys;
- database of literature related to specific health problems;
- discussion forum for knowledge exchange between parents but also between stakeholders or professionals in this field.

The web portal Radost.sk is very positively evaluated by parents of the handicapped children. It provides them important information related to support of their children, which is in many cases important for improvement of their health status. It provides also information on health procedures and new medicine techniques, technology, drugs or alternative approaches to people in all Slovakia - geographical location is many times a constraint in access to information and services

for the handicapped people and their relatives. This target group evaluates this project as the most important electronic service for the handicapped children in Slovakia.

SENIOR DOM

The “Senior Dom”² (Seniors’ House) is a not-for-profit non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Kosice (Eastern Slovakia), established in 2001. This NGOs was established by an older lady with leadership skills in her 70s. The target groups of this NGO are the elderly at the age 60+. According to its statute the Senior Dom serves the population of the elderly in Slovakia in the area of social affairs, health care and housing. All its activities are related to improvement of mental, intellectual, health, physical and cultural life of the elderly and facilitation of life style change after retirement. Vision of the Senior Dom is to create a seed of movement and activities, which will change the attitude of the society to the generation of the elderly and improve the quality of life of the elderly by “cultivating” their intellectual and physical capabilities and increasing their social integration (creating new interpersonal relations etc.). The Senior Dom provides training courses (ICT, language, memory training etc.) to its members, including running an “**Internet Tea Room for the Elderly**”. It is a successful example of bottom-up initiatives, initiated by active members of the target community (the elderly), increasing its social inclusion in a very efficient way.

² http://147.232.145.11/kultura/senior_dom/index.htm

4.0 CONCLUSION

When trying to summarise the overall situation in inclusive eGovernment in the Slovak Republic it is important to note at the very beginning that the Information Society development in general is lacking behind the EU average quite significantly. Thus, although relevant strategy documents on social situation and social development in the society pay attention to the issues of social inclusion, the same cannot be said for the “electronic version” of these issues. This fact, including the early stage of eGovernment development, has a direct impact also on the current status of eInclusion and inclusive eGovernment. Although some elements of eInclusion and inclusive eGovernment services can be identified in some national strategy documents (e.g. the OP Information Society; the National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010 National strategy) and related action plans, a holistic, clearly defined strategy for this area is lacking. Based on the National Strategy Reference Framework corresponding Operational Programmes (funded under the Structural Funds) were developed. These strategy documents however also elaborate the issues of eInclusion and inclusive eGovernment services only on a generic (sometimes even superficial) level. Furthermore, a strategy on multi-channel approach is completely missing.

To improve the situation in deploying eInclusion and inclusive eGovernment services, specific priorities, strategy objectives should be defined, specific measures implemented and subsequently calls for project proposals published. However, when looking at the strategy documents of individual Operational Programmes, a couple of references in one Operational programme to another one can be found – but without defining clear responsibilities for concrete actions. Thus, it is difficult to say, whether specific calls targeting inclusive eGovernment services will be published.

Some notes on the eInclusion concept can be found in the OP “Information Society” as well as in the OP “Employment and Social Inclusion”, which should directly support eInclusion and eSkills applications. However, none of these Operational Programmes elaborates either eInclusion issues in sufficient detail, or contains description of specific inclusive eGovernment applications. Without a well-defined framework, or without activities focused on inclusive eGovernment services and corresponding objectives and specific measures elaborated in relevant Operational Programmes, the impact on inclusive eGovernment services development will probably be quite limited.

In recent years, several e-skills projects for disadvantaged groups were funded and implemented under the Tempus Phare and European Social Fund (ESF). However, these projects were mostly focused on general ICT skills and reducing reluctance of members of these target groups to use ICT. This is of course not sufficient, and these actions need to be extended (to other target groups) and upgraded (more complex e-services implemented and deployed). Much more effort has to be paid to raising awareness and readiness.

Available general surveys on the Internet penetration do not show who is not online, what are the differences between and within individual social groups, and what are the spatial differences. Surveys mapping situation within specific disadvantaged communities are needed. The most critical situation is probably within the Roma communities. It cannot be expected that the situation

within these communities will improve quickly. However, providing e-services to intermediaries can be of significant help.

According to Millard, (2007), multi-channel (as opposed to single online channel) delivery is currently the most common way of addressing disadvantaged groups and represents 62% of all practices in 2007, compared to just 19% in 2005. With a more increased focus on skills and service use, this also reflects a greater sophistication and ability to “tune” services to specific needs of a target group or individuals. Although only one-fifth of multi-channel practices are where the end-users themselves do not use ICT, it is nevertheless a very successful strategy for delivering a service, which is likely to increase strongly in the future. Most of these practices involve ICT-empowered front-line staff acting as intermediaries, normally in traditional face-to-face mode, but now enabled by the technology to do so in the end-users’ own domestic, community or institutional context. Some new practices also rely on ICT-empowered back-offices through significant efficiencies in the design and delivery of services, which continue to be provided through traditional channels but now at much higher quality and with greater extent of personalisation.

As already mentioned above, a multi-channel strategy on the state level is completely lacking. However, there are some NGO-based initiatives utilising some elements of the multi-channel approach, (e.g. the INFODOM and SENIOR DOM initiatives). INFODOM is addressing intermediaries (parents of handicapped children) and provides them information and advisory services. Integrated inclusive eGovernment services using this trusted and popular portal for this target group would be a very efficient solution.

SENIOR DOM is another bottom-up initiative, which is addressing a different target group – the elderly. It illustrates how an intermediary organisation – an NGO established by representatives of the elderly themselves can, by improving ICT skills, increase social inclusion of this target group. The case study on the SENIOR DOM is available at <http://www.mceg.gov.eu/case-studies.aspx>.

Finally, the countries starting to develop inclusive eGovernment services with a delay can in principle turn this weakness into a strength – if they manage to learn from those who did it before them, avoiding the mistakes made by others, to build on their lessons learned and on the identified good practices - and thus developing new e-services more quickly, effectively and efficiently. Another potential “accelerator” of this catching-up process is to apply a partnership-oriented approach within the country - and to build on expertise, experiences and proven initiatives of the NGO and the private sector. It will not be necessary to wait for a long time to see whether the Slovak government has capitalised on this potential. The annexes of this paper contain information on areas of inclusive eGovernment, relevant EU legislation, information on relevant initiatives and R&D projects, which can be used as a helpful resource for this purpose.

5.0 REFERENCES

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ANNEX 1 INCLUSIVE EGOVERNMENT - PROBLEM AREAS AND INITIATIVES

This Annex summarises some general issues of inclusive eGovernment and related areas.

In general, the following social inclusion problems related to inclusive eGovernment were identified:

- Unemployment and worklessness: Low skills, Literacy/language skills, Long-term illness/disability, Ethnic penalty/discrimination, Social capital.
- Early years disadvantage; Child poverty, Lack of social capital, Access to benefits. Families or individuals with complex and multiple needs; Information sharing, Access to services, Intermediaries.
- Educational underachievement; Low parental expectation/involvement, Deprived neighbourhoods, Access to home computer.
- Homelessness; Social isolation; Frequent moving.
- Health inequalities; Mental health stigma, Disability and independent living, Access to services³.

Indicators of social inclusion, e.g..⁴:

- Age
- Special needs / presence of a disability
- General health
- Internet access/broadband coverage
- Education
- Income level
- Geography
- Language skills
- Labour market position

According to the definition used by the European Commission, inclusive eGovernment is about using digital technologies to provide public services, which improve people's lives, encourage participation in the local community, strengthen democracy and help those at risk of exclusion from society⁵.

In principle, inclusive eGovernment measures and initiatives should target the following areas:

- **Access for all**

If the Information Society is to be a real success, it must share its benefits with all members of society, the whole society, including those in socially disadvantaged groups, those who find it more difficult to use new technologies, such as those with a disability and the elderly. Fostering eAccessibility should ensure that people with disabilities and elderly people access ICTs on an equal basis with others. This includes removing the barriers encountered when trying to access and use ICT products, services and applications.

³ FOLEY, P., KATHY, ALFONSO, X., FISHER, J. & BRADBROOK, G. (2005). eGovernment: reaching socially excluded groups? (September) Improvement and Development Agency, [cited June 1 2006]. <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=1074872>

⁴ see also eInclusion Measurement Handbook, Tavistock; SIBIS, empirica, 2003

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/egov/index_en.htm

- **Geographical exclusion**

The European Union is committed to ensuring that the more remote and economically disadvantaged regions get the support they need to share in the benefits of economic growth⁶. Broadband internet access can play an important role in narrowing disparities between regions and contributing to social and economic cohesion.

The potential already exists for broadband internet connections to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Such infrastructure can give those living in rural areas access to goods and services without the need to travel great distances (it is not just about buying products and services via the Internet). ICTs based on broadband services and eGovernment facilities can deliver vital public services, create new jobs, and foster economic and social development.

- **Marginalised and vulnerable social groups and social inclusion**

The aim is to develop Information Society where every its member can reap its benefits because – independently of his/her social and cultural situation. It is therefore necessary to help certain groups bridge the growing ‘digital divide’ - including the unemployed, immigrants, disabled, elderly, and those living in remote or economically disadvantaged areas⁷. However, all these groups are confronted with existing barriers like lack of ICT and language, access to public and commercial services on-line (e.g. for finding a job or support social services), which limit their participation in the Information Society.

- **Older people in the Information Society**

Many older people face barriers while trying to exploit ICT products, services and applications. Some of the barriers are physical, which means that ICT manufacturers need to take older people’s needs (implied by their severe hearing, vision or dexterity problems) into account. The existing barriers are reflected also in lower rate of the Internet use by people of the age 65+ (10%).

On the other hand, it is widely recognized that ICTs can help older people to remain active and productive as they age, while improving work-life balance (this, taking into account current demographic trends, will become even more important in the future as the European the population ages). ICTs can also help older people live in their own homes, ensuring that they keep their independence for longer and overcome isolation and loneliness, increasing possibilities for keeping in contact with family and friends⁸.

- **eSkills**

Innovation cycle of ICTs is getting shorter and life in the Information Society is quicker than ever before, new technologies, products and services continuously appear on the market, what means that users must be prepared to update their skills and competences – if they do not want to take a risk of being left behind⁹.

- **Interoperability**

Interoperability is perceived as a key aspect on the road to eGovernment integration and improved service quality, its importance is emphasised also in the new EU strategy i2010

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/geographic/index_en.htm

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/socio/index_en.htm

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/ageing/index_en.htm

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/competences/index_en.htm

where it is addressed as one of the four main challenges. One of the flagship initiatives of the European Commission in the area of interoperability is **IDABC**¹⁰, which stands for Interoperable Delivery of European eGovernment Services to public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens. IDABC uses the opportunities offered by ICTs to encourage and support the delivery of cross-border public sector services to citizens and enterprises in Europe, to improve efficiency and collaboration between European public administrations.

- **Design for all**

One way of ensuring that everyone can fully participate in the Information Society is for industry to design ICT products, services and applications that all potential users (including e.g. the elderly and people with disabilities) can use. **Design for All** (DfA)¹¹ embraces the idea that it is perfectly possible to produce such ICT goods which can be accessed by nearly all potential users without modification or, failing that, products should be easy to adapt according to different needs, or should use standardised interfaces that can be accessed simply by using **Assistive Technologies** (ATs)¹². ATs can provide the vital link that adapts mainstream ICTs to the needs of people with disabilities. ATs are adaptive devices that enable people with special needs to access all manner of technical products and services. The European Commission is committed to funding research into ATs. Currently this is being addressed under the FP7, Challenge 7 - Independent Living and Inclusion¹³.

¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/home>

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/accessibility/dfa/index_en.htm

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/policy/accessibility/assist_tech/index_en.htm

¹³ http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/programme/challenge7_en.html

ANNEX 2 LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS AND INITIATIVES ON THE EU LEVEL

Title & source	Type	Short description
<p>Lisbon Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment, September 2007, http://www.egov2007.gov.pt/</p>	<p>Ministerial declaration</p>	<p>The ministers recognise that it is important to focus on, keep-up the momentum and set clear targets in the following policy priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The common EU policy objective to reinforce cross-border interoperability and reduce administrative burdens requires Member States to identify services and actions which can transform and simplify the way citizens access public services; • To ensure all citizens can benefit from ICT-enabled administrations, inclusive eGovernment policies shall address how best to combine online services together with other channels, such as human intermediaries who need to be equipped with state-of-the-art ICT tools; • The use of ICT tools as part of transparency and democratic engagement policies have been successful in many national, regional and local initiatives. Sharing these experiences and those of the eParticipation actions initiated by the European Parliament and launched by the Commission in 2006, shall contribute to gaining valuable experience.
<p>Ministerial Declaration on the occasion of the Ministerial Conference "ICT for an inclusive society", 11 June 2006, Riga, Latvia</p>	<p>Ministerial declaration</p>	<p>The ministers agreed to focus on the following priorities and committed to the indicated policy goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the needs of older workers and elderly people; • Reduce geographical digital divides; • Enhance eAccessibility and usability; • Improve digital literacy and competences; • Promote cultural diversity in relation to inclusion; • Promote inclusive eGovernment.
<p>European i2010 initiative on e-Inclusion Communication from the commission, SEC(2007) 1469, http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/docs/i2010_initiative/comm_native_com_2007_0694_f_en_acte.doc</p>	<p>Communication from the commission</p>	<p>The Communication proposes a European Initiative on e-Inclusion comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an e-Inclusion campaign "e-Inclusion, be part of it!" to raise awareness and connecting efforts during 2008, to be concluded by a Ministerial Conference, to demonstrate concrete progress and reinforce commitments, and • a strategic framework for action to implement the Riga Ministerial Declaration by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling the conditions for everyone to take part in the information society by bridging the broadband, accessibility and tackling competences gaps; • Accelerating effective participation of groups at risk of exclusion and improving quality of life. • Integrating e-Inclusion actions to maximise lasting impact.
<p>Universal Service Directive (Directive 2002/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services)</p>	<p>EU Directive</p>	<p>The Universal Service Directive is part of the "Telecoms Package" which, together with four other directives ("framework", "access and interconnection", "authorization" and "private life and electronic communications"), aims to recast the existing regulatory framework for telecommunications and to make the electronic communications sector more competitive. Universal</p>

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32002L0022:EN:HTML		<p>service" means an obligation imposed on one or more operators of electronic communications networks and/or services to provide a minimum set of services to all users, regardless of their geographical location within the national territory, at a specified quality level and at an affordable price.</p>
<p>eAccessibility, Communication, 13 September 2005, COM(2005) 425 final http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52005DC0425:EN:HTML</p>	<p>Communication from the Commission</p>	<p>The eAccessibility initiative is aimed to ensure that all citizens have access to Information Society services. This is about removing the technical, legal and other barriers that some people encounter when using ICT * -related services. In particular, it concerns people with disabilities and certain elderly people. It is also about encouraging such people to use ICT and the Internet, and making them aware of the prospects the latter can open up for them.</p>
<p>Bridging the broadband gap, Communication from the Commission, 20.3.2006, COM(2006) 129 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0129:FIN:EN:PDF</p>	<p>Communication from the Commission</p>	<p>The Communication focuses on the lack of adequate broadband services in the less developed areas of the Union. It assesses the instruments available at the EU level to address this and proposes two main strands of action: the strengthening of national broadband strategies that should set clear targets and reflect regional needs, and better exchange of good practice.</p>
<p>eEurope 2002: Accessibility of Public Web Sites and their Content Communication from the Commission, 25 September 2001, COM(2001) 529 final http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0529:FIN:EN:HTML</p>	<p>Communication from the Commission</p>	<p>People with disabilities and older persons face a wide range of technical barriers in terms of their capacity to access the Internet. The accessibility challenges faced by these and other users of the Internet can to a large extent be solved by means of appropriate coding when constructing Web sites and content, and the application of some simple rules of layout and structure when designing Web pages. This Communication is an example of the concerted effort which is required to remove access barriers and to ensure that future technologies and information systems do not create new, additional difficulties for people with disabilities.</p>
<p>Action Plan on Ageing Well in the Information Society June 2007 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0332:FIN:EN:DOC</p>	<p>Action plan</p>	<p>The Action plan is designed to create political and industrial momentum for a significant effort in developing and deploying user-friendly ICT tools and services, mainstreaming older users' needs and supporting other policy areas in addressing the challenges of ageing. This Action Plan is accompanied by research programme (FP7) raising to over €1bn the research investment on ICT targeted at improving the life of older people at home, in the workplace and in society in general. The action plan addresses market barriers for ICT services and tools and seeks to realise the opportunities particularly for the older people by raising awareness, building common strategies, removing technical and regulatory hurdles, and promoting take-up, joint research and innovation. It coordinates existing efforts, adding a number of new actions to integrate, complement and reinforce existing work. Three areas of user needs are to be addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ageing well at work or 'active ageing at work': staying active and productive for longer, with better quality of work and work-life balance with the help of easy-to-access ICT, innovative practices for adaptable, flexible workplaces, ICT skills and competencies and ICT enhanced learning (e-skills and e-learning); • Ageing well in the community: staying socially

		<p>active and creative, through ICT solutions for social networking, as well as access to public and commercial services, thus improving quality of life and reducing social isolation (one of the main problems of older people in rural, scarcely populated areas, as well as urban areas with limited family support);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ageing well at home: enjoying a healthier and higher quality of daily life for longer, assisted by technology, while maintaining a high degree of independence, autonomy and dignity.
<p>Situation of disabled people in the enlarged European Union: The European Action Plan 2006-2007. COM(2005) 604. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0604:FIN:EN:HTML</p>	Action plan	<p>Equality of opportunity is the objective of the European Union's long-term strategy on disability, which aims to enable disabled people to enjoy their right to dignity, equal treatment, independent living and participation in society. Actions undertaken by the EU both underpin the set of common EU economic and social values by enabling disabled people to fulfil their capabilities and participate in society and the economy.</p> <p>The EC plans to introduce a multiannual action plan through to 2010, aimed at mainstreaming disability issues in the relevant Community policies and implementing specific measures in key areas with a view to enhancing the economic and social integration of people with disabilities.</p>
<p>Modernising social protection for the development of high-quality, accessible and sustainable health care and long-term care: support for the national strategies using the "open method of coordination" COM (2004) 0304, 20 April 2004, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52004DC0304:EN:HTML</p>	Communication from the Commission	<p>Ensuring access to high-quality care based on the principles of universal access, fairness and solidarity. Providing a safety net against poverty or social exclusion associated with ill health, accident, disability or old age, for both the beneficiaries of care and their families.</p>
<p>Regions for Economic Change - for the 2007-2013 programming period, adopted by the EC under the Territorial Cooperation objective on 8 November 2006.</p>	Initiative	<p>The initiative "Regions for Economic Change" introduces new ways to dynamise regional and urban networks and to help them work closely with the Commission, to have innovative ideas tested and rapidly disseminated into the Convergence, Regional Competitiveness and Employment, and European Territorial cooperation programmes. From the 30 themes identified in the Staff Working paper (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/ecochange/doc/staffworkingdocument_en.pdf) the Commission has designated around half of them as a priority to be looked at in the first calls for proposals. The Commission is particularly interested in developing networks, potentially as fast track networks in these themes. The themes include: "Better ICT connection between regions" (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/ecochange/doc/theme26.pdf), "Integrating marginalised youth" (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/ecochange/doc/theme35.pdf) and "Managing Migration, facilitating social integration" (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/ecochange/doc/theme36.pdf) which are targeting also use of ICT. Financing for the networks projects linked to the initiative is possible under INTERREG IVC</p>

		(http://www.interreg4c.net/news.html), the 2007-2013 interregional cooperation programme, and URBACT II (http://urbact.eu/), the 2007-2013 cooperation programme on urban issues.
ICT Policy Support Programme (ICT PSP) , http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/ict_psp/index_en.htm - under the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) , http://ec.europa.eu/cip/index_en.htm	Programme	ICT PSP aims at stimulating innovation and competitiveness through the wider uptake and best use of ICT by citizens, governments and businesses, particularly SMEs. The approach is based on leveraging innovation in response to growing societal demands. The ICT PSP will help overcome the hurdles hindering the wider and better use of ICT in high growth sectors of public interest like health, inclusion or public administrations. Hurdles include the unavailability of innovative ICT-based services, the lack of interoperability of solutions across the Member States, as well as the fragmentation of relevant ICT-based products and services markets.
Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013, decision No. 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:327:0045:01:EN:HTML	Programme	The objective of the action programme is to develop and foster interchange, cooperation and mobility so that education and training systems become a world quality reference in accordance with the Lisbon strategy. It thus contributes to the development of the Community as an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.
Social inclusion of young people , Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 14 December 2000 http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11605.htm	Resolution of the Council	Noting that young people, especially the most vulnerable, are particularly susceptible to social, political and cultural exclusion, the Resolution calls on the Commission and the Member States to take several initiatives to ensure that young people are included in all aspects of society. The Council calls on the Commission and the Member States to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make the improvement of the socio-economic situation of young people and their social inclusion, as well as tackling their exclusion, a cross-sectoral priority; • promote broad access for young people to Community and national programmes, particularly with regard to mobility; • study objectives to ensure all young people can play a full part in economic and social life, combat discriminatory behaviour towards young people, prevent situations which can lead to marginalisation, assist in mobilising institutional, economic and social players and encourage young people to participate in drawing up the policies which concern them; • develop exchanges of information and good practice in combating the social exclusion of young people.
A framework strategy for non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all , Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 1 June 2005, COM (2005) 224. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52005DC0224:EN:	Communication from the Commission	This Communication sets out a forward-looking strategy to promote non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all in the EU. Ensuring effective legal protection against discrimination across the EU is a central part of this strategy. This involves ensuring the full transposition of EC anti-discrimination legislation by all Member States. It also requires a range of complementary measures, particularly in order to ensure that people are aware of their rights and are able to get access to justice.

HTML		
<p>Action programme to combat discrimination (2001-2006), Council Decision of 27 November 2000. http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l33113.htm</p>	Action programme	<p>The goal of this programme is to encourage concrete measures to combat discrimination and to supplement the activities (mainly legislative) of the Community and the Member States. A person or group of persons may be discriminated against if they are treated less favourably on the grounds of the characteristics indicated in the Treaty (race, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc.) or if the application of an apparently neutral provision is liable to adversely affect this person or group for the same reasons.</p> <p>The Community wishes in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analysis of factors linked to discrimination (assembly of statistics, studies, evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and dissemination of results); • transnational cooperation between the target actors and creation of European networks of NGOs; • awareness-raising as regards the European dimension of the fight against discrimination.
<p>Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: a European action plan (2004-2010) http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11414.htm</p>	Action Plan	<p>The EC plans to introduce a multiannual action plan aimed at mainstreaming disability issues in the relevant Community policies and implementing specific measures in key areas with a view to enhancing the economic and social integration of people with disabilities.</p> <p>The proposed action plan, covering the period from 2004 to 2010, seeks to set out a sustainable and operational approach to disability issues in the enlarged Europe. It has three central objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to implement fully the Directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation; • to reinforce mainstreaming of disability issues in the relevant Community policies; • to improve accessibility for all.
<p>Equal treatment in employment and occupation, Directive 2000/78/EC, 27 November 2000 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!DocNumber&lg=en&type_doc=Directive&an_doc=2000&nu_doc=78</p>	EC directive	<p>The purpose of this Directive is to lay down a general framework for combating discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation as regards employment and occupation, with a view to putting into effect in the Member States the principle of equal treatment</p>
<p>Immigration, integration and employment Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2003) 336 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52003DC0336:EN:HTML</p>	Communication	<p>Communication proposals to support the introduction of effective policies concerning the integration * of third-country nationals. This text deals with the current legislative framework for integration, the approaches adopted at European level and the policy orientations and priorities for the future.</p>
<p>Community programme for employment and solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013) Decision No 1672/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community</p>	Community programme	<p>The aim of the PROGRESS programme is to provide financial support for the implementation of the EU's objectives in the field of employment and social affairs. PROGRESS, the budget for which is 743 million, will finance analysis, mutual learning, awareness-raising and dissemination activities, as well as assistance for the main players over the</p>

<p>Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:315:0001:01:EN:HTML</p>		<p>period 2007-2013. The programme will be divided into five sections corresponding to five main fields of activity: employment, social protection and inclusion, working conditions, diversity and combating discrimination, and equality between women and men.</p>
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ANNEX 3 PROJECTS STIMULATING INCLUSIVE EGOVERNMENT

This annex provides a brief overview of R&D projects and other initiatives related to inclusive eGovernment funded by different instruments supported by the EU. They can also serve as an “inspiration” for national projects, adapting them to the context in their country.

There is a large number of R&D projects (either completed or still running) funded under Framework Programmes (FP) relevant to the discussed area:

- *Inclusive eGovernment*¹⁴ - the EU has funded more than 80 eGovernment-related research projects under the FP5 and FP6 since 1998. These projects were aimed at modernising public administration at all levels, developing new and/or improving services for citizens and businesses, while making them more user-friendly, in particular for marginalized groups in society (disabled, elderly, or unemployed people).
- *eAccessibility projects*¹⁵ are addressing problems, which prevent people from fully utilising ICTs and focus on helping those from vulnerable groups, such as elderly and disabled people, play a more active part in the Information Society with the help of ICTs. The current FP7 continues to provide strong support under its Challenge 7 priority area¹⁶ - Independent Living and Inclusion.
- *Supporting social and cultural inclusion*¹⁷ - these research projects should result in helping immigrants, disabled people, the unemployed and those from economically disadvantaged areas bridge the digital divide. The aim is to harness ICTs to help people assimilate into their communities, live more independent lives or improve access to the jobs market.
- *Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) for the Ageing Society*¹⁸ - the aim is to extend the time during which elderly people can live independently in their preferred environment with the support of ICTs. The projects target the needs of the individual elderly person, their families and caretakers, rather than the health care institutions. This includes for example assistance to carry out daily activities, health and activity monitoring and enhancing safety and security. It also covers means to improve access to social, medical and emergency services, and to facilitate social contacts as well as access to context-based infotainment and entertainment.
- *Projects to boost ICT skills and learning*¹⁹ seek to harness digital technologies to boost lifelong learning and eLearning for everyone, including older people, those with disabilities, and people from disadvantaged backgrounds or isolated communities.
- *Projects for older people* that explore and develop the ways in which ICTs can meet the needs and maximise the potential of older people. A list of these projects is at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/research/ageing/index_en.htm
- *New Opportunities for Europe's Regions*²⁰ - these projects are addressing the challenge to ensure that all Europe's regions benefit from the new opportunities provided by the Information Society and that no region is left behind. ICT applications developed within

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/research/projects/index_en.htm

¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/research/accessibility/index_en.htm

¹⁶ http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/programme/challenge7_en.html

¹⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/research/socio/index_en.htm

¹⁸ <http://cordis.europa.eu/ist/so/aal/home.html>

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/research/competence/index_en.htm

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/regwor/reg/index_en.htm

these project are making physical location less important in getting an education, finding new business opportunities and expanding horizons of people living in Europe's less developed or remote regions generally.

Selected projects in these fields:

- *DfA@eInclusion Coordination Action*, <http://www.dfaei.org/objectives.html> - One of the objectives of this project is to create and provide new on-line services, consultation and training as well as enable knowledge transfer in the domains of eAccessibility, Design for All and eInclusion. an overview of the recent developments in policy and legislation with regard to Design for All (DfA). D2.2b Report o Policy and DfA - the purpose of the report is to provide a conceptual framework and guidance for the understanding of policy related activities in the field. The project report D2.3 Overview of European benchmarking activities contains information on national benchmarking activities and evaluation of eAccessibility and usability guidelines.
- *The RISESI project* was funded within the FP5 IST Programme (IST–2001-33189). The project sought to identify factors influencing labour markets in the ICT sectors, particularly concerning social inclusion. It also aimed to propose policy recommendations targeted towards the main potentially marginalized groups of interest: women, citizens with immigrant backgrounds, immigrants, workers displaced from non-information society (primarily industrial) sectors, and youth. RISESI's main objective with respect to policy was to improve the social inclusion of these groups in the areas of employment and integration within the ICT sectors.