

[eInclusion in]

Bulgaria

България



ICT & Ageing

Geographic Digital Divide

eAccessibility

eInclusion

Cultural Diversity

Inclusive eGovernment

Digital Literacy & Competences

Country Profile
History
Strategy
Legal Framework
Actors
Who's Who
Areas

The Future of eInclusion

What's Inside

Contents:

Country Profile	1
eInclusion History	3
eInclusion Strategy	5
eInclusion Legal Framework.....	8
eInclusion Actors.....	9
eInclusion Who's Who.....	11
eInclusion Areas.....	12
The Future of eInclusion	21

Disclaimer:

This document is not intended to be exhaustive. Its purpose is to give an overview of the general eInclusion status in Bulgaria. 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): 7 606.6 inhabitants (2009)

GDP at market prices: 33 876.8 million Euro (2009)

GDP per inhabitant in PPS (Purchasing Power Standards, EU-27 = 100): 41.3 (2008)

GDP growth rate: -5.0 % (2009)

Inflation rate: 2.5 % (2009)

Unemployment rate: 6.8 % (2009)

Government debt/GDP: 14.8 % (2009)

Public balance (government deficit or surplus/GDP): -3.9 % (2009)

Source: Eurostat

Area: 111 910 km²

Capital city: Sofia

Official EU language: Bulgarian

Currency: Lev

Source: Europa website

Information Society Indicators

Percentage of households with Internet access: 30 % (2009)

Percentage of households with broadband connection: 26 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals regularly using the Internet: 40 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for uploading self-created content: 3 % (2008)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for reading online newspapers/magazines: 21 % (2009)

Percentage of Individuals using the Internet for finding information about goods and services: 17 % (2009)

Percentage of Individuals using the Internet for seeking health-related information: 10 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for looking for a job or sending a job application: 9 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for doing an online course: 1 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for seeking information with the purpose of learning: 4 % (2009)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for interaction with public authorities: obtaining information 7.9 %, downloading forms 5.9 %, returning filled forms 4.7 % (2009)

Source: *Eurostat*

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

March 2010

The 'Open architecture for Accessible Services Integration and Standardisation' (OASIS) project - a Large Scale Integrated Project co-financed by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme - has recently released its [first animated project video](#). In the newly released video, the two main characters (John and Sue) use the OASIS services on a daily basis.

The OASIS project started on 1 January 2008 and has a total duration of four years. Project's scope is to revolutionise the interoperability, quality, width and usability of services for all the daily activities of the elderly. More specifically, OASIS intends to use ICT and other key technologies to provide holistic services to older people in order to support their physical and psychological independence, to stimulate their social or psychological engagement and to foster their emotional well-being. OASIS thus addresses key areas of the activities of the elderly encompassing: independent living and socialising, autonomous mobility and flexible work-ability.

The OASIS project consortium is composed of 33 partners from 11 countries including Bulgaria. Other countries are: Belgium, China, Germany, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Romania, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom. Large Industries, SMEs, Universities, Research Centres, Non-Profit Organisations, Public Organisations and Healthcare Centres are represented among the partners.

News 2008 and before

2008

- ▶ On *11 December 2008*, the Bulgarian Coordination Council for Information Society (*Координационния съвет за информационно общество*) adopted the 'National Programme for the development of broadband Internet access'. The document has been prepared by the former [State Agency for Information Technology and Communications](#) (*Държавна агенция за информационни технологии и съобщения*, DAITS) with the participation of telecommunications companies and operators, as well as Non-Governmental Organisations. The objective of the National Programme has been to ensure that, by 2015, all Bulgarians gain the opportunity to enjoy reliable and high quality **broadband access**.
- ▶ In *March 2008*, the [State Agency for Information Technologies and Communications](#) (*Държавна агенция за информационни технологии и съобщения*, DAITS) launched a new project for the '[eIntegration](#)' of minorities. The project, which was supported by the Open Society Institute of Hungary, used advanced information and communication technologies (ICT) to help young people from the Roma community to make the most of their skills and abilities and reach their full potential. The project consisted of a nine-month training course, initially involving a group of 80 Roma men and women between the ages of 16 and 30. The candidates were selected from five Bulgarian cities to follow a four-phase course which became more specialised as the course progressed.

2003

- ▶ With the financial aid of the former Agency for Development of the Communications and ICT in the structure of the former Ministry of Transport and Communications (*Министерство на транспорта и съобщенията*, MTC) in 2003, MTC carried out two initiatives related to internet access insurance of people with disabilities. An examination and analysis of the basic requirements for creating internet access places for **people with disabilities** was completed with the aim of their integration in the information society. A business plan on the necessary equipment for one universal place for access and training of different categories of people with disabilities was prepared according to the available communications of the living place type. A specialised portal was created in full response to W3C access requirements, level 'A' and in a great degree to level 'AA' which allowed access for people with sight, hearing and vocal impairments to web documents and information mainly related to their specific needs and necessities.
- ▶ On the occasion of the European Year of People with Disabilities in 2003, the Council of Ministers prepared the 'Bulgaria for All' Program. In its framework, Bulgarian software for synthetic speech was developed, in the aim of blind people. **Information access** for blind people was ensured throughout an established Bulgarian version for reading machines, and computers with Braille and synthetic speech.

2001

The Action Plan on '[A co-operative effort to implement the Information Society in Europe](#)' (eEurope+) was the basic document which set the priorities for the development of the Information Society in Bulgaria. It recommended implementation of the basic directions of the [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) (WAI) of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) in the public web pages. The 'National Programme for Information Society Development in Bulgaria' was implemented in 2001. It included activities for adoption of Design for all standards about accessibility of the ICT products and about improving opportunities for employment and social incorporating of the people with disabilities. It was reliable on public-private partnership and collaboration on behalf of the European standardising organisations and the European Commission. In some countries, they have been adopted as norms which guarantee the effect of their implementation. The former Ministry of Transport and Communications (*Министерство на транспорта и съобщенията*, MTC) together with branch associations and non-governmental organisations undertook activities related to popularizing the principles of accessibility and elaborating on opportunities regarding their acceptance as norms in the national legislation.

eInclusion Strategy

Main strategic objectives and principles

National Programme for accelerated development of Information Society in Bulgaria (2008-2010)

The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union on 1 January 2007 determined the need to place the focus of national policy on creating a favourable economic and institutional climate aimed at supporting entrepreneurship, generating new and better jobs, ensuring sustainable development as well as improving the social status of the population.

In line with the objectives of the Lisbon strategy and the i2010 Initiative, Information Society (IS) is considered as a priority within the framework of the 'Government Programme of European integration, economic growth and social responsibility' (*Правителството на европейската интеграция, икономическия растеж и социалната отговорност*) as well as national strategic documents covering the period up to 2013. Following the strategic objectives established by the Bulgarian Government, the former State Agency for Information Technology and Communications (*Държавна агенция за информационни технологии и съобщения*, DAITS) prepared the 'National Policy for the Development of Information Society in Bulgaria' (*Държавна политика за развитие на информационното общество в Република България*), which was adopted by the Coordination Council for Information Society (*Координационния съвет за информационно общество*) on 3 May 2006.

The 'National Programme for Accelerated Development of Information Society in Bulgaria (2008-2010)' (*Национална програма за ускорено развитие на информационното общество в Република България (2008-2010г.)*) is aimed at the successful implementation of the objectives and priorities set by the state policy, through an integrated approach, defining the operational framework of the **Bulgarian Model** of Information Society at technological, economic and social levels. The document is divided into priority areas and sets out guidelines for the establishment of a roadmap for the development of Information Society in Bulgaria, also including relevant key projects.

The areas of eGovernment and eHealth are not included in this document as they will be implemented and managed under separate action plans and financial budgets which will be provided by the competent ministries. The programme focuses on the convergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), digital content, public services and the improvement of quality of life, taking into account the various possibilities offered by ICT for achieving social and economic development. Moreover the programme covers the concept of '**Inclusive Information Society**' whose application is intended to integrate all layers of society in the Information Society while supporting the development of human capital.

The programme defines the following basic principles to assist the process of development of Information Society in Bulgaria:

- ▶ **Focus on citizens:**
Each programme, project or activity for the development of Information Society should be assessed according to the advantages and benefits that it brings to the citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria. All measures taken must respect the rights of citizens, including the right to privacy.
- ▶ **Accessibility:**
Recognising the social nature of IS, the State will invest in services and activities for citizens, which may be difficult to implement for individual regions at present, but feature strong economic and social potential in the future.
- ▶ **Full compliance with European Union policies:**
The development of Information Society in Bulgaria should be in line with European Union laws and the policies of the International Telecommunications Union, the Council of Europe, as well as other international organisations, taking also into account national circumstances and development.

▶ **Integration of national ICT resources:**

Increasing the efficiency of public investment in ICT resources based on the integration and centralisation of data and the full compatibility between the systems to put in place. Of utmost importance is the introduction of a centralised approach with a leading body to coordinate the development of the Information Society.

▶ **Trust and security of networks and information:**

The state will apply a framework of standards, control measures and further resources to ensure the security of data and ICT systems. All efforts undertaken in the field of IT should follow established principles and security standards. This includes: electronic signatures and documents, data protection activities, measures for the protection from cyber crimes, intellectual property protection, Internet content regulation and consumer protection.

▶ **Effectiveness and efficiency:**

The development of IT should be accomplished through projects supporting the strategic goals and priorities set at national, regional and local levels, purposed to maximise outcomes while using limited resources.

▶ **Quality of digital content:**

Any activity, project or initiative leading to the creation of digital content should be supported and structured as part of a national digital heritage. Hence, of particular importance is all content related to the national identity.

▶ **Cooperation (Public-Private Partnerships):**

The State will rely on knowledge, competences and flexibility of Bulgarian ICT businesses, universities and NGOs for the effective development of Information Society in Bulgaria.

▶ **Technological neutrality:**

The State must ensure technological neutrality in all regulatory actions related to the development of Information Society in order to protect the interests of citizens and consumers.

As a result of targeted actions in selected areas, the programme lays the foundations of the Bulgarian Model of Information Society to bridge the significant gap of the Republic of Bulgaria through acquisition of new knowledge, technologies and practices necessary to generate innovation and accomplish technology transfer. Moreover, the programme follows the concept of Inclusive Information Society, aimed at both ensuring participation throughout all levels of society and at supporting human capital development.

Information Society and Social Inclusion

According to the 'National programme for accelerated development of Information Society in Bulgaria (2008-2010)', the access to modern, effective and quality IS services for all and the development of new services/applications are **key drivers** for achieving sustainable economic growth, creation of more jobs and improvement of the social status of the population.

Certain end-user groups have difficulties with respect to physical eAccessibility and to equal opportunities for eAccess in Bulgaria. This applies to the following target groups: elderly, disadvantaged and low-income people; minorities; people in remote areas and immigrants. Hence, the implementation of structural reforms in key sectors of the economy with particular regard to the implementation, use and dissemination of ICT will help to prevent the social exclusion of those social groups.

The computerisation of all areas of business and the public sector as well as the large-scale penetration of the Internet constitute substantial changes for a modern state, introducing the need to create a model for inclusive IS, where people regardless of their ethnic, religious or social affiliation will be able to take full advantage of the information age. With respect to inclusive IS, the following fundamental challenges to the national policy may be indicated:

- ▶ ensuring public access to electronic services;
- ▶ creating an environment for developing accessible ICT products and services;

- ▶ improving digital literacy and competences for people of all ages;
- ▶ creating multimedia and educational content and tools to support long-life learning;
- ▶ ensuring that all public websites will be easily accessible by people with disabilities;
- ▶ ensuring that all public websites will offer multilingual content;
- ▶ defining a state policy for sustainable improvement of the ICT labour market in Bulgaria;
- ▶ improving quality of life of Bulgarian citizens by promoting the use of ICT.

These **challenges** can be addressed by implementing corresponding projects as part of an active policy on eInclusion for all groups of society, which will prevent their premature exit from the labour market.

Measures which are laid down in relation to eInclusion in Bulgaria include:

- ▶ supporting a lifelong learning initiative for increase in qualification and computer literacy;
- ▶ increasing the number of Public Internet Access Points, mostly in libraries;
- ▶ supporting the establishment of rich content through the introduction of new Public/Private Partnership Models;
- ▶ adopting the principles of Web Accessibility Initiative as norms in the national legislation.

National Programme for the development of broadband Internet access

On 11 December 2008, the Bulgarian Coordination Council for Information Society (*Координационния съвет за информационно общество*) adopted a 'National Programme for the development of broadband Internet access'. The document was prepared by the former State Agency for Information Technology and Communications (*Държавна агенция за информационни технологии и съобщения*, DAITS) with the participation of telecommunications companies and operators, as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

The objective of the National Programme is to ensure that, by 2015, all Bulgarians will have the opportunity to enjoy reliable and high quality **broadband access**. The roadmap agreed for the development of broadband coverage, includes:

- ▶ the preparation of analysis for the availability of broadband access in the regions;
- ▶ the formulation of recommendations for the use of technology by region;
- ▶ the preparation of guidelines for the establishment of public-private partnerships; new recommendations to ensure the funding of broadband access projects and their procurement;
- ▶ and the launch of a system for monitoring and publishing the results of the projects' implementation.

Particular attention is paid to the regulatory framework which should guarantee the **rapid development** of an **efficient and competitive** market, as well as technological neutrality, simplified authorisation procedures and **transparency**.

Apart from the State Budget, the possible funding sources of the broadband access projects will be, among others: the EU Structural Funds; the 'Seventh R&D Framework Programme' (2007-2013); the 'South East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme (2007-2013)'; and the 'Safer Internet Plus' Programme.

eInclusion Legal Framework

Main legal texts impacting on the development of eInclusion

eGovernment Legislation

eGovernment Act

An eGovernment bill was drawn up in October 2006 and entered into force on 13 June 2008. The act lays down arrangements for the handling of **electronic documents** by administrative authorities, the provision of administrative services by electronic means and the circulation of electronic documents among different Administrations. The scope of the act also extends to other entities that carry out public functions (notaries, central and local educational authorities, etc.) and to providers of public services (health institutions, educational establishments, utilities, telecom operators, postal services, etc.).

One of the act's main principles is that, once a data set concerning an individual or a company comes into the possession of a public body, other public bodies cannot request the same data from this individual or company. On the contrary, they have to request it from the primary data administrator (article 2.1). For example, once an individual is born and the corresponding birth certificate issued, he/she should not need to produce copies of that certificate to any Administration for the rest of his/her life. It is the Administration concerned that has to request the certificate from the issuing authority.

Another important principle is laid down in article 8.2, which requires all public bodies to provide all of their **services electronically**, and not just manually. Exceptions are allowed only if another law/act explicitly provides for different arrangements.

By its very nature, the new act requires strong inter-institutional cooperation. Implementation of the Act is also seen as a major driver of new IT developments. A number of projects are already under way to help different Administrations meet their requirements.

It is worth noting that a month prior to the entry into force of the eGovernment Act, in April 2008, the Bulgarian Government adopted [four ordinances](#) setting out detailed arrangements for the implementation of the future act. These regulations cover, respectively: the delivery of electronic administrative services; the registers of information sites and administrative services; the internal circulation of electronic and paper documents within administrations; and the use of eSignature in administrations.

eCommunications Legislation

Telecommunications Act

In December 2006, Bulgaria notified the European Union of its Telecommunications Act of 10 October 2003, in its last amended version of June 2006. The Bulgarian authorities themselves considered it to be a partial transposition of the EU regulatory framework for electronic communications.

The European Commission Monitoring Report of September 2006 on Bulgaria's progress towards EU accession had observed that alignment with the 2002 *acquis* remained to be achieved. Pertinent primary and secondary legislations are underway.

eInclusion Actors

Main roles and responsibilities

National eInclusion

Policy/Strategy

Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications (*Министерство на транспорта, информационните технологии и съобщенията, МТИТС*)

As of October 2009, according to [Decree № 232 of 28 September 2009](#), the Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications (*Министерство на транспорта, информационните технологии и съобщенията, МТИТС*) overtook all responsibilities of the former State Agency for IT and Communications (*Държавна агенция за информационни технологии и съобщения, DAITS*) with respect to Information Society.

In particular the ministry is responsible for defining the State policy for Information Society development at legislative, technological, economic and social levels. It outlines the basic related activities, sets out Information Society priorities as well as the main objectives related to enhancement of a knowledge based economy. It is also responsible for coordinating Information Society activities.

The ministry also holds responsibility for Bulgaria's eGovernment strategy. In that respect, it is tasked with drawing up concrete plans for the implementation of the Bulgarian eGovernment strategy, including resource provision, while offering guidance to the Administrations.

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (*Министерство на труда и социалната политика, MLSP*)

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (*Министерство на труда и социалната политика, MLSP*) is a body of the Council of Ministers responsible for the development, coordination and implementation of the state policy in the fields of labour, professional qualification, incomes and living standard, industrial relations, health and safety at work, social security and social assistance. In particular, the ministry is responsible for the social protection and the support of vulnerable groups. The Ministry implements the state policy through its specialised units, namely the [National Employment Agency](#) (*Агенция по заетостта*), the [General Labour Inspectorate](#) (*Изпълнителна Агенция Главна инспекция по труда*) the [Social Assistance Agency](#) (*Агенция за социално подпомагане*) and the Agency for Foreign Aid.

Coordination

Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications (*Министерство на транспорта, информационните технологии и съобщенията, МТИТС*)

As described above.

Executive Agency 'Electronic Communications Networks and Information Systems' (*Изпълнителна агенция 'Електронни съобщителни мрежи и информационни системи'*)

A body established in 2009, the Executive Agency 'Electronic Communications Networks and Information Systems' (*Изпълнителна агенция 'Електронни съобщителни мрежи и информационни системи'*) is tasked with managing IT and communications. The Agency operates under the responsibility of the [Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications](#) (*Министерство на транспорта, информационните технологии и съобщенията, МТИТС*). Agency's Information Society Department is working on several projects related to cyber-security and Internet governance.

Implementation

Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications (*Министерство на транспорта, информационните технологии и съобщенията, МТИТС*)

As described above.

Support

Agency for Support

Responsible for the administration of the social support programmes throughout its territorial branches.

Private sector entities

Several support services are also undertaken by private sector entities through tendering procedures.

eInclusion Who's Who

Main eInclusion decision-makers and executives

Minister responsible for eInclusion



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eInclusion Areas

Riga Declaration Priorities

ICT & Ageing

Status in ICT & Ageing

In Bulgaria, as well as in the other Member States of the European Union, there is a recurring problem of **population ageing**. The predominant part of the persons from higher-age groups in active age are with higher education, professional skills and experience, but a lot of them have no computer literacy, or the knowledge and abilities needed for the rapid spread of the new technologies. In conformity with the policy for active ageing more persons over the age of 55 will remain in the labour market. That poses serious challenges for the state institutions, the business sector and the entire society for the integration of these people in the labour market.

Actions to support ICT& Ageing

The Government of Bulgaria tries to meet these challenges by elaborating on measures and programmes as a part of the active labour market policy which prevents their **social exclusion** and their early stepping out of the labour market. A policy for enhancing the training quality of persons from higher age groups is carried out. Courses for acquiring knowledge in the sphere of information technologies are organised. The proposed training taking into consideration the needs of the employers has been improved.

In addition, measures are undertaken for raising the readiness, capacity and possibilities of the occupied and unemployed, disadvantaged persons and groups to search and use the services of the information society. ICT is also being introduced into elderly people's lives in order to improve their everyday activities like shopping, banking, communication, access to health services.

Geographic Digital Divide

Status of Common Access to Electronic Content and Services

Despite the positive tendency in recent years and the rapid increase of the level of investments in ICT, the overall level remains insufficient. The main reasons identified are the lagging behind in digitalisation of the fixed electronic communications network, the interregional disparities in broadband penetration, the insufficient training in the use of ICT, the digital divide, the relatively low level of ICT uptake and use by SMEs, and the low purchasing power of Bulgarian households.

In 2005, the **ADSL service** launched in 2004 by the Bulgarian Telecommunications Company, gained great popularity. In just a year the number of subscribers to the service increased nearly sixfold. Nevertheless, the demand and supply of broadband services is not widespread. According to estimates of the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC), at the end of 2005 the penetration of these types of services in Bulgaria was approx. 1 %.

The effect of **modern ICT** in terms of the digital divide - access, skills, location and financial affordability - is only added to old disparities, only to further isolate social groups and economically deprived regions.

Considerable educational and **intra-regional disparities** exist in the use of PCs and the Internet. The highest rates of these indicators are observed in the South-Western region where almost half of the subscribers in the country are concentrated. The worst rates are registered in the North-Western region. As a rule, persons with basic and secondary education, with worker occupations, with household income

up to BGN 300 (approx. € 153) per month, from villages and small towns and from Northern Bulgaria constitute the majority of persons not using PCs and the Internet. There are specific groups which are nearly excluded from the use of computers and the Internet, such as ethnic minorities, pensioners, blind people and people living in rural areas. On the whole, these are people excluded from information society for a variety of reasons – low income, inadequate ICT infrastructure in the residential area they inhabit, poor education, language barriers, or because their occupations do not demand the use of such communication means.

Nevertheless, 31% of respondents have declared that they have an **Internet connection**, mostly young men, aged 26-45, with tertiary education, senior officials or managers, intellectuals and entrepreneurs, those with a monthly household income of over BGN 900 and those with BGN 601-900, capital city (60 %) and bigger cities residents, from the South West and South East planning regions.

A key challenge for policy-makers remains the **digital divide** among disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities. Data suggests though that the divide in ethnic groups reaches three to five time's difference in internet penetration rate. Two major explanations exist for that: education and economic well-being. Data also suggests that the divide could be easily bridged at least for high-school students. There is practically no divide based on ethnicity when accessing the Internet via PIAPs/internet cafés.

The greatest point of divide witnessed by the e-Bulgaria 2005 report has been the access to PCs and the Internet at schools. The large-scale government investment in ICTs in school aimed at practically leveraging this divide, leaving issues of trained teachers in specific regions in this country. However, at marginal levels PCs in households are growing even in minorities.

Telecentres in the country

There are 106 Telecentres operating at present in Bulgaria (status: April 2010).

Actions to support Common Access to Electronic Content and Services

The **modernisation** of electronic communications infrastructure and the widespread access to high-speed Internet are important prerequisites for the wide penetration of electronic services.

Related activities include:

- ▶ choosing the appropriate technology in accordance with the necessities of the place in which it is going to be installed;
- ▶ providing an economically affordable technology for the users;
- ▶ providing training related to using this technology;
- ▶ creating a stable regulatory system to favour the expansion of ICT;
- ▶ establishing and developing a network of community telecentres to meet social and economic needs;
- ▶ providing affordable services to local communities including those related to disabled people, elderly, and minorities;
- ▶ providing online service for public sector institutions (including social, cultural, healthcare and cultural institutions);
- ▶ establishing a home PC Program aimed at stimulating the purchase of home PCs, Internet access;
- ▶ improving the IT education and awarding the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL);
- ▶ establishing rich content through the introduction of new Public-Private Partnership models;
- ▶ developing critical, secure, dependable and trusted public-owned infrastructure, built on broadband connections to urban surroundings and poorly urbanised territories;
- ▶ introducing measures and systems to provide data and communication security meeting the European standards and business requirements.

'iCentres' project (I-център)

The 'iCentres' Project (I-център) is a national project established as a response to the Lisbon Strategy and the i2010 Strategic Framework at European level to **bridge the digital divide** and to contribute to the establishment of Information Society in Bulgaria. The project started in 2003 and became operational in the year 2004. Within the framework of this project a constantly developing network of telecentre facilities has been established in local communities in Bulgaria. Currently, there have been 106 telecentres established within the framework of this project in Bulgaria (Status: April 2010).

The project is aimed at facilitating access to information and education to virtually every citizen, regardless of gender, wealth, race, age, or physical disadvantages.

1. **Age user groups** comprising children (including orphans), young people, adults and seniors;
2. **Minority user groups** including ethnic minorities (persons of Roma, of Turkish origin, etc.) and disadvantaged groups (including physically disabled persons);
3. **Activity user groups** comprising students, unemployed and employed persons, as well as administrative employees.

The telecentres network is in the possession of a developed Technology Base, allowing provision of services in every location of the network. The network offers broadband connectivity, modern computer and multimedia equipment in every telecentre, a sophisticated server system, a real-time communication system, as well as a specifically designed mobile telecentre, fully equipped with state-of-the-art technology. The telecentres are **fully operational access points** – realising a link between content providers and their clients in the respective telecentre locations.

Moreover, an iCentres' E-Learning System has been developed in order to introduce continuous and distance learning and satisfy the growing needs for training. As a result of a successful partnership with a major private software and service provider (including both financial and technical support), the project technical team has designed, implemented and tested an **e-Learning technology**, allowing for simultaneous training of thousands of trainees and access from every telecentre. Furthermore, the 'iCentres' project put in place a team of instructors, including units of professional cadres in all telecentre regions.

eAccessibility

Status of eAccessibility

The incorporation of the information society's services in all branches of the economy leads to its modernisation, multiplication of effectiveness, productivity and generates additional economic growth. The accelerated development of the Information Society is a key factor for overcoming the digital separation between Bulgaria and the other Member States of the EU.

Regarding the **physical eAccessibility** and the equal opportunities for eAccess in Bulgaria, there are difficulties in the following target groups:

- ▶ old people;
- ▶ disadvantaged persons;
- ▶ persons with low income;
- ▶ minority groups;
- ▶ people in the outlying areas;
- ▶ migrants.

The ethnic groups and the migrants which are part of the country's cultural diversity have low or no preparation for **eAccess**. In most of the cases, there is low computer literacy which makes difficult their access to ICT and hinders communication with these target groups. Among the key factors of growth in

2006 still remains the improved access to computers and eAccess tools as a whole, as well as the diversification of the electronic content and services.

The **actual penetration** of the technologies in the society however greatly lags behind the increase of connectivity and economic accessibility. This is due to the non-economic barriers that influence the use of computers and the Internet such as education, age, social status, etc. of large groups of people.

Bulgarian households entered the EU well connected with telecommunication infrastructure. 65 % of households had cable TV in first half of 2006. 31 % of households with children have computers at home with a projected increase up to 42 % by the end of the year. Around a third of the population would have access to the internet by end of 2006. Currently typical internet bandwidth at home (two thirds of cases) is 256 kbs and higher, yet high-speed/volume traffic is usually bound nationally and expected to decrease as a result of serious campaigns by law-enforcement agencies against free servers and P2P networks. However, it is not expected that internet penetration at homes will decrease; on the contrary, new businesses are expected to emerge.

Raising the quality and the scope of the proposed services to persons who actively search work and to employers

IT plays a significant part in raising the quality and the scope of the proposed services to persons who search work actively and to the employers. The Employment agency (EA) puts into practice in all labour offices a "processing model" and individual approach for work with unemployed persons, which is a precondition for reducing the period of unemployment for persons at a mature age.

Granting of innovative instruments - business incubators, IT-Centres and schemes for micro-financing

An important accent in the project strategy has been laid upon the granting of innovative instruments to the target groups, with the help of which they will be supported to start and/or to assist development their own business. Such instruments are business incubators, ITC and schemes for micro-financing in the form of finance leasing.

The main purpose of ITC is raising the competitive power of the local enterprises and agricultural producers by accessing a variety of informational and business consulting services, in areas with low level of economic development. The centres support the development of a viable business through better informing and consultations for the current and forthcoming policy, the legal frame and the mechanisms for support to the undertakers.

The **unequal access** to ICT is outlined as the main problem for equal participation in the information society of the elderly people and of persons with special needs. This access becomes a necessary condition for their e-Integration (services, oriented to vulnerable groups). The solution of the problems, connected with the EA, requires co-ordinated efforts of the concerned state institutions, active participation of business, citizens and non-governmental organisations for assistance to all groups of consumers.

Actions towards eAccessibility

In order to overcome the obstacles to physical eAccessibility and the equal opportunities for eAccess, the following have been proposed:

- ▶ building of special terminals for access of disadvantaged persons and persons with low income;
- ▶ formation of specialist groups for work with the target groups;
- ▶ construction of special websites with information for the target groups;
- ▶ possibility for eAccess throughout the country to any kind of public and bank services;
- ▶ opportunity to ePay for the rendered services;
- ▶ chance for eAccess in urgent cases;

- ▶ construction of highly-organised and high-speed e-net with public terminals for access in the entire country;
- ▶ result-orientated building of e-nets in the outlying areas, the countryside and economically poor regions.

Main measures

- ▶ adopting the principles of Web Accessibility Initiative as norms in the national legislation;
- ▶ introducing distance working incentives.

Raising the quality and the scope of the proposed services to persons who actively search work and to employers

From the end of 2006, approximately one third of the employment agencies in the country have been working on the "one counter" principle. Furthermore, eAccessibility offers a number of services on its modern and interactive website, such as:

- ▶ on-line labour exchange with vacant labour places, notified in the employment agencies;
- ▶ eServices, which include on-line submission of petitions, complaints, proposals and alerts from citizens and legal entities, as well as access to public information;
- ▶ information on self-dependent vocational guidance for more than 400 professions;
- ▶ eAdviser for job search.

Creation of specialised IC sections

- ▶ Approx. 52 employment agencies have specialised IC sections, the so called 'Labour' Centres. ICT constitute a base for the services offered by these centres. With a view to individual and group consultations, they propose video films for professions.
- ▶ Multimedia products rich in text and video material on the particular professions and computer programmes for vocational guidance.

Creation of an eAccessibility Database

In 2006, a Project on programme 'PHARE' was put in place to setup a modern **eAccessibility database**, according to the contemporary requirements about scope and quantity of the information. This modern information system is aimed at becoming the basis for planning and accounting the national employment policy, monitoring the operations, carrying out with resources from the structural funds, etc.

Emphasis within the project strategy has been laid upon the granting of innovative instruments to the target groups, with the help of which they will be supported to start and/or to assist development of their own business. Such instruments are **business incubators**, ITC and schemes for microfinancing in the form of finance leasing. In order to stimulate economic growth and the formation of long-term employment through complex support for local business, business centres according to project 'Employment by business support' are established in 40 municipalities with low living standards in the country.

Upon the project in all business centres, (BC) are established ITC and the BC provide to the local community a number of services in the field of the contemporary communication and the Internet. These IT centres provide access to the Internet for native undertakers and assist in the development of business in different directions – creating direct business contacts, market information on the country and abroad, advertisement on the international market, the development of eCommerce and well-equipped halls for local training. The facilitated access to the Internet constitute a substantial instrument for the implementation of the project strategy on local level, in view of the fact that this contributes to the community fast access to world innovations, markets and technologies.

Plan for the equal opportunities for disabled persons (DP) for 2006-2007

For implementation of Operative aim II. "Creation of an accessible environment for DP" of the Plan for the equal opportunities for disabled persons (DP) for 2006-2007 the following activities for ensuring of E-A are provided:

- ▶ Activity 8 (A 8) – **Implementation of the principles for accessibility** in the public Internet pages as rules in the national legislation with a deadline the end of December 2007. The president of State Agency for Information Technology and Communications (SAITC), as a leading institution, is responsible for the implementation. As a result, A 8 aims to reach a guaranteed implementation of the principles for accessibility.
- ▶ A 9 – **Establishment and support of an informational portal** for DP. The president of SAITC, as a leading institution, is responsible for the implementation. A 9 should ensure accessible information and communication for people with ocular, auditory and mental disorders.
- ▶ A 10 – Preparation of a project for **establishment of a pilot centre** for training and technical aid of young DP to work with electronic informational and communication products and services till the end of December, 2007. The president of SAITC, as a leading institution, is responsible for the implementation. The Agency for DP is an engaged institution. A 10 is aimed at reaching vocational qualification, opportunities for distant employment and social integration of DP.

The indicated activities are in conformity with the Disability Action Plan of the EU (2004-2010), operative objective 3 – "Improving accessibility for all", as well as with a priority "Helping the access of goods and 23 services", provided for the second phase (2006-2007) of the Plan.

National programme for child protection (CP) for 2006

In the field of Constructing and supporting a national information system (IS), in the sphere of child protection (CP) according to the National programme for CP for 2006, the following aim has been incorporated: building of a computer IS for CP. This IS consists of two activities, connected with:

- ▶ **providing** an individual high-speed internet channel in State agency for child protection (SACP) only for the needs of IS. The Minister of the state administration and the administrative reform and the President of SACP are the competent authorities.
- ▶ **ensuring** the necessary computer configurations, smart cards and reading devices in SCP and RDSA. The executive president of ASA is the competent authority.

Digital Literacy and Competences

Status on Digital Literacy and Competences

Differentiation by skills in the new technologies and use of the Internet is an issue, where education plays a major role. The Ministry of Education and Science is **implementing a Strategy** for Introduction of ICT in High Schools which envisages **substantial investment** in high-speed Internet connectivity, development of digital educational content and teacher training.

- ▶ all universities are connected to the Internet and 80% of the students are on-line;
- ▶ the National High-speed Research Net work is connected to the European Research and Educational; network (GEANT);
- ▶ the majority of the universities provide wireless Internet access to their professors and students;
- ▶ all schools are computerised and above 80% of their students use the Internet;
- ▶ Personal computers' density in elementary and high schools will be 12 pupils per PC within the end of 2007.

Improving the employment adaptability of disadvantaged persons

Using the ICT, the active labour market policy generates conditions for improving the **employment adaptability** of disadvantaged persons. The effective use of all opportunities for ICT by elaboration, implementation, monitoring and control of the programmes and measures for employment and vocational training is a base for achievement of durable results.

Actions towards stimulating Digital Literacy and Competences

The following actions are aimed at stimulating Digital Literacy and Competences in Bulgaria:

Main measures

- ▶ employment and utilisation of modern information and education technologies for eInclusion and integration of minorities, the disabled, and the elderly;
- ▶ ICT training at an early age;
- ▶ raising computer literacy skills of all teachers and professors;
- ▶ raising the IT expertise level of computer class teachers;
- ▶ improving the quality of informatics and information technology education;
- ▶ a lifelong learning initiative aimed at improving qualifications and computer literacy.

Improving the employment adaptability of disadvantaged persons

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (*Министерство на труда и социалната политика*, MLSP) undertakes particular actions - for the last several years a number of operations were launched, which resulted in raising the training quality, improving the correspondence of the offered training with the real necessities of the employers, and especially an extension of the training in the IT sphere.

Bulgarian-German Centres for Vocational Training (CVT)

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (*Министерство на труда и социалната политика*, MLSP) heads 3 Bulgarian-German Centres for vocational Training (CVT). The center in Pazardzhik is specialised in modern technologies, business administration and foreign language training. Upon the programme 'CT of young men' the access of young persons to ICT is improving through gaining knowledge in this sphere. The training of unemployed youth is accomplished upon Educational Programmes (EP), based on the contemporary achievements in the field of ICT.

Raising of the Vocational Training (VT), Human Capital's Development (HCD) and Life-long Learning (LLL)

The actions for raising Vocational Training (VT), Human Capital's Development (HCD) and Life-long Learning (LLL) are among the main priorities of the employment policy. Accordingly, measures for improving the Vocational Training of disadvantaged groups on the labour market are launched, particularly intended for training of young people, computer training, entrepreneurship's training, etc. The actions for raising the knowledge of unemployed persons in the field of ICT hold a significant part in National Action Plan for Employment.

Project on 'Training for reconciliation between work and family life of women' (TRWFLW)

In 2006, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (*Министерство на труда и социалната политика*, MLSP) in co-operation with Bulgarian Industrial Association planned the project TRWFLW, aimed at providing a complete training to 70 women, taking into account the newest ICT achievements.

'Training and Employment of Teachers' (TET) Programme

In 2006, the 'Training and Employment of Teachers' (TET) Programme was launched, including, among other things, a training module for teachers on how to use ICT. In this module, which constituted a significant part of this programme, a total of 150 teachers participated.

eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

Status on eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

The creation of digital multimedia **cultural content**, digital libraries and museums can substantially raise the interest to Bulgarian culture heritage, but is still in an initial phase. Only 30 % of Bulgarian libraries use computers, 1.6 % have digitalised their content, 16 % have copy machines, and only 8.5 % have electronic catalogues.

Actions towards eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

The following actions are being taken with regard to the Cultural Diversity aspect of eInclusion:

- ▶ increasing the number of Public Internet Access Points, mostly in libraries, as well as in regions with ethnic minorities and high unemployment rate;
- ▶ development of linguistic translators and other applications in the translation area;
- ▶ implementation of Cyrillic domain names;
- ▶ promotion of locally relevant content generation;
- ▶ collaborating in the development of content which simplifies people's lives and improves their quality of life;
- ▶ creation of valuable eContent in the local language in all social spheres;
- ▶ preservation the local social-cultural identity and strengthen the integration of exclusion risk group;
- ▶ potentiating the use of tools which allow to create links to the community from all perspectives (friends, family, social circle, institutions, businesses...).

Inclusive eGovernment

Status on Inclusive eGovernment

The developments in the eGovernment and ePolicy in Bulgaria in 2005 and 2006 mainly concerned the deployment of ICT in the central administration (including its regional units), the availability of websites and the information and electronic services offered through them, as well as IT training for public servants. The positive results in providing electronic services however are mostly due to some separate efforts of different administrations and have no synergic effect.

The Electronic Governance Act passed the Council of Ministers in October 2006 and entered into force on 13 June 2008. The National e-Government Interoperability was adopted by the Council of Ministers in June 2006.

Many governmental agencies, municipalities and regional administrations have introduced eServices based on the **'One-Stop-Shop'** principle. More than 300 public centres for e-Service delivery have been established in small cities and villages.

The Decree No 153 / 05.07.2004 of the Council of Ministers obliged all governmental bodies to receive and issue electronic documents signed by qualified electronic signature. The average readiness for eDocuments works in the governmental administration has been estimated as 77,5 % (Status of November 2005).

The main emphasis has been placed on the 20 indicative e-Services (12 – for citizens and 8 – for companies) defined by the European Commission. The rate of fulfilment of the full cycle of these services (bilateral automated transactions) at the end of 2005 is as follows: indicative e-Services for citizens – 47.06 %; indicative e-Services for companies – 80.56 %; average rate - 58.65 %.

Besides the indicative eServices many governmental agencies have brought into use more than 40 additional services. In particular, many eServices have been introduced by Social Security and Tax Administrations.

Actions towards Inclusive eGovernment

Following actions are related to Inclusive eGovernment in Bulgaria:

- ▶ development and introduction of systems of indicators and mechanisms for measuring the users' satisfaction with the quality of the service delivery;
- ▶ review, needs analysis and improvement of the services proposed to the citizens;
- ▶ development of mechanisms for assessment of the possibilities and needs for introduction of innovative practices and new services;
- ▶ preparation of guidelines and methodologies on the development of service delivery standards and client's charters;
- ▶ development of models for the active involvement of the civil society in the process of enhancing the administrative service delivery - development of dialogue;
- ▶ development of administrative eServices for the citizens charter;
- ▶ upgrading the state administration information systems with business intelligence and knowledge management facilities and procedures;
- ▶ implementation of public Data Bases in compliance with EU directives for the management of a registry system, a cadastre system, a property registry, territories, population and resources;
- ▶ promotion of eServices among the people in a technologically disadvantageous position by guaranteeing facilitated or free access;
- ▶ training of staff in work with people in a disadvantageous position;
- ▶ establishing call-centres for information provision by the administration, as well as self-service points;
- ▶ development of modules to the eGovernment systems for multilingual functionality.

The Future of eInclusion

Research in Practice & Future Challenges

Research in Practice

The National Programme for Accelerated Development of Information Society in Bulgaria (2008-2010) (*Национална програма за ускорено развитие на информационното общество в Република България (2008-2010г.)*) defines the following objectives for Research and Innovation:

- ▶ **to increase** the volume and quality of research in ICT;
- ▶ **to strengthen** the long-term cooperation between research institutions and businesses in support of the technology transfer;
- ▶ **to encourage** and support entrepreneurship among academic staff of universities and research institutes in the field of ICT;
- ▶ **to create** a favourable environment for the creation and implementation of innovations in the ICT sector.

In the field of science and research, a significant component of EU policy towards the Lisbon goals is to build a **European Research Area (ERA)**. Structuring requires targeting resources (human, material, technical and financial), defining development priorities and building a common market for innovative products that will be able to ensure sustainable economic growth and competitiveness.

According to the European vision for the development of Information Society and knowledge-based economy, e-infrastructure (GEANT and GRID) will create the conditions for development of products, services and applications research, education, health, business and eGovernance.

In this respect, the construction of high-speed networks to support data transfers between research institutes, universities and schools constitutes a prerequisite for the integration of the Bulgarian education system to the global information space.

Future Challenges

Future challenges for the Bulgarian eInclusion strategy:

- ▶ developing ICT infrastructure for wide public access to electronic services;
- ▶ making ICT products and services more accessible and more cost-effective;
- ▶ improving digital literacy and competences in all age groups;
- ▶ developing multimedia content and tools for both compulsory education and life-long learning;
- ▶ improving eAccessibility of public websites and extending their functionalities with translation features for foreign languages;
- ▶ increasing quality of life.

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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