



# THE INTERNET, A PUBLIC SERVICE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE

The Internet has a strong potential for serving the public good. Firstly, it is a service in itself, and secondly it is a means of accessing other services. This is why Internet services must be accessible and affordable, as well as secure, reliable and continuously available.

## Objectives

- promoting the public service concept of the Internet and e-accessibility;
- encouraging the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to reinforce democratic processes and public participation in Internet governance;
- making the Internet accessible to people with disabilities and improving their quality of life.

## Achievements

### Access for all

- Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2007)16 on measures to promote the public service value of the Internet;
- The Council of Europe has called on its member states to create public access points offering a minimum range of communication and information facilities, in line with the principle of universal community service.

### E-democracy

- Recommendations by the Committee of Ministers on electronic voting (Rec(2004)11) and electronic governance (Rec(2004)15);
- The Forum for the Future of Democracy held in Madrid on 15-17 October 2008 examined the use of ITC as a means of enhancing democratic processes and creating new information, debating, consultation and transaction spaces for interaction between governments and citizens and among citizens themselves.
- On February 2009 the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on e-democracy (CM/Rec(2009)1). This text sets out principles and guidelines on this subject and is accompanied by practical tools, in particular a set of generic tools for electronic democracy and a check-list for introducing e-democracy tools, along with a technical glossary.

## Participation by people with disabilities

- Resolution ResAP (2007) 3: "Achieving full participation through universal design". Universal design aims to make the design and development of environments, products, communications, information technologies and services accessible and understandable to, as well as useable by, everyone, to the greatest extent and in the most independent and natural ways possible, preferably without the need for adaptation or specialised solutions;
- Recommendation Rec (2006)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015 (aimed at improving the quality of life of people with disabilities as regards their participation in politics and cultural life, their employment and their social and legal protection);
- The Action Plan calls on states to ensure that public authorities make their information and communications accessible to people with disabilities;
- Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1592 (2003), underlining the role played by the Internet in the social inclusion of people with disabilities, whether through online work, electronic democracy or access to knowledge and information;
- Resolution ResAP (2001) 3 determining the conditions enabling people with disabilities to derive full benefit from the opportunities offered by the Internet (availability of products and services, accessibility, ease of use, affordability, raising awareness among decision-makers in politics, industry, employment and education, appropriateness and attractiveness, adaptability and compatibility).

## Next step

- Preparation of a code of good practice on Internet governance: participation, access to information and transparency are the key concerns addressed by the work being done by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Association for Progressive Communications.

**[www.coe.int/t/dgap/democracy](http://www.coe.int/t/dgap/democracy)  
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