

[eInclusion in]

Belgium

België / Belgique / Belgien



ICT & Ageing

Geographic Digital Divide

eAccessibility

eInclusion

Cultural Diversity

Inclusive eGovernment

Digital Literacy & Competences

Country Profile

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Disclaimer:

This document is not intended to be exhaustive. Its purpose is to give an overview of the general eInclusion status in Belgium. Even though every care has been taken to ensure accuracy, the information herein should be treated as indicative and no responsibility for errors can be assumed. Neither the European Commission, nor any person acting on its behalf can be held responsible for the use that could be made of the information provided.

Country Profile

Basic data and indicators

Basic Data

Population (1 000): 10 750 inhabitants (2009, provisional)

GDP at market prices: 337 284.0 million Euro (2009)

GDP per inhabitant in PPS (Purchasing Power Standards, EU-27 = 100): 115 (2008)

GDP growth rate: -3.0 % (2009)

Inflation rate: 0.0 % (2009)

Unemployment rate: 7.9 % (2009)

Government debt/GDP: 96.7 % (2009)

Public balance (government deficit or surplus/GDP): -6.0 % (2009)

Source: Eurostat

Area: 30 528 km²

Capital city: Brussels

Official EU Languages: Dutch, French, German

Currency: Euro

Source: Europa website

Information Society Indicators

Percentage of households with Internet access: 67 % (2009)

Percentage of households with broadband connection: 63 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals regularly using the Internet: 70 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for uploading self-created content: 18 % (2009) (*)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for reading online newspapers/magazines: 34 % (2009)

Percentage of Individuals using the Internet for finding information about goods and services: 59 % (2009)

Percentage of Individuals using the Internet for seeking health-related information: 33 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for looking for a job or sending a job application: 13 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for doing an online course: 4 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for seeking information with the purpose of learning: 27 % (2009)

Percentage of: individuals using the Internet for interaction with public authorities: obtaining information 27.2 %, downloading forms 12.6 %, returning filled forms 10.2 % (2009)

Source: *Eurostat*

(*) Source: *Digital competitiveness report*

Editorial notice: Statistical indicators referenced in this section reflect those of Eurostat at the time the Edition is being prepared.

eInclusion History

Main developments and key milestones (in reverse chronological order)

For the latest developments, see [ePractice news for eInclusion](#)

Recent News

May 2010

Since 30 April 2010, a survey has been undertaken in the [VERITAS project](#) among designers and developers in order to better understand the design and development process of products and services for people with disabilities, their functional limitations as well as those of older people.

Designers or developers active in the design and development process in the automotive, smart living spaces, workplace, eHealth and/or infotainment domains, have been invited to complete the survey by answering related questionnaire(s):

- ▶ Automotive
- ▶ Smart living spaces
- ▶ Working environment
- ▶ E-health
- ▶ Infotainment.

The questionnaires have been designed to identify the industrial user's needs of designers and developers per application sector in terms of procedures followed for the design and development of new products. The questionnaires take into account their potential relation to older people and people with disabilities in the VERITAS project. The objective of this questionnaire was to help in extracting project users' needs and in preparing a report.

February 2010

The '[Start2surf@home](#)' was an initiative launched by the Federal Government aiming to **reduce digital divide** by offering computers with full Internet access to 100 000 Belgians. Past the launch of 'Internet for Everyone' (*'Internet pour tous'*) in 2006, the Federal Government launched a new all-in-one operation aiming at promoting the use of computers and of the Internet via a low-priced pack. The '[Start2surf@home](#)' pack was customised according to the needs of the user and it included a computer, an internet subscription, anti-virus software, as well as a basic manual to introduce users into the world of computers and the Internet.

News 2009 and before

2009

- ▶ In 2009, the Ministry of Social Integration [presented](#) (in French) a study performed by the Work & Technology Research Centre of the University of Namur (*Fondation Travail – Université - FTU*) on off-line youngsters and the digital divide. It concluded that there is a considerable gap between the youngsters' actual skills and the requirements posed by the socioeconomic sphere. This gap can bring about autonomy and socioeconomic insertion issues for 16–25 year-olds, who are going through many transitions. Following this study, the Ministry is subsidising a limited number of innovative projects that aim at closing this gap, during 2010–2011.

- ▶ The Flemish Government showed its intention [to educate its citizens](#) on free software (open source), in its coalition agreement published on *10 July 2009*. The open source information is meant to help to increase the region's use of the Internet, including electronic government services, media, culture, health services and eLearning. The regional government took office on 13 July 2009 with the intention to improve access to high-quality media content, which combines technological innovations and new media. The Flemish plan should also help to reduce the administrative burden.
- ▶ In *June 2009*, a study was performed by the Walloon Telecommunications Agency (*Agence Wallonne des Télécommunications* – AWT) on the [use of ICT by Walloons](#). The study analysed information gathered in a 2008 survey among 2169 individuals aged 15 or older. The study demonstrated that the digital divide issue has remained a reality. Almost one third of Walloons were not using the Internet. This digital divide can also be identified at two levels:
 - physical access to technology (lack of equipment, financial resources and physical access);
 - difficulty to use technology (lack of ICT, intellectual and social skills).

2008

- ▶ The Ministry of Social Integration subsidised both public and private organisations to provide ICT training for their respective target publics, encouraging them to use innovative and project-based techniques.
- ▶ In *July 2008*, foreign nationals living in Belgium became entitled to replace their old paper identity card with versatile and 'smart' electronic identity cards. The new cards were designed to be a convenient citizen-centred tool, which would save time and energy by providing a safe and secure means to deal with the government electronically. The electronic identity cards can also be used by citizens and residents to access and interact with data held in national registries by the government.
- ▶ In *June 2008*, the Work & Technology Research Centre of the University of Namur published a [study](#) (in French) commissioned by the Ministry of Social Integration concerning the digital divide of the second degree. It focuses on competences and ICT skills rather than the purely material access to a computer and internet, and states that while the digital divide is being closed in terms of computer access, it widens in terms of literacy and competences.

In the same month, the Flemish Government presented [recommendations](#) on Digital Flanders along with the transposition of the 2010 objectives of the European Commission, which contained specific additional recommendations on eInclusion and related areas, such as eHealth (extended to eCare) and eWork.

- ▶ In *2008*, governmental websites were reported to aim at obtaining the 'Anysurfer' Label. This is a quality label for meeting the criteria on web accessibility based on international guidelines. 'Anysurfer' is a private initiative of people with physical impairments. The label aims at providing accessible websites for people with disabilities and, in particular, for visually impaired people. The [Federal Belgian Portal](#) has obtained the 'Anysurfer' label.
- ▶ The Commune of Waterloo, launched in 2007 a European first: the award winning service W@tson, the 'virtual local councillor' available to answer questions from the citizens of Waterloo for 24 hours a day through an instant messaging platform. In *August 2008*, Watson extended its database and increased its capacity to direct users in order to find relevant information on the Commune's website by an intuitive recognition of keywords.

2007

- ▶ An intermediary audit was made of the Federal Plan for eInclusion on the commission of the Ministry of Social Integration. This audit has been conducted by the University of Namur (Interdisciplinary Group on Technology Assessment) in cooperation with Bart Cammaerts (London School of Economics – LSE).

- ▶ In *October 2007*, the first European quality label for web accessibility was launched in a joint Belgian, French and Spanish initiative. Under the name '[Euracert](#)', the certification intended to contribute towards a common European accessibility label.
- ▶ In *2007*, young Belgian job seekers holding an eID card could apply on-line for a '**first job**' card from the National Employment Office. The 'first job' cardholders were eligible for an initial employment contract, which facilitated job seeking in Belgium.
- ▶ In *February 2007*, a [comparative study](#) of the price of an Internet connection in Belgium was published by the Ministry of Social Integration . It provided a statistical basis for the conclusion that the price of a connection is relatively high in Belgium, especially compared with its neighbouring countries.
- ▶ In *January 2007*, the Government of the Region of Wallonia adopted the '[Anysurfer](#)' accessibility label, which was aimed at encouraging further improvements in the accessibility of the Region's public administration websites to the sight-impaired and Internet surfers with disabilities.
- ▶ In the period 2006–2007, the '[Internet for everyone](#)' ('*Internet pour tous*') campaign consisted of providing one affordable package deal to potential buyers. The package consisted of a PC, an Internet connection and a training session. The package was offered by three consortia consisting of well known PC manufacturers and ISPs. It was indicated that the project contributed to 16 % of the increase of new Internet connections over a period of one year. The retailers estimated the slipstream of the project to be 50 %. This percentage accounted for buyers initially interested in the package but who eventually opted for another (more expensive) commercial offer. As a sum, the project contributed to almost a quarter of the increase of Internet connections.

2006

- ▶ The Ministry of Social Integration introduced a measure to give Public Social Welfare Centres (PSWC) the opportunity to intervene in the cost of a recycled computer for a number of their clients setting it at € 100 per computer. This measure was part of a combination of measures to avail PSWCs with the means to promote the social participation, as well as the cultural and sportive development of their clients.
- ▶ Together with the set up of Easy-e-Spaces, the Ministry of Social Integration encouraged and subsidised public and social organisations to start up their own public computer centres, *Openbare Computerruimten* (OCR) or *Espaces Publics Numériques* (EPN), to provide free internet, computer access and ICT training to both the general public and specific target groups. Over the course of 4 years (2006–2010), more than 400 of these spaces started up and were sustained in Belgium.
- ▶ Starting *1 July 2006*, **only the electronic procedure** became authorised for introducing an application for social help for the disabled, through the [Communit-e](#) process.
- ▶ In 2006, '[Easy-e-Space](#)', a joint effort of Oxfam and the Ministry of Social Integration, offered a free computer and Internet service in public spaces. 'Easy-e-Space' comprised a computer network of five PCs having them all linked with a powerful server, a printer and a scanner. All the materials (except for the server) were refurbished second hand equipment and utilised an open source software environment (Edubuntu).

2005

- ▶ In the period *October–November 2005*, Fedict launched the [Peeceefobie/Pécéphobie](#) original campaign in which Ginette, a fictional character, explained - via a TV commercial, a website (www.peeceefobie.be), a booklet, and a teaching package - how she had overcome her fear of PCs and the Internet. In seven simple steps and in simple terms she explained how users could protect their computer against viruses, spam (unwanted e-mail), intruders via the Internet, and so on.

- ▶ In *September 2005*, the Belgian Social Security Administration launched the '[Communit-e](#)' application, aimed at simplifying the benefit application procedures for the disabled, while reducing examination periods and improving cost control.

eInclusion Strategy

Main strategic objectives and principles

eInclusion Policies

ICT policy and eInclusion policy in Belgium is to a large extent demand- and sector-driven. This is partially explained by the institutional arrangements that govern the country. In social affairs, many institutional channels exist through which social organisations and pressure groups can express their concerns. At governmental level, matters pertaining to eInclusion are dealt with by different ministries and administrations depending on their respective competencies. The federal structure of Belgium also allows for a regionally diversified approach.

Regions are competent for matters such as town and country planning, nature conservation, housing, water policy, environment, economics, energy policy, local authorities, employment policy, public works and transport. Communities are competent for personal matters (health, welfare), cultural matters, education and training, and co-operation between the Communities and the Regions.

Each Region and Community has its own legislative and executive powers in its respective fields of competence, and its own Parliament and Government to exercise these powers. However, the Flemish Region and Community has merged their executive and legislative powers, giving birth to one single Flemish Parliament, one single Flemish Government and one single Public Administration, competent for community and regional matters.

Federal policies

Federal Plan for e-Inclusion

The '**Federal Plan for e-Inclusion**' is an agreement between the Federal Government and the regional authorities (Flemish, French and German-speaking) of Belgium on integrated eGovernment and the construction, usage and the development of integrated services.

All Belgian Governments launched this national, collaboratively agreed action plan to address the digital divide challenge in the country. This is one of the few eGovernment initiatives in Belgium with a national scope. Its first phase covers the years 2006-2010 and had an ambitious objective of having reduced the digital divide in Belgium by one-third by 2010. The national action plan against the digital divide covers all governments in Belgium, and aims at creating synergies between existing and future government approaches, entirely respecting each government's competencies. The national action plan against the digital divide further aims to establish a digital-divide-specific barometer that assesses annually the digital divide in a quantitative and qualitative manner. (Source: [OECD](#))

eSociety Policy

In the aim to ensure that eGovernment services are **accessible to all** and that they do not widen the digital divide, the Government has developed a strategy to train and stimulate citizens to use the Internet ('Computerisation of the society or eSociety policy'), while encouraging private or voluntary organisations to act as intermediaries by providing value-added public services.

National Action Plan on Digital Divide

Following the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, Belgium made a commitment to develop a national action plan to combat the digital divide. Special attention has been given to people with disabilities in order to ensure that ICT would bridge the digital divide rather than allow it to further grow. This has led to a study that started in September 2005 with a focus on having a clear picture on

the issues and desires of people with disabilities, per type of disability. This Guide is now available. It goes hand in hand with further stimulus of 'design for all' towards entrepreneurs, which opens new markets.

Flemish policies

Digital FI@nders

The action plan 'Digital FI@nders' includes the awareness campaign 'Hallo Vlaanderen' and the newsletter 'Kenniswijzer eFI@nders' on latest ICT developments.

Walloon regional policies

The Walloon Region has taken measures to combat the digital divide. The Council of Ministers of 21 March 2004 in Ostend instructed the Minister of Social Integration, in collaboration with the Secretary of State for the Computerisation of the State and the federal government.

An initial inventory, established in 2004 to measure the diversity of initiatives, was undertaken. Such measures complemented and gave rise to an action programme adopted by the Government in July 2005 entitled 'Contribution of the Walloon Region on a national digital inclusion' (*Contribution de la Région wallonne au plan national d'inclusion numérique*). The implementation of actions contained therein is coordinated by the Office of the Minister-President with the support of the EASI-WAL Commission. This document has also served as the starting point for the 'National Plan to Fight against the digital divide' (*Plan national de lutte contre la fracture numérique*), adopted in October 2005. The national plan sponsors joint activities with competent bodies at the federal and community levels.

eInclusion Legal Framework

Main legal texts impacting on the development of eInclusion

Introduction

There is no comprehensive legislation information available on eInclusion in Belgium. The topic is mainly covered through eGovernment and social security legislation; however, the complex political structure of the country results in a diversified legislation depending on the federal, regional, and community laws applicable for every citizen.

The following paragraphs present the eInclusion aspect of the federal legislation, which is applicable to all residents of Belgium.

eGovernment Legislation

All Belgian citizens are entitled to an electronic identity card with digital certificates that allows for electronic authentication and electronic signatures. The legal framework of the electronic identity card is based on the Law of 25 March 2003 on national registers, the Royal Decree of the same date on eID cards, and the Royal Decree of 1 September 2004 on the 'decision to proceed with the widespread introduction of the electronic identity card'. In addition, the law of 15 March 2007 defines a legal framework for providers of trusted services. It includes time stamping, electronic archiving, registered mail and transitory blocking of money transfers. By defining guarantees for the offering of these services, the law increases its legitimacy among the citizens.

eCommunications Legislation

Law on electronic communications

The law on electronic communications was adopted on 13 June 2005 and published in the Belgian Official Journal on 20 June 2005. It was intended to transpose the [EU regulatory framework for electronic communications](#) into Belgian law. This legislation set the landscape for the wide development of broadband internet throughout the urban and rural areas in Belgium, thus eliminating the geographical digital divide in the country.

eInclusion Actors

Main roles and responsibilities

The federal structure of Belgium results in a political landscape where six governments are involved in the definition and implementation of the Belgian eInclusion policies.

Federal level

Federal Government - Minister for Enterprise and Simplification

At the federal level, eInclusion policy is formed by the Minister for Enterprise and Simplification. The Minister also coordinates the activities of the regions and communities.

Federal Government - Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health

The Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health is responsible for social integration and oversees the operation of public services that address the digital divide, such as the FPS SI (see below).

Federal Government - Secretary of State for Poverty Reduction and Social Integration

The [Secretary of State for Poverty Reduction and Social Integration](#) supervises the operation of the Federal Public Service for Social Integration (FPS SI). According to the Secretary of State, the [social integration plan](#) includes measures in the direction of computer recycling, support of the 'Easy-e-Space' installations, reduction of internet costs and co-financing of the purchase of recycled computers.

Federal Public Service for Information Technology and Communication (Fedict) (*Service public fédéral Technologie de l'Information et de la Communication*) (*Federale Overheidsdienst voor Informatie- en Communicatietechnologie*)

The main implementation of the eInclusion strategy in Belgium at the federal level is performed by [FEDICT](#). The Federal Public Service for Information Technology and Communication (Fedict) provides its services to regional and community governments relating to its fields of operation.

Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration (PPS SI) (*Services publics fédéraux de programmation pour l'intégration sociale - SPP IS*) (*Programmatorische Federale Overheidsdienst Maatschappelijke Integratie - POD MI*)

The [Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration](#) (PPS SI) is a planning service of the federal government established in 2003 and led by a management committee. It addresses many different aspects of social integration, including the operation of public social welfare centres, anti-poverty policy, federal urban policy, digital divide, and eGovernment & website applications.

Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS) (*Banque-Carrefour de la Sécurité sociale*) (*Kruispuntbank van de Sociale Zekerheid*)

The [CBSS](#) supports the implementation of eGovernment services in the social sector. In particular, it supports the implementation of integrated services across all public institutions in dealing with social security aspects. The CBSS also manages the 'Register bis' which contains a database of persons who do not have the Belgian nationality, but who are located in Belgium and are registered with the Belgian Social Security.

Regional level

Flemish region

Flemish Government (*Vlaamse regering*)

The [Flemish regional/community Government](#) addresses eInclusion through the duties of the Minister for Administrative Affairs, Local and Provincial Government, Civil Integration, Tourism and the *Vlaamse Rand*. Significant activity is performed through the Coordination Cell for Flemish e-Government (CORVE).

Walloon region

Walloon Regional Government (*Gouvernement wallon*)

The dual role of the Walloon President who is also the President of the French Community facilitates the activities towards eInclusion in Wallonia. These activities are primarily channelled through the eGovernment support [activities of the President](#). The organisation responsible for eGovernment and eInclusion is the eAdministration–Simplification Directorate-General (EASI–WAL).

Brussels-Capital region

Ministry of the Brussels-Capital region (*Ministère de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*) (*Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest*)

The Ministry of the Brussels-Capital Region is responsible for the implementation of eInclusion at the Brussels Capital regional level. The Brussels Regional Informatics Centre (BRIC) provides ICT support for the citizens of Brussels.

Community level

French Community

Ministry of the French Community (*Ministère de la Communauté française*)

The Ministry of the French Community is responsible for the implementation of the eInclusion legislation in effect in all French-speaking territories in Belgium. These include most of Wallonia and the Brussels-Capital region. More specifically, the main responsibility lies within the General Affairs & Budget and Financial Audit Directorate-General of the General Secretariat of the ministry.

German-speaking Community

Ministry of the German-speaking Community (*Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*)

The Ministry is responsible for the implementation of all governmental decisions in accordance to the legislation for the German-speaking territories in Eastern Belgium. The Minister for District Authorities of the German-speaking Community is the member of the Government responsible for eInclusion.

eInclusion Who's Who

Main eInclusion decision-makers and executives

Ministers Responsible for eInclusion

Federal level



Vincent Van Quickenborne
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Regional level

Flemish Government

**Geert Bourgeois**

Vice-Minister-President of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Administrative Affairs, Local and Provincial Government, Civil Integration, Tourism and the Vlaamse Rand

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Wallonia Regional Government

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Brussels Capital Regional Government

**Brigitte Grouwels**

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Community level

French Community Government



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German-speaking Community Government



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Prime Minister and Minister for District Authorities of the German-speaking Community

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eInclusion Executives

Federal level



Philippe Courard
Secretary of State for Poverty Reduction and Social Integration

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Regional level

Flemish Government



Geert Mareels
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Wallonia Regional Government



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Brussels-Capital Regional Government



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Community level

French Community Government



Dominique Barthélémy
Director-General, General Affairs & Budget and Financial Audit

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German-speaking Community Government



Bruno Hick
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Other eInclusion Executives



Frank Robben
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eInclusion Areas

Riga Declaration Priorities

ICT and Ageing

Status in ICT and Ageing

Belgium is among the high performers of EU regarding access to ICT for the elderly. According to [EUROSTAT](#), 49 % of people aged 55 or more have used a computer in 2009, which is above the EU average of 42 %; only 44 % has never used a computer which is lower than the EU average of 52 %.

Regarding [Internet usage](#), 48 % of Belgians, aged 55-74, have never used the Internet, and 47 % of them have used it in the past 12 months (2009). In comparison, the EU-27 average is 59 % and 38 % respectively.

Actions to support ICT and Ageing

Peeceefobie/Pécéphobie campaign

The Federal Government launched the [Peeceefobie/Pécéphobie](#) campaign in 2006 trying to demonstrate that ICT is also reachable by seniors. The campaign featured a fictional character, Ginette, who was supposed to be a middle-aged housewife that gradually becomes acquainted with technology. The campaign was quite popular.

'Attentianet' eTEN project

The ['Attentianet'](#) eTEN project has explored ways to enhance the life of the elderly using ICT means. The project has taken into account the fact that there has been a great need of simple things that become difficult with age, especially, communication.

Other actions

In Wallonia, a pedagogical CD-ROM is provided by the Walloon Telecommunications Agency ([Agence Wallonne des Télécommunications – AWT](#)) for seniors.

Geographical Digital Divide

Status of Common Access to Electronic Content and Services

Belgium, thanks to its size and smooth landscape, exhibits full rural coverage of broadband Internet, according to the 2009 'Digital competitiveness report' of the European Commission. It is interesting to note, however, that the same report indicates below average scoring for Belgium in advanced communications through mobile telephone networks, partly as a result of the aforementioned full fixed-line broadband coverage of the country.

Actions to support Common Access to Electronic Content and Services

Public Internet Access Points (PIAP's)

The full broadband coverage of Belgium does not require additional actions regarding infrastructure. However, several local initiatives exist that support public internet access points (PIAPs) to support common access to electronic content and services. The [Public Internet Access Points](#) (PIAP's) of the Belgian city of Kortrijk have been established to increase the number of Internet connections in public places, effectively improving the access to new technologies for those who cannot afford computers

and/or an internet connection at home. The ICT department of the city envisioned the PIAP's as an electronic link between the people of Kortrijk and the city hall. All Belgians have electronic identity cards, and by combining them with the technology of the PIAP's, the benefits of the project reach all inhabitants of the city and its seven boroughs.

eAccessibility

Status of eAccessibility

According to the '[Measuring Progress of eAccessibility in Europe](#)' (MeAC) project Belgium exhibited the following status on eAccessibility in 2007:

- ▶ One out of six of the selected public websites passed the automatic evaluation; however, none passed both the automatic and the manual evaluations.
- ▶ None of the sectoral/commercial websites even passed the automatic evaluation.
- ▶ The main emergency number (112 or other) was not directly accessible by means of text telephones.
- ▶ A text relay service was available, although only in Flanders. A video relay service was not available.
- ▶ Neither of the two main mobile telephony operators provided eAccessibility related information to customers with disabilities via their website. Neither of them offered models that are labelled as hearing aid compatible via their online sales channel.
- ▶ Neither of the two main landline telephone operators provided eAccessibility-related information to customers with disabilities via their website. Neither of them offered models that are labelled as hearing aid compatible via their online sales channel.
- ▶ Regarding the two main public TV channels (operated by the same broadcaster), in 2006:
 - Both provided national language programs with subtitling. In terms of volumes, the broadcaster's programmes provided with subtitling amounted to 50 % of its overall national language programming. (Information on individual channels was not available).
 - Neither provided any programmes with signing.
 - Neither provided any programmes with audio description.
 - Information about the TV access services provided was made available on the public broadcaster's website and via teletext.
- ▶ Regarding the two main commercial TV channels, in 2006:
 - Both provided national language programmes with subtitling. In terms of volumes, one channel provided programmes with subtitling amounted to 5 % of its overall national language programming. No data were available for the other channel.
 - Neither provided any programmes with signing.
 - Neither provided any programmes with audio description.
- ▶ Regarding the two main retail banks operating in the country, neither had installed any talking ATMs, nor had they had any plans to install talking ATMs.

The [Accessibility monitor 2007](#) showed that 96 % of the websites in Belgium were not accessible. In comparison, the [monitor's results in 2009](#) indicated that 93 % of Belgian websites have still not been accessible, which is a slight improvement since 2007.

Actions towards eAccessibility

'BlindSurfer' label

The Belgian Federal Government has shown its intention to support the reduction of the digital divide, especially for the disabled. For this reason, it has publicly announced that all governmental websites will need to comply with the requirements of the 'BlindSurfer' label.

Accessibility-Monitor–Belgium

While earlier studies show that a great deal needs to be done to make governmental websites accessible in Belgium, no figures exist about the average accessibility of websites in Belgium. The [Accessibility-Monitor–Belgium](#) is an instrument developed by 'Anysurfer' and K-point. The Accessibility monitor uses the QuickScan procedure to screen websites and determine (in-)accessibility. The scan consists of 14 important and generally accepted criteria for accessibility. To pass the 'Quickscan', a website should meet 11 of the 14 criteria.

Plan AFECT

In the Brussels-Capital region the '[Plan AFECT](#)' (*Accessibilité, Formation, Emploi et économie sociale, Culture citoyenne et Technologie durable*) is a strategic tool to reduce the digital divide.

Digital Literacy and Competences

Status on Digital Literacy and Competences

Eurostat provides a set of indicators related to [basic computer skills](#) and [basic internet skills](#). These indicators are based on self-assessment of the surveyed persons. Sufficient acquaintance (performing 5 or 6 out of 6 simple operations) with basic computer skills is claimed by 18 % of Belgians, while the percentage falls to 5 % when considering basic Internet skills. For comparison reasons, the corresponding percentages for the EU-27 average are 28 % and 8 %, respectively.

Actions towards Digital Literacy and Competences

Programme 'Start2surf'

The programme '[Start2surf](#)' promotes the purchase of a computer in two different forms:

- ▶ '[Start2surf @home](#)' provides fiscal incentives to individuals who choose to purchase one of the four designated starter packs. The incentive is in the form of tax credit.
- ▶ '[Start2surf PC bonus](#)' provides a financial incentive for low-income working individuals that choose to purchase a computer for their private use. The financing is performed through tax-deductible reimbursement by the employer of the individual.

'Internet for everyone'

The name '[Internet for everyone](#)' (*'Internet pour tous'*) has identified two initiatives of Fedict:

- ▶ the 'Internet for everyone' label, granted to user-friendly and efficient applications promoting eInclusion, and
- ▶ the 'Internet for everyone' package, which was a concrete government measure to increase Internet penetration in households.

A computer with an Internet connection was offered at an affordable price to anyone not yet connected to the Internet at home. The campaign specifically targeted citizens at risk of digital exclusion.

'IT-huis' project

The main goal of the 'IT-huis' project that operates in the Flemish region is to diminish the digital divide by making technology more accessible for the digitally disadvantaged. The project aims at reaching this goal with four interconnected projects:

- ▶ 'iSchool': Schools are incentivised to organise ICT courses for parents and grandparents, and support them to establish these courses. In these courses, they learn basic ICT skills so they can support their (grand)children with their schoolwork.
- ▶ 'iBuur': The initiative supports projects in different neighbourhoods that work with disadvantaged groups. Free equipment (laptops, beamer, etc), train-the-trainer sessions, learning resources, are some of the provisions of the project.
- ▶ 'iThema': Every month a complex subject is explained. A brochure shows step-by-step instructions on popular technologies and websites.
- ▶ 'iBib': The project provides incentives for organisations working with disadvantaged groups that can rent equipment for free: 40 laptops, 1 beamer, 1 camera, 1 video, 10 headphones, etc.

'Public Computer Spaces' project

In 2006, the Walloon Region launched the 'Public Computer Spaces' project (**EPN**, *Espaces Publiques Numériques* in French, **OCR**, *Openbare computerruimtes* in Dutch), under the auspices of the Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration (PPS SI) (*Services publics fédéraux de programmation pour l'intégration sociale* - SPP IS) in French, (*Programmatorische Federale Overheidsdienst Maatschappelijke Integratie* - POD MI) in Dutch. EPN are public spaces that provide training to people willing to learn how to use ICT.

Other actions

- ▶ In 2005, **Childfocus** and Fedict released in collaboration a special edition of the 'Bob et Bobette' ('*Suske en Wiske*' in Dutch) comic titled '*Le site sinistre*' ('*De sinistere site*' in Dutch). The aim of this action was to raise awareness, particularly towards the risks of the Internet for younger people. In 2006, the comic was distributed free of charge to all Belgian Elementary school six-graders.
- ▶ An example of regional initiative was a Walloon TV campaign titled '*Juliette, Reine du Net*' run in 2006 that aimed at raising awareness on the Internet. The campaign was organised by the Walloon Telecommunications Agency (*Agence Wallonne des Télécommunications* – AWT).

eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

Status on eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

The main cultural aspect of Belgian eInclusion relates to language. The trilingual and multiethnic nature of Belgium identifies it as a country with substantial cultural diversity. This holds especially true for the Brussels-Capital region and the surrounding Flemish areas. Most online information provided by federal websites is available in three languages. Regional websites in most cases are presented in the language that dominates (Dutch for the Flemish region, French and German for the Walloon region, Dutch and French for Brussels).

Actions towards eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

The support of cultural heritage using ICT is a goal pursued by Belgian Governments, with special focus at the Community level. All three communities support the preservation of cultural and linguistic artifacts. More specifically, the Flemish Government supports the website cultuurweb.be that provides free access to cultural information. The French Community government operates the culture.be website that also provides free access to cultural information.

Inclusive eGovernment

Status on Inclusive eGovernment

The establishment of the electronic identity card (eID) has promoted the interaction between the public administrations and the citizens through different channels. However, Belgium still lags behind the EU average according to the Eurostat readings of 'individuals that use the Internet for interaction with public authorities'.

Actions towards Inclusive eGovernment

'Battle against the digital divide' initiative

The city of Ghent is providing the strategic initiative '[Battle against the digital divide](#)' that provides a multi-channel access to city services, the social welfare agency (CPAS in French, OCMW in Dutch), and other social services to assist in solving problems of citizens.

VSNG initiative

[VSNG](#) is an initiative of 'LINC vzw'. It regroups Flemish organisations that are active in the field of eInclusion. VSNG pursues three main objectives:

- ▶ to promote local initiatives in the eInclusion field, particularly for vulnerable social groups;
- ▶ to be a centre of excellence where good ePractices can be exchanged;
- ▶ to be a partner of the public authorities in the development of public policies in the field of eInclusion.

Since 2006 VSNG is the organiser of the '*Digitale Week*' (www.digitaleweek.be) and co-organiser of '*La fête de l'Internet*'.

Communit-e application

The Disabled Persons Directorate-General of the Federal Public Service (*Service Public Fédéral* - SPF) of Social Security [gives access](#) to the computerised applications of the Disabled Persons Directorate-General to the municipalities so as to:

- ▶ Enter benefit applications directly into the computer system of the SPF Social Security, without needing to resend any social personal data already available in the social security network, as they are automatically made available to the Crossroad Bank for Social Security.
- ▶ Receive, by return, an acknowledgement of receipt of the application and the administrative and medical forms (pre-completed with identification data) those forms can be provided immediately to the person concerned.

The [Communit-e](#) application uses the Belgian eID card to identify users and the civil servant directory from the Crossroad Bank for Social Security to give access to the users.

The Future of eInclusion

Research in Practice & Future Challenges

Research in Practice

The [Seventh Framework Programme](#) (FP7) comprises, under its umbrella, EU research initiatives that play a vital part in attaining the objectives of growth, competitiveness and employment. The broad objectives of FP7 have been grouped into four categories: [Cooperation](#), [Ideas](#), [People](#) and [Capacities](#). eInclusion aspects hold a prominent place in this programme, which has been operational since 2007 and will expire in 2013.

Approximately € 400 million have been allocated to FP7's [Challenge 7: 'ICT for Independent Living, Inclusion and Governance'](#), one of the seven 'Challenges' of the [ICT Work Programme](#) 2009 – 2010 under FP7. The aim of 'Challenge 7' is to create ICT products, through research and development, which will foster independent and active living among Europe's ageing population, improving living standards and mitigating ICT complexity in order to encourage groups with special needs to uptake and use ICT tools and technologies to their benefit.

'Challenge 7' set three objectives:

Objective ICT-2009.7.1: [ICT & Ageing](#)

- ▶ Service robotics for ageing well
- ▶ Open Systems Reference Architectures, Standards and ICT Platforms for Ageing Well
- ▶ RTD roadmaps and stakeholder coordination.

Objective ICT-2009.7.2: [Accessible and Assistive ICT](#)

- ▶ Embedded Accessibility of Future ICT
- ▶ ICT restoring and augmenting human capabilities compensating for people with reduced motor functions or disabilities
- ▶ RTD research agendas & coordination of constituencies.

Objective ICT-2009.7.3: [ICT for Governance and Policy Modelling](#)

- ▶ Governance and Participation Toolbox
- ▶ Policy Modelling, Simulation and Visualisation
- ▶ Roadmapping and Networking for 'participation, governance and policy modelling'.

Belgium is involved in the following FP7 projects:

1. [Social software for inclusion of \(marginalised\) young people](#) (INCLUSO)

Research area: ICT-2007.7.2 Accessible and inclusive ICT

Project start date: [2008-09-01]

2. [An ambulatory BCI-driven tremor suppression system based on functional electrical stimulation](#) (TREMOR)

Research area: ICT-2007.7.2 Accessible and inclusive ICT

Project start date: [2008-09-01]

3. [Integrated cognitive assistive and domotic companion robotic systems for ability and security](#) (COMPANIONABLE)

Research area: ICT-2007.7.1 ICT and ageing

Project start date: [2008-01-01]

4. [Open architecture for accessible services integration and standardisation](#) (OASIS)

Research area: ICT-2007.7.1 ICT and ageing

Project start date: [2008-01-01]

5. [Open accessibility everywhere: groundwork, infrastructure, standards](#) (AEGIS)

Research area: ICT-2007.7.2 Accessible and inclusive ICT

Project start date: [2008-09-01]

6. [European ambient assisted living innovation alliance](#) (AALIANCE)

Research area: ICT-2007.7.1 ICT and ageing

Project start date: [2008-01-01]

7. [Social ethical and privacy needs in ICT for older people: A dialogue roadmap](#) (SENIOR)

Research area: ICT-2007.7.1 ICT and ageing

Project start date: [2008-01-01]

National projects

- ▶ In 2008, a quantitative and qualitative survey in support of the design of a second 'Internet for everyone' campaign using techniques of segmentation and differentiation to target non-users, was undertaken by the University of Ghent (MICT-IBBT) for the Federal Agency for ICT (Fedict).
- ▶ The Work and Technology Research Centre (*Fondation Travail – Université - FTU*) had planned research on Second Degree Digital Divide for the Federal Service for Scientific Research for the period 2008–2010.
- ▶ During 2007–2008, an audit was performed on the Federal Plan for eInclusion. This plan aimed at coordinating the policies and actions endorsed by governments at the regional, community and federal levels. This audit was conducted by the University of Namur (Interdisciplinary Group on Technology Assessment) in co-operation with Bart Cammaerts of London School of Economics (LSE).
- ▶ The Flemish Institute for Technology Assessment (viWTA, now IST, *Instituut Samenleving & Technologie*) published several studies on ICT and poverty, youth and the ageing population.
- ▶ In the period 2006–2008, a project was carried out on barriers and optimisation of eLearning platforms. The project was financed by the Flemish Research Institute on Broadband Technologies (IBBT), in cooperation with the Flemish employment office (VDAB, *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding*). Research partners were COSIC, DstriNet, CUO & ICRI (KULeuven, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), MICT (UGent, *Universiteit Gent*), EDM (UHasselt, *Universiteit Hasselt*) and IBBT SMIT (VUB, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*).
- ▶ VIN was a project carried out in the period 2006–2008, which examined how technological innovations support and configure sociality within networks and communities, as well as empower and guide users in becoming (more) active in their social setting of everyday life and work. The project was financed by Flemish Research Institute on Broadband Technologies (IBBT). The following IBBT research groups participated in the project: IMEC NES, COSIC, CUO & ICRI (KULeuven), IBCN, MMLab & MICT (UGent) and ETRO & IBBT SMIT (VUB).
- ▶ The Citizen Media project was an integrated project funded by the EU FP6 framework. The overall objective of the project was to investigate new ways on how to exploit the huge amount of user-generated content in innovative ways in order to support people in their daily lives and how technology can enable social change to strongly involve users for co-creating networked applications. The project started in 2005 and it was scheduled to run until 2009. The following IBBT research groups that participated are: IBCN (UGent) and IBBT SMIT (VUB).

- ▶ In the period 2005–2008 surveys were carried out on ICT appropriation and use by people of 55 years and older, as well as by teenagers between 12 to 18 years. The latter survey was conducted by the University of Namur (Interdisciplinary Group on Technology Assessment) in cooperation with the IBBT-SMIT (VUB) and The Department of Communication of the University of Antwerp.
- ▶ In 2007, a quantitative survey of the 'Digital Divide in Flanders' was carried out by the Research Department of the Flemish Government, covering both inequalities in the adoption and the use of ICT.
- ▶ In 2007, an assessment of the policies and the actions endorsed by the Public Agency for Social and Economic Assistance (*Centre Public d'Action Sociale* - CPAS in French, *Openbaar centrum voor maatschappelijk welzijn* - OCMW in Dutch) to promote the eInclusion of excluded and poor people, was performed.
- ▶ 'The construction of computer competencies and the reduction of inequality' was a study for the Federal Agency for Social Integration conducted by the Work and Technology Research Centre (*Fondation Travail – Université* - FTU), in the period 2007-2008.
- ▶ MONIT, MUTLIGOV & DASHBOARD were interrelated projects on the penetration, usability, etc. alternative channels for eGovernment as means of closing the digital divide, financed by IBBT. In the period 2006–2007, the following IBBT research partners that participated are: CUO & ICRI (KULeuven) and MICT, IBCN and MMLab (UGent), EDM 5UHasselt) and ETRO & IBBT SMIT (VUB).

European Commission - eInclusion Practice

eInclusion practice (epractice.eu) is an information and exchange service for European professionals.

The eInclusion factsheets are one of the epractice.eu services. The factsheets present an overview of the eInclusion status and progress in the European countries.

The eInclusion factsheets are produced and updated once a year.

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