



Country Profile

Information Society Indicators

- Percentage of households having access to the Internet at home, 2006: 48.7%
- Percentage of households with a broadband connection, 2006: 20%
- Percentage of individuals (16-74) using the Internet at least once a week, 2006: 36%
- Percentage of individuals (16-74) having ordered/bought services for private use over the Internet in the last 3 months, 2006: 23%
- Percentage of individuals (16-74) using the Internet for interacting with public authorities, 2006: Obtaining information 17.7%, downloading official forms 15.8%, returning filled forms 11.9%.

Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2006

e-Inclusion History

- In 1999 Ireland published its first Action Plan on the Information Society - *Implementing the Information Society in Ireland*. In 2002, a further plan, *New Connections*, was published. Both plans were aimed at stimulating greater participation in the Information Society through the creation of infrastructures, raising awareness and promoting engagement by the public and organisations that could benefit from exploiting the Internet and its related technologies. The third Action Plan on the Knowledge Society is currently being developed.
- In 1997 the Government established the first Information Society Commission (ISC), to act as an independent advisory body on matters relating to the Information Society. Its term of office finished at the end of 2000. The second ISC was established in 2002 and its term finished at the end of 2004.
- The eInclusion Fund, now called the ASC (Access, Skills and Content) Initiative was started in 2005. The purpose of the funding is to target those at greatest risk of being left behind in the move to the Knowledge Society, by exploiting the potential of technology to foster communities of common interest through on-line services and networks. It is designed to promote access, skills and the creation of content for community based groups and organisations that primarily cater to the needs of older people and people with disabilities. In 2005, 48 projects were funded under the eInclusion Fund. In 2006, under the ASC Initiative, €1.45m was spread among 75 projects being undertaken right across the country. 90 projects were approved for funding of €2.4m in 2007.

e-Inclusion Strategy

- Currently, a new Action Plan on the Knowledge Society is being developed and eInclusion is one of two key focus areas in the plan.
- The plan is based on the vision that 'Ireland is recognised as a place where everyone has the opportunity, through engagement, awareness, support, enablement and participation, to exploit ICT to improve their quality of life, and the cohesiveness and wellbeing of their communities.' The new plan will build on e-inclusion achievements to date and reflect the need to develop the use of ICT to achieve wider inclusion objectives. In addition it will incorporate new measures to promote eInclusion and to intensify the focus on the need to further encourage, facilitate and enable more senior citizens to participate in the knowledge society
- eInclusion policy will aim to:
 - raise awareness among target groups of the potential of the Knowledge Society
 - address the ability of people to access and use technologies in terms of skills, connectivity and accessibility
 - focus on the application and use of technologies by encouraging the development of more content (which will enhance the relevance and value of the Internet as a resource), research on content needs and more interaction with the public and private sectors on meeting future content demands.



Important policies in place

- There are a number of Irish policy documents which include initiatives to progress an inclusive Knowledge Society. These include [Towards 2016](#), the current Social Partnership Agreement, [Programme for Government 2007-2012](#), [National Development Plan 2007-2013](#) and [National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016](#).
- The eInclusion Fund, now called the ASC (Access, Skills and Content) Initiative, was started in 2005 and it has been funded annually since then. It is aimed at enhancing understanding and appreciation of how technological advances benefit individuals and society and encouraging and assisting the development of initiatives which focus on helping to provide the necessary skills for confident use of technology by all citizens – particularly those who have been identified as being at higher risk of exclusion – so that they may participate in an inclusive Information Society.

Over €2.38 million was allocated in 2007 to 90 separate initiatives. These projects are at present underway and are at various stages of progress with most due to be completed in 2008. Thousands of people will benefit directly from these initiatives with many thousands of others deriving further benefits.

The projects encompass a very broad range of initiatives from a local training course for as few as 5 participants to an undertaking which will see 150 peer group trainers equipped with skills and a further 2,000 people trained in ICT skills. The latter project will also deepen the community skills infrastructure in disadvantaged communities enabling further passing on of ICT skills beyond the lifetime of this project.

A list of projects supported is available on the [Department of the Taoiseach website](#).

e-Inclusion Legal Framework

Law in practice

- The Disability Act 2005 sets out a range of obligations for public service bodies in the area of access to services and information. This includes electronic and written information being provided in an accessible format to a person with a vision impairment on request and audio communications being made accessible to a person with a hearing impairment. The Act also provided for the establishment of a “Centre for Excellence in Universal Design” (established in January 2007) which has a specific role in relation in developing and promulgating Design for All principles in ICT.

Research in Practice

- An eInclusion Research Group has been established to deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities around e-inclusion and bridging the digital divide.
- In 2003 the Information Society Commission published research by Dr Susan O’Donnell on access and usage of ICT – [eInclusion: expanding the Information Society in Ireland](#)
- The Information Society Policy Unit at the Department of the Taoiseach has also undertaken some initial research on the key target group of senior citizens (aged 65 and over) who do not currently engage with the internet (Jordan – “Seniors and Surfing Why Not” - 2007). The findings have improved insights into the perspectives of this key group and will inform policy development including specific measures to encourage and facilitate greater engagement by senior citizens with the internet.
- Research is also being supported under the ASC (Access, Skills and Content) Initiative, e.g. research on specific training needs and development of an online resource base to support organisations working on Information Society and eInclusion issues for older people in Ireland.

e-Inclusion Actors

- The ISPU (Information Society Policy Unit) in the Department of the Taoiseach has a co-



<p>ordinating role on the Information Society, including e-inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An eInclusion Stakeholders Group was established to monitor progress on a national e-inclusion strategy, which will address those in each lifecycle stage (children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities) that are digitally excluded. ▪ The eInclusion Research Group will carry out research to deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities around e-inclusion and bridging the digital divide. ▪ The Inter-Departmental eAccessibility Group promotes ICT accessibility for people with disabilities in Ireland. ▪ There is significant and important involvement by the community, voluntary and not-for-profit sector in prioritising e-inclusion and the ASC Initiative is supporting them in this regard.
<p>e-Inclusion Who is Who</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Colm Butler, Information Society Policy Unit. Department of the Taoiseach, Government Buildings, Upper Merrion Street, IE- Dublin 2
<p>e.Inclusion Progress by Riga Areas</p>
<p>ICT & Ageing</p>
<p>Status in ICT & Ageing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of individuals (55-74) who have used a computer, 2006: 28.5% ▪ Percentage of individuals (55-74) who have used the Internet, 2006: 20.9% <p>Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2006</p>
<p>Actions to support ICT& Ageing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is envisaged that the new Action Plan on the Knowledge Society will include a number of actions which will specifically focus on how we can encourage more seniors to engage with the Internet and avail of the opportunities the Knowledge Society can make available to them.
<p>Geographic digital divide</p>
<p>Status of Common access to electronic content and services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of households with a broadband connection, 2006: 20% ▪ Percentage of households with an Internet connection, 2006: 48.7%
<p>Actions to support Common access to electronic content and services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The National Broadband Scheme (NBS) will provide broadband services to certain target areas in Ireland in which broadband services are not currently available or are unlikely to be available in the foreseeable future. The tendering process for the NBS commenced in May 2007 and it is expected that a preferred Service Provider (or consortium of Service Providers) will be selected in 2008. The objective is that the last 10%-15% of the country, which will never have access to broadband without intervention or support, will now have access to broadband, provided on a technology-neutral basis. ▪ Projects funded under the ASC Initiative have a broad geographical spread and, in 2007, represent 22 of the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland. They encompass all areas of Irish society from isolated rural communities, residents of villages, towns and city dwellers as well as communities of common interest such as active retirement groups and organisations which work with people with disabilities.
<p>e-Accessibility</p>
<p>Status of e-Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of persons with a disability in households having a personal computer, 2006: 49.4% ▪ Percentage of persons with a disability in households having access to the Internet, 2006: 39.9% <p>Source: CSO, Census 2006</p>
<p>Actions towards e-Accessibility</p>



- The NDA (National Disability Authority) are currently redeveloping their [IT Accessibility Guidelines](#) to provide best practice guidance on web accessibility. The NDA is also developing other resources, including Smart Card accessibility guidelines, non-technical advice on carrying out accessibility audits, and an ICT accessibility procurement toolkit.
- A number of projects supported by the ASC Initiative focus on the ICT needs of people with particular access needs, e.g. funding is being given to provide a whiteboard and assistive technology switches in a special school.

Digital Literacy and Competences

Status on Digital Literacy and Competences

- Percentage of households who cite lack of skills as a reason for not having access to the Internet at home, 2006: 14.6%

Actions towards stimulating Digital Literacy and Competences

- Towards 2016 (Social Partnership Agreement) prioritises action across each lifecycle stage (children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities) on helping those from disadvantaged communities to acquire basic ICT skills.
- The new national skills strategy – *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy* – sets out the skills requirements of the economy to 2020, based on a vision of a knowledge based, innovation driven, high growth, participative and inclusive economy.
- The Department of Education & Science is developing an ICT Strategy for Schools, to develop an e-learning culture in schools that will ensure that ICT usage is embedded in teaching and learning across the curriculum.
- Skills development has been a key focus of the ASC Initiative run by the ISPU (Information Society Policy Unit) in the Department of the Taoiseach. Training is incorporated in 82 (91%) of ASC projects funded in 2007. These projects entail specific measures to assist the target groups, in particular older people and people with disabilities to engage with the knowledge society.

Inclusive eGovernment

Status on inclusive eGovernment

The principles driving the Inclusive eGovernment agenda at a European level have been on the national agenda in Ireland since the publication of the [first action plan](#) on the information society in 1999, which identified the need for action to ensure that the benefits of the information society could be enjoyed by all sections of society. The second action plan, [New Connections \(2002\)](#), identified the need to reshape the delivery of government services around user needs, and on a 24/7 basis.

Significant progress is being made in achieving the goals set out in the action plans. According to Central Statistic Office statistics for 2006, 867,500 (58.5%) households had a home computer and 722,200 (48.7%) households had an internet connection. This marked an increase of approximately 200,000 households since 2004.

The CSO statistics reveal that 545,600 (17.7%) persons used the internet in the previous three months to obtain information from public authority websites, 487,000 (15.8%) used the internet to download official forms and 366,300 (11.9%) used the internet to send completed forms.

The Information Society Commission produced a report on [eGovernment](#) which noted the importance of ensuring that government services are socially inclusive and that ICT presents the opportunity to address traditional problems of exclusion and disadvantage. This report recognised that many citizens who are at risk of exclusion might need assistance in accessing public services, either at front desks or over the telephone.

Steps have been taken to ensure that citizens are able to access important public services through one easy electronic channel and the [citizens information](#) portal has been identified as an example of best practice in the 2007 Capgemini benchmark of online public services. However, other channels of delivery remain open to all users.



Actions towards inclusive eGovernment

ICT has been recognised as an important issue in the national social partnership agreement, [Towards 2016](#).

The adoption of a lifecycle framework, as set out by Ireland's National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) in its report, [The Developmental Welfare State](#), is a key innovative feature of the partnership agreement. The lifecycle approach places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery, by assessing the risks facing him/her, and the supports available to him/her to address those risks, at key stages in his/her life. The key lifecycle stages are identified as: Children, People of Working Age, Older People, and People with Disabilities.

ICT is identified as a key enabler of change in relation to many of the key issues which face each of these four groups. This will be reflected in the forthcoming Knowledge Society Action Plan. The new plan will go beyond basic technological, infrastructural and **access** issues and will also include actions aimed at **raising awareness** of the potential benefits of using ICT; the need to address ICT **skills** requirements; and the development of **content** that is relevant to the needs of all sectors of society, including those at risk of exclusion.

Public services will continue to be delivered through various channels of delivery, including on a face-to-face basis where appropriate.

Challenges

- There are many people who are not engaged with the Information Society and who run the risk of marginalisation as more and more content is created, disseminated and traded across the Internet. Therefore, there is a requirement to continue to raise awareness and to encourage more people to avail of these opportunities.
- It will be a substantial challenge to halve number of older people who do not engage with the Internet by 2010 in order to meet the target under the *Ageing well in the Information Society - i2010 Initiative*.

