

COUNCIL RESOLUTION**of 8 October 2001****on 'e-Inclusion' — exploiting the opportunities of the information society for social inclusion**

(2001/C 292/02)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- (1) RECALLING that the Community has among its tasks to promote throughout the Community a high level of employment and social protection and to raise the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion;
- (2) RECALLING the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 17 December 1999 on the employment and social dimension of the information society ⁽¹⁾;
- (3) RECALLING that the extraordinary Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 called for an information society for all;
- (4) RECALLING that one of the objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, approved by the Nice European Council of 7 to 9 December 2000, is to exploit fully the potential of the knowledge-based society and of new information and communication technologies and ensure that no one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities;
- (5) RECALLING that the promotion of the knowledge-based society is a key element across the European employment guidelines, and, in particular, that they call for e-Learning for all citizens, a particular attention to the needs of disadvantaged people, tapping the employment potential of the knowledge society, and invite the social partners to establish the conditions for giving every worker the opportunity to achieve digital literacy;
- (6) RECALLING that the Commission communication 'Strategies for jobs in the information society', adopted in February 2000, stressed the opportunities of the information society for improving the living and working conditions of all citizens, and RECOGNISING that lessons can be learnt from previous experience in fields such as community economic development, technology transfer and sustainable development;
- (7) RECALLING that the joint informal meeting of Ministers for Employment and Ministers for Telecommunications on 16 February 2001 in Luleå highlighted the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) as an engine for growth and employment in Europe and stressed the need to reduce ICT skills shortages and to increase digital literacy, and RECOGNISING the challenge for enabling the unemployed to take up this job potential by appropriate learning in ICT skills;
- (8) RECALLING that the social partners and non-governmental organisations play a key role in reducing the digital divide, by promoting access for all to the knowledge-based society and by exploiting the resulting potential, in particular in terms of jobs and qualifications;
- (9) RECALLING that a key objective of the 'e-Europe 2002 action plan', endorsed by the Feira European Council of 19 and 20 June 2000, is to achieve the participation of all in the knowledge-based economy and, in particular, a more effective coordination at European level of policies to avoid info-exclusion;
- (10) RECALLING that the Commission communication 'e-Europe 2002 — impact and priorities', submitted to the Stockholm European Council of 23 and 24 March 2001, underlined the priority of e-Inclusion and called on the high-level group 'Employment and social dimension of the information society' (ESDIS) to draw up, in support of the social inclusion process, a report on e-Inclusion by the end of 2001 to enhance the coordination of policies to prevent a digital divide in Europe;
- (11) RECOGNISING that this report, submitted as a Commission staff working paper 'e-Inclusion — the information society's potential for social inclusion in Europe' builds on a Eurobarometer survey and a broad exchange of policy practices among the representatives of the Member States in the ESDIS high-level group; that this analysis identifies barriers to participation in the information society, and policy areas to enhance the inclusion of disadvantaged people in the information society and to ensure effective and sustainable uses of technology that are fully integrated into the local economy;
- (12) TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the recommendations made by the ESDIS high-level group on the basis of this analysis,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 8, 12.1.2000, p. 1.

CALLS ON MEMBER STATES:

- for disadvantaged people and accessible for persons with disabilities;
- I. to tap the information society's potential for disadvantaged people by:
1. facilitating appropriate on-line content and services, accessible according to demand profiles, understandable and affordable for all people, and backed up by regular user-friendliness checks, including for the disabled and others with special needs and, in particular, targeted on-line services in areas such as social protection, employment, education and training, health, housing, and justice, while continuing, as appropriate, complementary off-line access to basic public services;
 2. facilitating local communities through encouraging financial and technical support for the development of on-line services and networks, in particular in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, less-favoured rural and peripheral areas, and through an emphasis on the needs of these areas within the framework of e-Government;
 3. realising ICT job opportunities, in collaboration with social partners, within the framework of the employment guidelines, and in particular:
 - (a) by providing the unemployed and inactive people, workers at risk of exclusion including older workers, and people with disabilities with ICT training and other learning that respond to their individual needs and requirements for employment and with incentives to obtain a certificate of basic ICT skills, like the European computer driving licence (ECDL), and to take up conversion courses in ICT or e-Business skills; and
 - (b) by promoting telework and on-line recruitment.
- II. to remove barriers in the information society by:
1. raising awareness of the information society's opportunities and challenges, in particular among technology-shy people, including the elderly, and within communities at risk of digital exclusion, as well as by sensitising ICT producers, information providers, social partners and political actors to the special needs of disadvantaged people in terms of ICT equipment, on-line content, and information society jobs;
 2. making ICT access available and affordable, for example:
 - (a) by supporting the establishment of user-friendly public Internet access points in all local communities which could feature free access, on-site training facilities, and locations favourable
- (b) by providing targeted incentives for individual ICT purchase and use by disadvantaged people;
 - (c) by developing ICT infrastructures in remote or dispersed localities; and
 - (d) by exploiting the potential of other technical platforms like mobile communications or digital TV for e-Inclusion;
3. promoting digital literacy as an element for full participation in society, appropriate to specific learning needs, and developing networks of e-Learning centres, in particular for disadvantaged people;
 4. tackling technical barriers for people with different disabilities in terms of ICT equipment and web content, in particular by implementing the respective e-Europe actions, monitored by the e-Accessibility expert group;
 5. promoting the development of specific software adapted to the particular needs of disadvantaged groups.
- III. to encourage partnerships of all stakeholders, with an emphasis on the regional and local dimensions, by:
1. developing the above e-Inclusion measures as an integral element in the fight against social exclusion, across all relevant policy areas;
 2. supporting the key role of regional and local actors, social partners and civil society organisations, including their becoming producers of information and content and actively extending the benefits of new technology to the wider community, and taking full advantage of public-private partnerships;
 3. taking due account of the different levels of digital exclusion in the Member States, across regions and localities, and appropriately addressing the various disadvantaged communities;
 4. mainstreaming a gender equality approach in e-Inclusion policies, while putting a particular emphasis on enhancing the take-up of training and employment opportunities of the information society among women;
 5. promoting, where appropriate, e-Inclusion measures under the Structural Funds, in particular the European Social Fund;

CALLS ON THE COMMISSION:

1. to take fully into account the challenges and opportunities of e-Inclusion with a view to further developments of the social inclusion strategy, including in the context of the open method of coordination at European level;
2. to promote the further realising of the information society's job potential for the unemployed within the framework of the European employment strategy;
3. to favour, where appropriate, e-Inclusion measures within the Structural Funds, in particular within the European

Social Fund, taking into account other priorities, as well as within other relevant Community action programmes;

4. in collaboration with the ESDIS high-level group, to monitor and analyse progress in the effective coordination of e-Inclusion policies within the framework of the employment and social inclusion strategies, and to report on it in the joint employment report and in the synthesis report on combating social exclusion and poverty.

Done at Luxembourg on 8 October 2001.
