



Regional Developments in ICT Uptake

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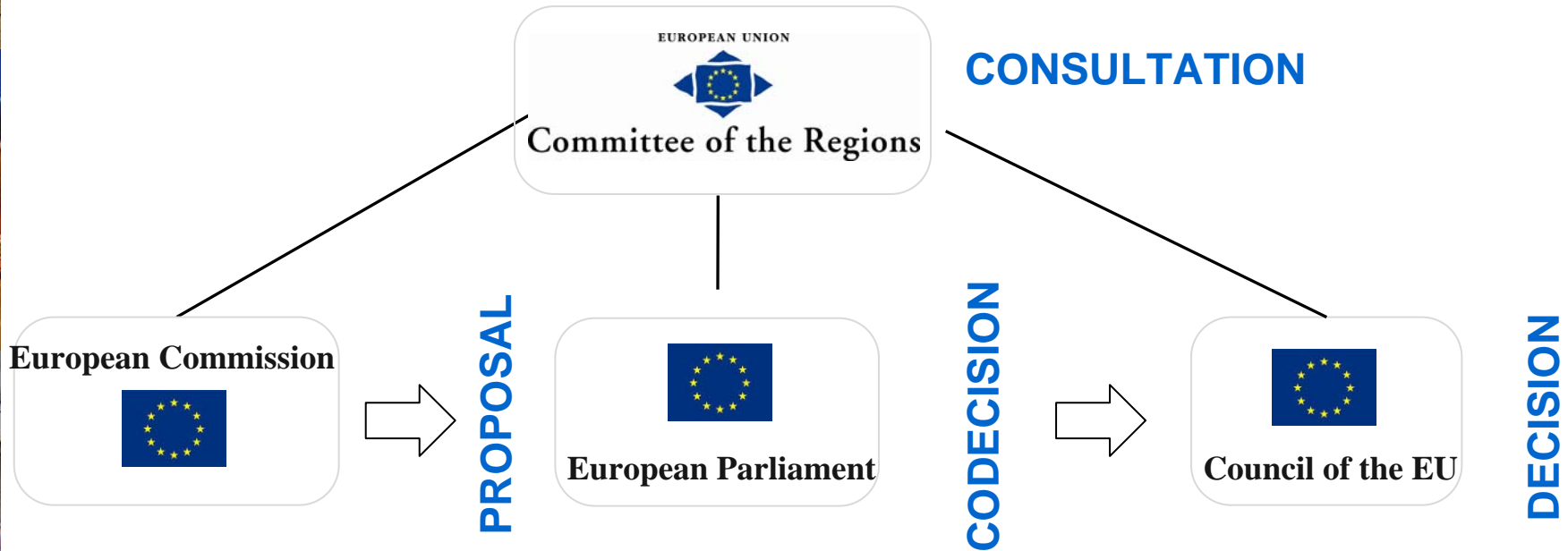


▶ The Committee of the Regions (CoR) in brief

A political assembly of the European Union, representing local and regional governments.

- ❖ Created by Maastricht Treaty (1992)
 - ❖ 344 members representing local and regional governments
 - ❖ 27 national delegations
 - ❖ 4 political groups
 - ❖ 6 thematic commissions (sub-committees)
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- **To give local and regional government a say over the drafting of EU legislation.**
 - **To bring Europe closer to its citizens and to encourage a culture of subsidiarity.**
 - **To provide a meeting place where cities and regions can share best practice and take part in a dialogue with the European institutions.**

The CoR and EU decision-making





Reference documents

- *Communication from the Commission on the "**European i2010 initiative on e-Inclusion** - To be part of the information society" COM(2007) 694 final*
- *Communication from the Commission on **E-skills** for the 21st Century: fostering competitiveness, growth and jobs COM(2007) 496 final*
- ***Committee of Regions opinion on „e-Inclusion”**
CdR 5/2008
(rapporteur: A. SZALAY, expert: G. SIMOR)*



The digital divide

- A long-lasting digital divide leads to **social and economic exclusion**.
- The realisation of equal opportunities concerning the digital access and competencies is a **social necessity**; and at the same time is an **economic opportunity** that has been unexploited until now.
- **ICT must be utilised as a „social means”** establishing a tie between the digital and physical inclusion strategies and the Community social policy



The EU Ministerial Conference on 11 June 2006

“ICT for an inclusive society”

(Riga Declaration)

- „Countries will put in place, by 2008, **digital literacy and competence actions**, (...) These actions will be **tailored to the needs** of groups at risk of exclusion, because of their social circumstances or their capacities and special needs, notably the unemployed, immigrants, people with low education levels, people with disabilities, and elderly, as well as marginalised young people, contributing to their employability and working conditions.
- The **current gaps** of digital literacy and competence between these groups and the average population **should be halved by 2010.**”



Better ICT connections between regions

- **Cohesion strategic guidelines** for 2007-2013 and European Commission Communication for **Regions for Economic** change stressed:
 - Access to broadband infrastructure and services and the strategic use of **ICT** constitute one **main driver for economic growth, social development and inclusion**
 - **ICT** is a key element to improve **quality of life** and to redress the **balance** between urban and rural areas



The digital inclusion – e-Inclusion

- The **Committee of the Regions (CoR)** assigns great importance to the promotion of a regionally and socially equitable information society that is accessible for all, to increase regional competitiveness and the quality of public services.

CoR Opinion on «European i2010 initiative on e-Inclusion: to be part of the information society«

„To be part of it!“

- *Filling the existing gap as concerns broadband*
- *Filling the existing gap as concerns e-Accessibility*
- *Reduction of inequalities as concerns digital literacy*
- *Establishment of modern online services*
- *Utilisation of ICT solutions for socially disadvantaged persons and groups exposed to risk of exclusion*



The role of local and regional authorities

- It is important that Member States and **local and regional authorities elaborate specific plans** for the promotion of the information society, well-defined in time and appropriate to be benchmarked, in the direction towards the execution of «**Local digital agendas**»
- Territorial communities play a key role in digital inclusion:
 - Ensuring **access** to broadband **at affordable price**
 - Execute **pilot project** targeting e-Accessibility
 - Develop new approaches that focus on **online public services** for the citizens



Learning: for all, always and everywhere

- Education and modern and effective training systems of all fields are of absolute necessity from view of **social integration** and **economic competitiveness**
- Information and communication technologies (ICT) contribute to:
 - effectiveness of classical education
 - more flexible learning solutions
 - life long learning



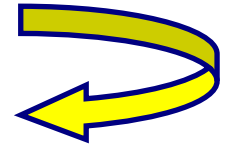
Bridging the broadband gap

- One main aim of European cohesion policy for 2007-2013: make Member States, regions and cities more attractive through **accessibility and provision of services**
- **EU structural and rural development funds** must support the improvement of **broadband infrastructure** and the development and **use of electronic services**
- Local and regional authorities in view of their **closeness to citizens** have a key role and responsibility in providing various services and educational facilities
- Special emphasis on **areas** where **market mechanisms are insufficient** on their own



Bridging the e-Accessibility gap

- Amsterdam Treaty: prohibition of disability-related discrimination, accessible public websites
- **Responsibility of regions:**
 - Purchase, develop requisite products and services
 - Encourage economic environment for businesses by possible investment in ICT and infrastructure expansion
- Provide leadership on pilot projects
- Need for new competence building programmes to enable implementation of measures





Tackling the digital competences gap

- Persons exposed the most to risk:
 - The elderly
 - Economically inactive
 - Less educated people

- European Commission in 2008 is carrying out an **EU-wide study on digital competences**
Aim of study: to **provide guidance** on digital competences policy



Modern public e-services



- **ICT** provides a major **opportunity** to improve **public services** and **socio-economic benefits** for **cohesion**
- European cities, local and regional authorities must seize this opportunity to provide **citizen-centred public e-services**. Particular relevance to remote, outermost and rural regions
- Promoting e-Inclusion shall enhance **local community life** and act as a **catalyst for competitiveness** and business start ups.



ICT solutions for the socially disadvantaged and groups at risk of exclusion

- Forecoming **demographic change** → Ageing population → necessity to develop conditions for **telemedicine**:
 - Increase quality of life, independent living
 - Improve healthcare, ICT-based health service
 - Generate long-term savings in costs of social security systems
- Necessity of **alignment of** divergent **regulatory systems** and foster **mainstream solutions**
- **European research programmes**: 7th Framework Programme, ICT Policy Support Programme



Integrating e-Inclusion actions to maximize lasting impact

- Importance of **stakeholder partnerships**: policy makers, industry, users, civil society, academia
- Role of local and regional authorities in strategy formulation and implementation
- Supports the increase in **volume and quality of ICT research in Europe**
- Importance of **ICT as a new „social instrument“** – close links needed between ICT strategies and Community social policy
- Implementation of **horizontal priorities** to promote equal opportunities (accessible public websites)



Conclusions

Innovative actions: Regions in the global economy

- **Regions** can be **key players** in the **global economy**: they are the first to be affected by economic changes.
- **Promotion of networking the „net-economy”** can make a significant contribution to the geographical and economic opening-up of European regions.
- The new opportunities offered by the growth of **ICT** will **enable regions** to reduce their handicaps (particularly peripheral regions) and develop their assets by **reinforcing the competitiveness** of businesses, especially SMEs.



- The role of the information society for economic and social participation should be firmly put on Europe's economic and social agenda.

Ensuring e-Inclusion is a social necessity and an economic opportunity.

- CoR must act to **take away the barriers** in the information society itself, to **maximise** the **contribution** of ICT to economic and social inclusion and to **stimulate business** opportunities in this context.



- High responsibility lies on **local and regional authorities** to **elaborate ISSs** and to consistently **implement, update and monitor** them in compliance with local interests



Thank you for your attention!

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