

[eInclusion in]

Ireland

Eire



ICT & Ageing

Geographic Digital Divide

eAccessibility

eInclusion

Cultural Diversity

Inclusive eGovernment

Digital Literacy & Competences

Country Profile

History

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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 Ireland. 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): 4 467.8 inhabitants (2010)

GDP at market prices: 159 645.7 million Euro (2009)

GDP per inhabitant in PPS (Purchasing Power Standards, EU-27 = 100): 127.0 (2009)

GDP growth rate: -7.6 % (2009)

Inflation rate: -1.7 % (2009)

Unemployment rate: 11.9 % (2009)

Government debt/GDP: 65.5 % (2009)

Public balance (government deficit or surplus/GDP): -14.4 % (2009)

Source: [Eurostat](#)

Area: 70 000 km²

Capital city: Dublin

Official EU language: English, Irish

Currency: Euro

Source: [Europa website](#)

Information Society Indicators

Percentage of households with Internet access: 72 % (2010)

Percentage of households with broadband connection: 58 % (2010)

Percentage of individuals regularly using the Internet: 63 % (2010)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for uploading self-created content: 8 % (2008)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for reading online newspapers/magazines: 21 % (2010)

Percentage of Individuals using the Internet for finding information about goods and services: 57 % (2010)

Percentage of Individuals using the Internet for seeking health-related information: 27 % (2010)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for looking for a job or sending a job application: 14 % (2010)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for doing an online course: 5 % (2010)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for seeking information with the purpose of learning: 35 % (2010)

Percentage of individuals using the Internet for interaction with public authorities: obtaining information 22.3 %, downloading forms 62.2 %, returning filled forms 14.5 % (2010)

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

October 2010

The rollout of the provision of services under the [National Broadband Scheme](#) (NBS) was completed in October 2010. In line with the contract, broadband services have since become available to all premises within each of the 1 028 designated NBS Electoral Divisions. However, despite Government and private investment in broadband, there continues to be isolated cases of premises throughout the country that are not capable of receiving a broadband service. This is primarily due to technical and other reasons (e.g. suitability of a telephone line, distance from an enabled exchange, or no 'line of sight' from the premises to the wireless base station). The European Commission has set aside a portion of the European Economic Recovery Programme (EERP) funding for rural broadband initiatives. Using this funding, which will be augmented by an Exchequer contribution, it is intended to formally announce the launch of a Rural Broadband Scheme in early 2011. This scheme will aim to provide a basic broadband service to individual un-served rural premises outside of the NBS areas. It is expected that the service offered under this scheme would at least match the service offered under the NBS and that the scheme will be fully rolled out by the end of 2012.

August 2010

From August 2010, job-seekers in Ireland have the opportunity to take part in the '[WebActivate](#)' project whose aim is to provide them with a free digital skills training scheme for building websites for local small businesses (i.e. SMEs). The project aims to create employment for hundreds of people in four major population centres across Ireland, namely Cork, Dublin, Galway and Limerick, while simultaneously providing local SMEs with a way of establishing an online presence. 'WebActivate' is an initiative of the Digital Skills Academy and is supported by the Digital Hub Development Agency and several chambers of commerce, as well as further education institutions. It is being run as part of the Labour Market Activation Fund 2010, funded by the Irish [Department of Education and Skills](#) (*An Roinn Oideachais Agus Scileanna*) and the European Social Fund.

July 2010

The [losingyourjob.ie](#) website provided by the Irish Citizens Information Board (CIB) won a Taoiseach's Award (head of government award) for public service excellence in July 2010. The aim of the website is to help people who have lost their job, or have been put on reduced working hours obtain clear and comprehensive information about their rights and entitlements. The site takes a fully integrated, 'life-event' approach to the information surrounding job loss, including people's legal rights, their entitlements (such as claiming social welfare benefits, requesting a tax refund, getting help with rent or mortgage payments) and options (such as looking for a new job, starting a business, returning to education).

News 2009 and before

2009

- ▶ The Assistireland.ie website is an online resource providing information on assistive technology. The site, run by the Citizens Information Board, improved its look and feel in *November 2009* by introducing a directory of products available from Irish suppliers for people with disabilities and older people. The upgraded site also included a range of new features that made it easier to use. Over 30 topics are currently covered, ranging from health care products to wheelchair seating systems, offering a large variety for users to choose from. The [new suppliers' section](#) has proved very popular, with over 2 000 people accessing it everyday. Furthermore, telephone and [email support](#) are on offer, providing assistance to the elderly and the disabled, as well as directions to products and suppliers.
- ▶ The **BenefIT 2** eInclusion Grant Scheme was launched in *August 2009*, as a successor to the previous BenefIT Scheme. Through the scheme, the Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*, DCENR) allocated a budget of € 351 000 to selected projects fulfilling eInclusion (training) objectives. The average cost to the Department per person trained was estimated at approximately € 50, a sum substantially less than that of previous schemes.
- ▶ The latest [Technology Actions to Support the Smart Economy](#) paper, by the [Knowledge Society](#) Division of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, announced, in *July 2009*, measures to address the skills and confidence deficit amongst those who have completed their formal education. These would build on the successful **BenefIT** eInclusion grant scheme, in the form of initiatives in which government partners with the community, voluntary and non-profit sectors in the delivery of eInclusion projects across the country.
- ▶ On *25 June 2009*, the Irish Minister for Integration John Curran, T.D., launched the new [integration.ie](#) website with the main objective of becoming a key source of information for migrants and to other stakeholders on the latest developments in integration and diversity management. The site also provides information on European and national funding streams managed by the Office of the Minister and useful links to relevant national and international websites. The launch of the Irish website also coincided with the recent launch of the [European Website on Integration](#) by the European Commission (EC).
- ▶ The Irish Government announced, in *February 2009*, the National Broadband Scheme, a € 223 million investment, to expand broadband coverage in rural Ireland. The Irish Government [[Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources](#) (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*, CENR)] concluded a tendering process and signed a new contract with a private telecommunications company with the objective of providing, by September 2010, a basic broadband service to rural areas of the country which heretofore had little or no access to such services. Thanks to the full national broadband coverage, numerous existing businesses could be protected and sustained while new positions could potentially be created, representing a significant boost to Ireland's economy.
- ▶ A [Survey on Older People and ICTs](#) in Ireland report, prepared by the Work Research Centre (WRC) and Age Action Ireland, showed in *January 2009* that usage of computers and the Internet was growing even though at the time it had only reached a minority of those aged over 65.

2008

- ▶ In *December*, the Minister for the Information Society, Seán Power, T.D., met with counterparts from other EU Member States at an eInclusion Conference in Vienna. The purpose of the conference was to report on the progress being made towards reaching the Information Society Declaration signed at Riga in 2006, and to share ideas and information on the development of an eInclusive society across Europe. The Minister informed his European Ministerial colleagues of Ireland's recent

'Next Generation Network' consultation process and of the Government's commitment under the [National Broadband Scheme](#) (NBS) to provide broadband to all areas currently not served nationwide.

- ▶ On *15 October*, [Robobraille](#), the award-winning email service for people with a visual impairment or reading difficulties, was selected as one of the five medal winners in the eAccessibility category of the eInclusion Awards 2008. RoboBraille is an email-based service capable of translating electronic documents into either synthetic speech, or contracted Braille. The service is available free of charge to all non-commercial users and has been validated in Ireland, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Great Britain.

Specialising in high tech electronic Assistive Technology (AT) for children and adults with disabilities and their families, the Enable Ireland service became, in October 2008, a medal finalist in the eAccessibility category of the European eInclusion Awards 2008. Their flagship National Assistive Technology Training service provides advice and training on AT products promoting the independence of people with disabilities.

The [Mid-West Regional Authority](#) of Ireland was a medal finalist in the **Inclusive Public Services** category of the European eInclusion Awards 2008. Their involvement in the CitizenFirst project, part of a pan-European partnership, encouraged increased citizen and community participation with local and public bodies through ICT awareness, training and the installation of Public Internet Access Points.

- ▶ The European Commission funded [MeAC](#) project ('Measuring Progress of eAccessibility in Europe') published, in *June 2008*, a first series of country profiles for European countries, including that of Ireland. The profiles provided an overview of relevant policies and levels of eAccessibility actually achieved in nine EU Member States, as well as in the United States.

2007

- ▶ In *February 2007*, the [National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016](#) (NAPinclusion) was launched by the government. Section 6.4.6 of the plan was devoted to eInclusion, with actions focusing, among others, on access to ICT skills, building awareness, enhancing the accessibility and usability of public service information and services, and exploring aspects of ICT and ageing.
- ▶ The Irish Minister of State, Tom Kitt announced, in *January 2007*, the allocation of € 1.45 million to some 76 projects around the country, under the **Access, Skills and Content (ASC) Initiative** originally launched in 2006, as part of the government's eInclusion Fund. The ASC (Access, Skills and Content) Initiative was established to support the participation of late adopters of technology in an inclusive information society. It was specifically aimed at those who were at greatest risk of being left behind in the move to the information society – especially older people and people with disabilities.

2006

In *June 2006*, the document '[Towards 2016](#) - Social Partnership Agreement for 2006-2015' was launched by the government. Among other social issues, it prioritised action across each lifecycle stage (children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities) on helping those from disadvantaged communities to acquire basic ICT skills. The document made frequent reference to diversity in society and recognised that policies to accommodate diversity and promote equality of opportunity were becoming increasingly important both to the welfare of workers, as well as to the performance of workplaces.

2005

The deadline for project proposals funded under the eInclusion Fund [later called the ASC (Access, Skills and Content Initiative)] expired on *30 September 2005*. Projects were selected for funding based on their

relevance to and support of the priority areas for action in the government's eInclusion strategy. The purpose of the funding was to target those at greatest risk of being left behind in the move to the Knowledge Society, by exploiting the potential of technology to foster communities of common interest through online services and networks. For 2005, the government allocated € 1 025 million for the funding of eInclusion initiatives under the eInclusion Fund.

2002

The government's information society policy, further detailed in the document 'New Connections', published in *March 2002*, recognised the importance of providing online services in a way that makes them accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities. It referred directly to the eEurope 2002 recommendation to adopt the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines for public websites and put the [National Disability Authority](#) (*Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais*, NDA) in the role of developing and monitoring standards in the area.

1999

- ▶ Ireland published its first 'Action Plan on the Information Society - Implementing the Information Society in Ireland'. The plan aimed at stimulating greater participation in the Information Society through the creation of infrastructures, raising awareness and promoting engagement by the public and organisations that could benefit from exploiting the Internet and its related technologies.
- ▶ The [National Disability Authority](#) (*Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais*, NDA) was established as an independent statutory agency under the aegis of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform by the National Disability Authority Act. The Authority provides best practice guidance on accessibility of IT services and monitors eAccessibility in public websites.

eInclusion Strategy

Main strategic objectives and principles

eInclusion policies

Developing the 'Knowledge Society' and increasing the number of citizens, who participate in and benefit from it, is a key objective of the [Knowledge Society](#) Division of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*, DCENR). eInclusion is one of the key focus areas. Policies seek to:

- ▶ raise awareness, particularly among people in key target groups, of the potential benefits to them of participating in the Knowledge Society by engaging digitally;
- ▶ address the ability of people to access and use technologies in terms of skills;
- ▶ increase connectivity and accessibility;
- ▶ focus on the application and use of technologies by encouraging the development of more content and increasing awareness of existing content (which will enhance the relevance and value of the Internet, as a resource), research on content needs, and more interaction with the public and private sectors on meeting future content demands.

There are a number of Irish policy documents which comprise initiatives to progress an inclusive Knowledge Society, namely:

- ▶ National Recovery Plan 2011 - 2014;
- ▶ '[Towards 2016](#)', which epitomises the current Social Partnership Agreement;
- ▶ the Programme for Government 2007-2012;
- ▶ the [National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016](#) (NAPinclusion);
- ▶ the [National Development Plan 2007-2013](#): 'Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All'.

The last two plans aim, among others, at a greater social inclusion, by also allocating funds for social inclusion measures affecting children, the disabled and other groups. Section 6.4.6 of the NAPinclusion is devoted to eInclusion. Actions proposed focus on:

- ▶ a nationwide broadband scheme that aims to provide 100 % broadband coverage;
- ▶ access to ICT skills in the context of breaking down barriers to lifelong learning;
- ▶ building awareness of the knowledge society through the use of various channels and networks including the Citizen Information Centres and the existing channels with Local Authorities;
- ▶ exploiting existing ICT infrastructure in communities;
- ▶ an ICT and Content Strategy for Schools;
- ▶ an eAccessibility Charter between the business communities and disability organisations;
- ▶ enhancing the accessibility and usability of public service information and services;
- ▶ exploring three aspects of ICT and ageing: independent living, staying active in the community and staying longer in the workforce - dialogue within the multi-sectoral eInclusion Stakeholder Group.

The most recent policy document issued on July 2009 by the [Knowledge Society](#) Strategy on [Technology Actions to Support the Smart Economy](#) also refers to the recognition of the importance of eInclusion by the government as 'citizens, businesses and society all stand to gain from more people participating in the Knowledge Society'.

The government's objectives include a range of measures relating to a number of key themes to be pursued, which are outlined below:

Availability and Access

Objectives and actions under this theme will focus on the availability of digital infrastructure (including broadband) to enable citizens to participate in the Knowledge Society. The new **National Broadband Scheme** will be important in this context. Accessibility for people with disabilities is another important dimension of this theme. In this context, it is anticipated that objectives and actions will focus on approaches to facilitate accessibility to increasingly crucial technologies, such as public sector websites for people with disabilities.

Digital Literacy, Skills and Competence

The government's view is that lack of the requisite digital literacy skills can become an impediment to the participation of many people in the Knowledge Society. Research has also shown that many of those who do not participate lack confidence. Provision for the teaching of the requisite skills in the formal education system will continue to be important as will the 'ICT in Schools' programme to promote an eLearning culture in the country's schools. Future eInclusion strategy will also have regard to other existing initiatives and policy measures including 'Towards 2016' and the National Skills Strategy. It will, in addition, incorporate measures to address the skills and confidence deficits amongst those who have completed their formal education. These measures will build on the successful **BenefIT** eInclusion grant scheme.

Awareness and Motivation

The issue of awareness-raising with a view to motivating current non-users, such as the elderly and those who have not had much of a formal education, will be a theme of focus in the future eInclusion strategy. The objective will be to help people discover what such technologies can do for them, as well as to appreciate the value of these technologies in their everyday lives.

eAccessibility

The government's information society policy, further detailed in the document 'New Connections' (March 2002), recognised the importance of providing online services in a way that makes them accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities. It referred directly to the eEurope 2002 recommendation to adopt the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines for public websites and put the [National Disability Authority](#) (NDA) in the role of developing and monitoring standards in the area.

The current [National IT Accessibility Guidelines](#) have been developed by the NDA and cover the following areas:

- ▶ websites and online applications;
- ▶ public access terminals, such as ATMs, information kiosks, ticket vending machines, information displays and card readers;
- ▶ telecommunication devices and services, such as desktop telephones, mobile phones and Interactive Voice Response services;
- ▶ application software.

Additional resources made available after 2007 include guidelines for producers and procurers of ICT products and services, so that they become accessible to as wide an audience as possible, including people with disabilities. These are:

- ▶ a range of best practice guidance documents for web developers, designers and content creators;
- ▶ an introduction to web accessibility for managers, which provides high-level information on issues of legal obligations, business benefits and processes to improve accessibility of organisations' websites;
- ▶ an 'IT Procurement Toolkit' that provides guidance to buyers of IT products and services to include meaningful, measurable and accurate criteria on accessibility in requests for tenders;

- ▶ guidance on web accessibility auditing;
- ▶ guidelines on smart card technologies.

More general guidance on universal access (including ICT), is offered by the [Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](#), whose mission is to enable people in Ireland to participate in a society that takes account of human difference and to interact with their environment to the best of their ability.

Along these lines, the [Towards 2016](#) strategy document pulls together the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the **National Disability Strategy**, which also includes provisions for ICT accessibility.

Broadcasting

For broadcasting, accessibility facilities include sign language, teletext services, subtitling and audio description. A set of basic principles is applied in assessing whether there is an obligation and the nature of the obligation for each broadcaster/channel, namely:

- ▶ nature of the broadcaster (public/private, receipt of public monies/public service duties, etc.);
- ▶ stage of development of the broadcast provider (time in operation, experience in providing access services, expertise etc.);
- ▶ level of current provision of access services;
- ▶ type of programming schedule (production of live programming, amount of programming received from other broadcasters, amount of home produced programming);
- ▶ technical and human resource costs/capabilities;
- ▶ costs, which are taken into account in the establishment of timeframes, to the extent that these can be calculated.

The newly established (2009) [Broadcasting Authority of Ireland](#) (*Údarás Craolacháin na hÉireann*, BAI), which licenses digital terrestrial television multiplex operators except for the national public broadcaster, applies a licensing policy which requires operators to provide the technical capacity needed to facilitate the availability of access services, under assigned accessibility targets. One such target is that digital receivers shall, at a minimum, provide subtitling. Other assistive services (such as audio description) have not been mandated as yet due to affordability and availability considerations.

Broadband policy and next generation's networks

In 2009, a number of priority areas were identified and policy frameworks announced. They included the development of next-generation broadband, which was supported by the government through targeted actions, such as the one-stop shop for service providers to provide access to state-owned infrastructure, the Kelvin transatlantic submarine telecoms cable to improve international connectivity, the [National Broadband Scheme](#) (NBS) to deliver affordable broadband to residences and businesses in rural Ireland and the 'Broadband to Schools' initiative, which is being expanded to roll out 100 Mbps to post-primary schools. The rollout of the provision of services under the scheme advanced incrementally over a 22 month period and was completed in October 2010. In line with the contract, broadband services are now available to all premises within each of the 1 028 designated NBS Electoral Divisions.

Following the government's [admission](#) that 'the private sector in Ireland was failing to invest at the level necessary to keep pace with the demand for broadband', the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Náúúrtha*, DCENR) initiated a **Regional Broadband Programme** to address the telecommunications infrastructure deficit by building high speed, open access broadband networks, in association with the local and regional authorities, in major towns and cities. Under the support of the National Development Plan, the deployment of (Fibre Optic) [Metropolitan Area Networks](#) (MANs) enable telecommunications companies to provide cheap 'always-on' high-speed access to the Internet, thus facilitating new entrants, new services and more competition for broadband throughout Ireland.

The MANs are publicly owned, while allowing all telecommunication operators open access to the networks. To date, 27 MANs have been completed under Phase I of the Programme and 65 MANs have been completed under Phase II of the Programme. [e|Net](#) operate as wholesalers of access to the MANs.

Other initiatives

- ▶ The initiative '[Towards 2016](#)' (Social Partnership Agreement) prioritises action across each lifecycle stage (children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities) on helping those from disadvantaged communities to acquire basic ICT skills.
- ▶ The new national skills strategy document [Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy](#) sets out the skills requirements of the economy to 2020, based on a vision of a knowledge-based, innovation-driven, high growth, participative and inclusive economy.
- ▶ The Ministers Strategy Group has developed an ICT strategy for schools ([Investing Effectively in ICT in Schools, 2008-2013](#)), based on an eLearning culture aimed to ensure that ICT usage is embedded in teaching and learning across the curriculum.
- ▶ Approaches to achieving more widespread digital inclusion are monitored by the Knowledge Society Division of the Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*, DCENR). The Division is also responsible for recent successful intervention measures such as the **BenefIT** digital inclusion schemes, which target 'harder-to-reach' groups. In developing future policy, the Department will have regard to the impact of current initiatives, the potential for wider stakeholder involvement and relevant research.

eInclusion Legal Framework

Main legal texts impacting on the development of eInclusion

eInclusion legislation

There is no specific legislation on eInclusion in Ireland. Instead, provisions for eInclusion are contained in legislation for disability discrimination, equality and electronic communications.

eAccessibility legislation

Disability Act 2005

The [Disability Act 2005](#) (Number 14 of 2005) sets out a range of obligations for public service bodies in the area of access to services and information. This includes electronic and written information being provided in an accessible format to a person with vision impairment (upon request) and audio communications being made accessible to a person with hearing impairment. The Act also provided for the establishment of a [Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](#) (CEUD). This was established in January 2007 and has a specific role in relation to developing and promulgating the 'Design for All' or 'Universal Design' principles in ICT, namely to:

- ▶ support and assist in the development of standards of excellence by liaising with appropriate national and international standards bodies for this purpose;
- ▶ recommend those standards for adoption by bodies operating in the fields of information technology and telecommunications;
- ▶ encourage compliance by the bodies aforesaid with appropriate national and international standards in universal design;
- ▶ provide information to those bodies in relation to the practical and theoretical aspects of supportive technologies.

Under the terms of the Disability Act 2005, six government departments have prepared sectoral plans on disability, which are now in force. The sectoral plan of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*, CENR) contains a number of commitments to improve telecommunications services for people with disabilities, including a commitment that the Commission for Communications Regulation ([ComReg](#)) would encourage voluntary initiatives by telecommunications service providers and would consult with stakeholders.

The Disability Act also requires every public body to have a least one person called the 'Access Officer', responsible for arranging extra assistance for people with disabilities who use the organisation's information and services.

Equality legislation

Equality legislation in Ireland (the Employment Equality Acts, 1998 - 2004 and the Equal Status Acts, 2000 - 2004), does not specifically mention eAccessibility issues, but literature published by the [Equality Authority](#) in relation to reasonable accommodation and accessible service provision does make direct mention of communication technologies, such as telephone services, websites, the Internet and interactive technologies.

Public procurement

Accessible procurement legislation

Accessible procurement is a legal requirement for all public sector bodies. Section 27 of the [Disability Act 2005](#) requires that, where reasonable, the goods and services that are supplied to a public body should also be accessible to people with disabilities. The [National Disability Authority \(Údarás Náisiúnta Michumais, NDA\)](#) has produced a [Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information Provided by Public Bodies](#). This states that procurers should highlight accessibility 'as a criterion to be considered throughout the entire tendering process (from drawing up and running tender competitions through tender evaluation and placing the contract to final debriefing)'.

The Minister for Finance has issued the [Public Sector Procurement Regulations 2006](#) implementing the EU procurement Directive [2004/18/EC](#). Section 23(2) states the requirement to integrate accessibility considerations (as far as practicable) in the technical specifications of the contract documentation for public bids, for all persons who are likely to use the relevant works, products or services, particularly those with disabilities.

eCommunications legislation

The Communications Regulation Acts

By means of the [Communications Regulation Act No 20 of 2002](#) and of secondary legislation (a number of Statutory Instruments), Ireland transposed all European Directives for electronic communications, namely: [2002/21/EC](#) (Framework Directive); [2002/20/EC](#) (Authorisation Directive); [2002/19/EC](#) (Access Directive); [2002/22/EC](#) (Universal Service Directive); and [2002/58/EC](#) (Directive on privacy and electronic communications). The Act also established the Commission for Communications Regulation as a regulatory authority. Among the authority's missions is to ensure that users, including disabled users, derive maximum benefit in terms of choice, price and quality, and have access to a universal service. The authority should also ensure that the needs of specific social groups, in particular disabled users, are addressed.

The [Communications \(Regulation\) Amendment Act No 22 of 2007](#) amended the 2002 Act to confer additional functions on the Commission for Communications Regulation and to make further provisions for the enforcement of that Act. Among others, it also provided for the establishment and operation of an Emergency Call Answering Service (ECAS).

The [Telecommunications Regulatory Reform Package](#) was agreed by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers and came into force in December 2009. The revised package aims to ensure that the regulatory framework continues to serve the best interests of consumers and industry, and includes amendments of the five main telecommunications Directives. The strengthening of the rights of users, particularly of disabled users is of great interest to eInclusion. This, along with the rest of the package, will be included in the forthcoming Irish legislation, mainly via Statutory Instruments which will come into force in May 2011.

Broadcasting

Broadcasting Acts

The [Broadcasting Act 2009](#) sets the regulatory framework for broadcasting services in Ireland. The Act consolidates almost 50 years of legislation relating to Irish broadcasting, such as the [Broadcasting \(Amendment\) Act 2007](#), the [Commencement Order 2007](#) and the previous Acts of 2001 and 1990 into a single act. The Act establishes the role of the [Broadcasting Authority of Ireland \(Údarás Craolacháin na hÉireann, BAI\)](#), which ensures that "the number and categories of broadcasting services made available

in the State best serve the needs of the people of the island of Ireland, bearing in mind their languages and traditions and their religious, ethical and cultural diversity". Among other duties, the Authority has to provide a regulatory environment to "facilitate the development of a broadcasting sector in Ireland that is responsive to audience needs and in particular is accessible to people with disabilities". It is the responsibility of the Authority to revise the broadcasting rules and the specific steps that each broadcaster is required to follow in order to promote understanding and enjoyment by the deaf, or persons with a hearing impairment, the blind, or partially sighted persons, persons with a hearing impairment and partially sighted, of programmes transmitted on any broadcasting service provided by the broadcaster.

Section 38(4) obliges the Authority to produce an annual report to the Minister responsible "on progress made towards increasing accessibility of broadcasting services to people with disabilities, and in particular, on progress made to achieve the targets set out in any broadcasting rules."

eInclusion Actors

Main roles and responsibilities

National eInclusion

Policy/Strategy

Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha, DCENR*)

DCENR has, among others, responsibility for the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors. The Department produces policies and strategies for eInclusion. The [Knowledge Society Division](#) of the Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources has two key areas of focus, namely, the formulation of digital inclusion policy to further advance the development of the knowledge society in Ireland, and the promotion of eInclusion to maximise the number of people participating in and benefiting from the knowledge society. Policy is formulated in the context of the wider social partnership policy framework (the [Towards 2016](#) Social Partnership Agreement for 2007-2015) for which the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) has responsibility.

National Disability Authority (*Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais, NDA*)

The NDA is the lead state agency on disability issues and universal design, including eAccessibility; it also provides independent expert advice to the government on policy and practice.

Coordination

Knowledge Society Division, Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources

The Knowledge Society Division has responsibility for policy measures to promote digital inclusion. It has also developed, coordinated and implemented digital inclusion intervention initiatives, namely the BenefIT digital inclusion schemes. These schemes, which build on initiatives previously operated by the Department of the Taoiseach, focus on the 'harder-to-reach' groups in society. In its policy role, the Division examines and sometimes commissions relevant research, such as the ['Survey of Older People and ICTs in Ireland'](#).

Office for Social Inclusion (OSI), Department of Social and Family Affairs (*An Roinn Gnóthaí Sóisialacha agus Teaghlaigh*)

The OSI is the government office, based in the Department of Social and Family Affairs, with overall responsibility for co-ordinating and driving the government's social inclusion agenda which includes the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion), the social inclusion elements of the 'Towards 2016' National Social Partnership Agreement and the new National Development Plan 2007-2013. All those documents contain sections on eInclusion (for example, section 6.4.6 of the NAPinclusion). The Office co-ordinates the process across departments, agencies, regional and local government, and implements key support functions. The key challenge for the Office is to ensure that the social inclusion agenda is being implemented and further developed at national, regional and local levels of government in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

Implementation

Knowledge Society Division, Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources

The Division has devised, implemented and funded the BenefIT eInclusion initiatives, which build in the previous ASC (Access, Skills and Content) Initiative.

Support

National Disability Authority (*Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais, NDA*)

The NDA provides best practice guidance on accessibility of IT services and monitors eAccessibility in public websites. The [National IT Accessibility Guidelines](#) have been developed by the Authority to aid compliance effort with accessibility standards.

The [eInclusion Stakeholders Group](#), originally operating under the [Department of the Taoiseach](#) and now under the [Knowledge Society Division](#) develops, implements, communicates, and monitors progress on a new national **eInclusion Strategy** which will address those in each lifecycle stage that are digitally excluded.

Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (*Lárionad Foirfeachta i nDearadh Uilíoch, CEUD*)

The CEUD is dedicated to enabling the design of environments that can be accessed, understood and used regardless of age, size and ability. This includes ICT systems and their accessibility. The Centre was established by the National Disability Authority (NDA) in January 2007 under the Disability Act 2005 and, among others, provides support in three areas of ICT accessibility, namely standards, education and professional development, and awareness.

eInclusion Who's Who

Main eInclusion decision-makers and executives

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eInclusion Areas

Riga Declaration Priorities

ICT & Ageing

Status in ICT & Ageing

It is evident from statistics that the aged do not, in general, use ICT in their daily activities. Ireland presents a below average picture in this respect. The European Commission's report on ['Europe's Digital Competitiveness'](#) for 2010 puts the index on regular Internet use for those between 65 and 74 for Ireland at 0.25, as opposed to an EU-27 average of 0.33. This was also confirmed for digital skills: the issue of the same report for 2009 showed a relatively high disparity in Internet use observed between those in the 65-74 age group (index at 0.26) and the EU-27 average (index at 0.30) for the year 2008. We should note here that the lower the value of this index, the higher the level of disparities it represents.

A [Survey on Older People and ICTs](#) in Ireland report prepared by the Work Research Centre (WRC) and Age Action Ireland in January 2009, showed that usage of computers and the Internet was growing even though at the time it had only reached a minority of those aged over 65. From an eInclusion perspective, three main digital divides were observed:

- ▶ an 'age divide', whereby older people were less likely to use ICTs than younger people;
- ▶ within the older population:
 - a 'first order' digital divide, whereby some segments of the older population were a lot more likely to be users than others;
 - a 'second order' digital divide amongst those who were users, whereby some segments of the user population were making more usage and better usage, gaining more benefits, than others.

Actions to support ICT & Ageing

Planned actions

Section 6.4.6 of the [National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016](#) refers to actions targeted to exploring three aspects of ICT and ageing:

- ▶ independent living;
- ▶ staying active in the community;
- ▶ staying longer in the workforce.

Other initiatives

Projects to assist target groups at risk of exclusion, in particular older people and people with disabilities, have been implemented and funded by the Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*, DCENR). The Benefit schemes operated by the [Knowledge Society](#) Division involved working in partnership with the third (community and voluntary) sector to reach 'harder-to-reach' groups. The main focus of the initiatives has been on awareness-raising measures, teaching basic digital skills and confidence building.

Geographic Digital Divide

Status of Common Access to Electronic Content and Services

As remarked in the European Commission's '[Europe's Digital Competitiveness](#)' report for 2010, the trend for broadband is medium to low in Ireland at a penetration rate of 22.2 % as opposed to an EU-27 average of 24.8 %; this corresponds to the 14th place among the EU-27 states. Despite significant growth (from 43 % in 2008 to 54 % in 2009, household broadband penetration was still slightly below the EU average of 56 % (2009). Internet take-up by households also was up to 67 %, slightly above the EU average. The percentage for rural coverage by DSL lines in 2009 was at 82 % as opposed to the corresponding figure for national coverage at 92 %. The gap was lower than the EU-27 average (80 % and 94 % correspondingly).

The corresponding report for 2009 also remarks that Ireland made significant progress between 2005 and 2008 in reducing the broadband penetration gap between national and urban areas; the 2009 results shown above, confirm this. Ireland also demonstrated the highest increase in regular Internet use in EU-27 for the period 2005 - 2008, at a level above 25 %. The mobile broadband market is well developed and the country has declared a target for a 100 % broadband coverage by 2010.

Actions to support Common Access to Electronic Content and Services

The National Broadband Scheme (NBS)

The [National Broadband Scheme](#) (NBS) delivers broadband to certain target areas in Ireland in which broadband services were deemed to be insufficient. Following the conclusion of a competitive tendering process, the contractors (a company called '3') are required to provide services to all premises in the NBS area who seek a service. In order to facilitate competition in the area, '3' are also required to provide wholesale access to any other authorised operator who wishes to serve premises in the NBS area. The rollout of the provision of services was completed in October 2010 and broadband services are now available to all premises within each of the 1 028 designated NBS Electoral Divisions.

Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs)

The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*, CENR) initiated a Regional Broadband Programme to address the telecommunications infrastructure deficit. Currently, under the support of the National Development Plan, the deployment of (Fibre Optic) [Metropolitan Area Networks](#) (MANs) enable telecommunications companies to provide cheap 'always-on' high-speed access to the Internet, thus facilitating new entrants, new services and more competition for broadband throughout Ireland.

The MANs are publicly owned, while allowing all telecommunication operators open access to the networks. To date, 27 MANs have been completed under Phase I of the Programme and 65 MANs have been completed under Phase II of the Programme. The Phase I MANs are being independently managed for the State by [e|Net](#), who were awarded the 15-year services concession contract in June 2004. In July 2009, e|net were awarded the 15-year services concession contract to operate and manage the Phase II MANs. [e|Net](#) operate as wholesalers of access to the MANs and offer a full suite of products including ducting, sub-ducting, dark fibre, high level managed capacity, co-location facilities and relevant auxiliary services.

The Benefit and ASC Initiatives

Projects funded under the Benefit and ASC Initiatives have had a broad geographical spread. For example, the ASC scheme in 2007 involved projects operating in 22 of the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland. Under the Benefit 2 scheme, training in basic internet skills is provided in every county in the Republic. These projects encompass all areas of the Irish society from isolated rural communities, residents of villages, towns and city dwellers, as well as communities of common interest such as active retirement groups and organisations which work with people with disabilities.

eAccessibility

Status of eAccessibility

According to the results of the [Measuring progress of eAccessibility in Europe](#) (MeAC) project, the results of the evaluation for WCAG 1.0 Level A accessibility criteria (using automatic and manual methods of evaluation) for Ireland, as measured in 2008, were as follows:

- ▶ 1 out of 6 selected public websites passed the automatic evaluation;
- ▶ 1 out of 6 sectoral /commercial websites passed both the automatic and the manual evaluations.

For telecommunication services, the following situation was identified by the same study in 2008:

- ▶ the main emergency number (112 or other) was directly accessible by means of text telephones;
- ▶ a text relay service was available, but not a video relay service;
- ▶ of the two main mobile telephony operators, both provided eAccessibility-related information to customers with disabilities via their websites; one of them offered models that were labelled as hearing aid compatible via their online sales channel;
- ▶ of the two main landline telephony operators, one provided eAccessibility-related information to customers with disabilities via its website; one operator offered models that were labelled as hearing aid compatible via their online sales channel.

For broadcasting services, the corresponding figures were:

Of the two main public TV channels (operated by the same broadcaster), in 2007:

- ▶ both provided programmes with subtitling, amounting to 87 % and 62 %, respectively, of their overall national language programming (figures refer to peak time, i.e. 18:00 to 23:00);
- ▶ one provided programmes with signing, but only a short programme (2.5 minutes) was broadcast with signing;
- ▶ none provided programmes with audio description.

Of the two main commercial TV channels, in 2007:

- ▶ both provided programmes with subtitling, amounting to 23 % and 36 %, respectively, of their overall national language programming;
- ▶ none provided programmes with signing;
- ▶ none provided programmes with audio description.

The successor of the above study [Monitoring eAccessibility \(2009-2011\)](#), which is still in progress, assesses the level of accessibility in public websites in comparison with legislative provisions and the deadline for implementation of WCAG 2.0. The assessment is given as the percentage of the websites which are still lagging behind the deadlines. Available results for 2010 show that Ireland has a relatively low accessibility status for its public websites at 29.44 % as opposed to an EU-27 average of 56.83 %. The general provision for public websites is that accessibility is clearly expected to be present in such sites, even though there is not a very strong, or a very direct mandate for such compliance. There is also no date set for compliance with WCAG 2.0 specifications.

Actions towards eAccessibility

Universal Design

The [Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](#) (CEUD) is dedicated to enabling the design of environments that can be accessed, understood and used regardless of age, size and ability. The Centre has an ICT branch, which contributes to the development and promotion of standards, education courses and awareness. The CEUD-ICT mailing list is a public discussion list of academics, practioners, universal

design advocates and others interested in discussions, knowledge sharing and capacity building and awareness-raising around ICT. The [CEUD ICT Guidelines](#) contain a range of guidelines and other universal design resources on ICT. The CEUD is the National Contact Centre for the [European Design for All e-Accessibility Network](#) (EDeAN). EDeAN is a network of 160 organisations in European Union Member States to which some members of the CEUD ICT mailing list also belong. The goal of the network is to support all citizens' access to the Information Society.

Telecommunications services

The Commission for Communications Regulation ([ComReg](#)), in its effort to encourage voluntary initiatives by telecommunications service providers established the Industry Forum which includes representatives of telecommunications companies, the disability sector and the NDA. In 2007, as a result of work within the Forum, ComReg and the [National Disability Authority](#) (*Údarás Náisiúnta Michumais*, NDA) jointly published a guide to telephone services for people with disabilities and the elderly.

In addition, a number of other fixed and mobile operators provide some services targeted towards disabled users, such as making available handsets with accessibility features and Braille billing.

IT Accessibility Guidelines

- ▶ The [National IT Accessibility Guidelines](#) have been developed by the [National Disability Authority](#) (NDA) to provide best practice guidance on accessibility of IT services. In view of those, the [Excellence through Accessibility Award](#) scheme has been established to reward those government departments and agencies that have taken steps to make their services more accessible. The NDA has developed a set of 14 accessibility guidelines and 41 criteria for the Accessibility Award. The guidelines have been drawn up after extensive consultation with Government Departments, state agencies, voluntary and community bodies and the NDA Standards Advisory Committee.
- ▶ The [IT Procurement Toolkit](#) provides guidance in identifying clear and measurable accessibility requirements for tender documents.

Local government

In 1995, the city of Barcelona hosted a conference on the 'City and the Disabled', which was also the launching point of the so-called 'Barcelona Declaration'. The declaration aimed at local government in creating a more inclusive society for the disabled to ensure access to information generated by the community. In 2001, the National Disability Authority (*Údarás Náisiúnta Michumais*, NDA) launched the Barcelona Declaration project, initiating pilot initiatives undertaken by local authorities between 2001 and 2004. Disability proofing guidelines were provided and, to date, 107 councils in Ireland have adopted the project.

Digital Literacy and Competences

Status on Digital Literacy and Competences

Digital literacy and competences in Ireland generally rate lower than the European average. This is verified by the European Commission's ['Europe's Digital Competitiveness'](#) report for 2010 and the corresponding one for 2009:

- ▶ The index on 'Digital Literacy by Risk Groups and Country' was at 0.66 (having risen by 0.01 from 2007 to 2009) for the 'Riga Total-at-Risk Groups' for the year 2009, as opposed to a corresponding European (EU-27) average of 0.71.
- ▶ The index of 'Digital Literacy Disparities in At-Risk Groups by Country' was at 0.64 for the year 2007, as opposed to an EU-27 average of 0.68. This shows that the country had a higher level of disparity compared to the European average, with the situation differing in groups such as women (0.94 against 0.91 for EU-27), the 'inactive' (0.54 against 0.47 for EU-27) and those in rural areas where the index matches the EU-27 index at 0.88.

- ▶ Along with some other countries such as Austria and Sweden, Ireland exhibited a drop in digital skills in 2009 with negative growth rates of between 1 and 3 percentage points. Close monitoring of this area is needed for the future so that a negative trend can be detected early.

Actions towards stimulating Digital Literacy and Competences

The eInclusion Grant Schemes

The [Technology Actions to Support the Smart Economy](#) paper (July 2009) stresses the importance of eInclusion. The **BenefIT** eInclusion grant schemes, through which government partners with the community, voluntary and non-profit sectors in the delivery of eInclusion projects across the country, have been very successful. A more comprehensive report on the outcomes achieved by the wide range of projects under the BenefIT scheme is available on the DCENR website at www.eInclusion.ie. These projects focus on encouraging, facilitating and enabling people in the 'harder-to-reach' target groups to participate in the knowledge society and to acquire the necessary skills.

The first BenefIT scheme, launched in October 2008, provided financial support to voluntary, non-profit organisations to develop initiatives to encourage and support the participation of late adopters of technology. The scheme, which operated 2008-9, was extremely successful. Some of the key findings of the report on the outcomes of the scheme entitled 'What BenefIT?' (to be published in early 2011), are summarised below.

The scheme was tremendously popular, with demand for places exceeding supply. It reached into all areas of the country empowering many communities and thousands of people to help themselves.

Over 32 000 people will have directly benefited under the scheme, mostly in the form of training. As a result, these beneficiaries (70 % of whom are new participants in the knowledge society) can now use computers/the Internet, transact online and have an understanding of Internet safety issues. Of the direct beneficiaries about half were aged 65 or older, 20 % were unemployed and 18 % were people with disabilities. Two thirds were female.

The scheme significantly helped to grow the market for hardware, software and other related goods and services. Of the two thirds of project participants (trainees), who had not already had a computer, half indicated that they planned on acquiring one.

The scheme was an effective partnership of key stakeholders delivering significant impact in a cost-effective way. The quality of the training was high, participants were very satisfied with the training they received and the average cost per beneficiary was just € 104.

As a result of this scheme and its predecessors, there will be ongoing legacies to assist in further increasing digital engagement, in terms of:

- ▶ on-line resources and equipment / infrastructure created, now available for others to use;
- ▶ examples of effective / best practise and learning approaches which can assist future projects.

The **BenefIT 2** eInclusion Grant Scheme was launched in September 2009 as a successor scheme. With regard to the current economic realities and the more limited resources available, this scheme was devised so as to maximise the impact in the areas of greatest need and achieve optimal value for money. Through the scheme, the Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources (*An Roinn Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádurtha*, DCENR) has allocated a budget of € 351 000 to selected projects fulfilling eInclusion (training) objectives. The average cost to the Department per person trained under this scheme is estimated at approximately € 50, a sum substantially less than that of previous schemes. Three projects are expected to operate primarily in 2010, under BenefIT 2:

- ▶ Dublin Employment Pact, in partnership with FIT, Dublin City Council, the ICA, the Older Women's Network, VEC's REHAB Care, and Friendly Call Services, providing training for 3 500 people in 26 counties, under a grant of € 143 000;

- ▶ Age Action Ireland, in partnership with Louth Leader Partnership, Paul Partnership Limerick and a wide range of organisations including, local authorities, local libraries, family resource centres, community groups to provide training for 2 450 trainees in 15 counties, under a grant of € 143 000;
- ▶ Mullaghmatt, Cortolvin Community Development Limited, in partnership with the family Resource Centre network, to provide training for 1 440 trainees in counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth Monaghan and Sligo, under a grant of € 65 760.

All those projects focus on providing basic training to beginners, for either no charge or for a nominal fee of € 20. 7 390 people are expected to undergo training.

eLearning on disability

The National Disability Authority's ['eLearning' project](#) is a module, currently entasked to provide basic disability equality training to public sector staff in Ireland. Content includes an overview of disability in Ireland, including statistics and relevant legislation. The training will show some of the barriers faced by customers with disabilities and will explain how good customer service can get over these barriers. Trainees will learn how to engage with a person with a disability in a customer services setting. The draft design for the training module can be seen on the [eLearning Public Consultation web page](#).

National Assistive Technology Training Service

Specialising in high tech electronic Assistive Technology (AT), this national service, called the [National Assistive Technology Training service](#), provides advice and training on AT products to the 'Enable Ireland' service users and staff. 'Enable Ireland' provides free services to children and adults with disabilities and their families from 40 locations in 14 counties. In addition, training courses are open to members of the public and specialised programmes can be developed for businesses to advise them on the wider everyday role that AT plays in the workplace.

Other initiatives

Prior to the BenefIT schemes, the eInclusion Fund, subsequently called the **ASC (Access, Skills and Content) Initiative** was operated by the Department of the Taoiseach. It was aimed at enhancing understanding and appreciation of how technological advances benefit individuals and society, as well as encouraging and assisting the development of initiatives which focus on helping to provide the necessary skills for confident use of technology by all citizens – particularly those who have been identified as being at higher risk of exclusion – so that they may participate in an inclusive Information Society.

eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

Status on eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

Following the Riga Dashboard, the 'Index of Regular Internet Use in At-Risk Groups by Country', compiled by the European Commission's ['Europe's Digital Competitiveness'](#) (2010), evaluates Ireland at a lower than average 0.66 for the 'Riga Total-at-Risk Groups' as opposed to a corresponding European (EU-27) average of 0.68.

As reported by the same source, the dominant social networking site in Ireland in May 2009 was Google, followed by YouTube, Yahoo! and the social networking site Bebo.

Actions towards eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

Broadcasting

The mandate of the [Broadcasting Authority of Ireland](#) (BAI) is to ensure that broadcasting services best serve the needs of the people of the island of Ireland, bearing in mind their languages and traditions, and their religious, ethical and cultural diversity. In its current form, the new [Broadcasting Act 2009](#) removes the existing ban on advertising directed towards religious ends, replacing it with a ban on advertising that refers to the benefits of belonging to or believing in a particular religion.

Social Partnership Agreement

The [Towards 2016](#) Social Partnership Agreement for 2006-2015 makes frequent reference to diversity in society; actually "deepening capabilities, achieving higher participation rates and more successfully handling diversity, including immigration" is one of the five objectives of the agreement. Section 32.15 of the Agreement recognises that policies to accommodate diversity (in terms of gender, nationality, age and disability, as well as other aspects) and promote equality of opportunity are becoming increasingly important both to the welfare of workers, as well as to the performance of workplaces.

Intercultural fora

The [Office of the Minister of State for Integration](#) has been set up to develop, drive and co-ordinate policy in relation to social integration of legally resident immigrants across government departments. The Office supports a number of [intercultural fora](#), where migrants from different cultures and backgrounds interact by sharing their integration experiences. Participants can express their opinions and raise issues that affect migrants on a daily basis, thus being able to influence policy at a local level.

Inclusive eGovernment

Status on Inclusive eGovernment

Ireland's eGovernment performance has seen considerable improvements, notably in online availability and usage by businesses, with some challenges remaining in the use of eGovernment by citizens. eGovernment in Ireland is addressed by a comprehensive programme of public service transformation. Ireland also leads on the eProcurement indicators, with 29 %. The Minister for Finance assumed political responsibility for eGovernment policy and coordination in 2008. His department manages these processes, ensures the effective involvement of all relevant public bodies, and provides the government with regular progress reports and strategy proposals.

According to the latest version of the [benchmarking-based measurement](#) for eGovernment, prepared for the European Commission (2009), the online availability index for eGovernment services places Ireland at 83 % in terms of full online availability (7th on EU-27) and 94 % in terms of online sophistication (9th in EU-27). Both scores are above the EU-27 average. In terms of inclusive eGovernment however, the figures for services towards citizens (i.e. excluding services towards businesses) are more relevant: in this case, online availability drops slightly down to 80 % and online sophistication to 93 %.

In terms of User Experience, Ireland scores above the EU-27 average. It obtains 55 % on the Usability metric and 42 % on User Satisfaction Monitoring. The Irish portal receives particularly good scores and achieves 100 % on the One-Stop-Shop Approach indicator and 67 % on the User-focused Portal Design metric. Ireland provides a threefold entry point to its government services: a 'mother' portal, and a business and citizen portal. In terms of eAccessibility of the national portal, Ireland is positioned in around the EU27 average.

According to Eurostat, usage of electronic services related to public administration in 2009 was at 28 % of the population (EU-27 average at 30 %), comprising 23.3 % for obtaining information, 20.2 % for downloading forms and 18.5 % for returning filled forms.

Actions towards Inclusive eGovernment

Government portal

www.gov.ie is the Irish government's central website providing information on the country, its history, geography, culture and official publications. It provides a gateway to all departments of state and public bodies, as well as a portal to a wide range of online services.

Reform programmes

The '[Transforming Public Services](#)' (TPS) programme sets out actions aimed at a radical overhaul of the Irish public service, placing the citizen/user of such services at the centre. The result will be a more

integrated service where all public servants will collaborate more effectively, irrespective of the part of the administration in which they work, their job title or the geographical location. The reform process, which is underway, takes into account the analysis and conclusions of the OECD review of the Irish public service, as well as the lessons drawn from reports under the 'Organisational Review Programme' and the 'Efficiency Review Process'.

Other services

The [Citizens Information Website](#) was launched in April 2001, run by the [Citizens Information Board](#), Ireland's national agency responsible for providing information and advice on social services, operating under the aegis of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (*An Roinn Gnóthai Sóisialacha agus Teaghlaigh*). The website provides guidance on a wide range of subjects, including employment rights, buying a home, moving abroad and education. The subjects covered are divided into 14 categories, representing life events and activities, allowing users to readily access the topic relevant to them. Sourced from a wide variety of service providers and agencies, the information is backed up by case studies, supporting documentation and downloadable forms.

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' sets 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'.

Ireland is involved in the following FP7 projects:

1. [Coordination action in R&D in accessible and assistive ICT](#) (CARDIAC)

Research area: ICT-2009.7.2 Accessible and Assistive ICT

Project start date: [2010-03-01]

Project end date: [2013-02-28]

2. [Virtual User Concept for Supporting Inclusive Design of Consumer Products and User Interfaces](#) (VICON)

Research area: ICT-2009.7.2 Accessible and Assistive ICT

Project start date: [2010-01-01]

Project end date: [2012-06-30]

3. [Bridging research in Ageing and ICT Development](#) (BRAID)

Research area: ICT-2009.7.1 ICT & Ageing

Project start date: [2010-03-01]

Project end date: [2012-02-29]

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

Research area: ICT-2007.7.2 Accessible and inclusive ICT

Project start date: [2008-09-01]

Project end date: [2012-02-29]

5. [International support of a common awareness and knowledge platform for studying and enabling independent living](#) (CAPSIL)

Research area: ICT-2007.7.1 ICT and ageing

Project start date: [2008-01-07]

Project end date: [2010-01-06]

Future Challenges

There are still many people in Ireland who do not participate in the Knowledge Society and who run the risk of marginalisation as more and more content is created, disseminated and traded across the Internet. Therefore, there is a requirement to continue to raise awareness and encourage more people to avail of these opportunities. As indicated in the report '[Technology Actions to Support the Smart Economy](#)', future policies and initiatives will seek to address this need by focusing inter alia on:

- ▶ awareness
- ▶ skills
- ▶ connectivity
- ▶ accessibility
- ▶ content creation.

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.

eInclusion practice is an initiative of the Directorate General for the Information Society and Media, European Commission.

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