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

■ Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on electronic democracy (e-democracy), setting out principles and guidelines, 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;

■ Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers on electronic voting (Rec(2004)11) and electronic governance (Rec(2004)15);

Participation by people with disabilities

■ Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)8: «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 CM/Rec(2009)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on ageing and disability in the 21st century: sustainable frameworks to enable greater quality of life in an inclusive society, stressing that new technology applications should be fully accessible to older persons with disabilities;

■ Recommendation Rec (2006)5 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 ("Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 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;

■ Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1854 (2009) and Resolution 1642 (2009) "Access to rights for people with disabilities and their full and active participation in society", calling on member states to ensure full access to the media, including Internet, for people with disabilities;

■ Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1592 (2003) "Towards full social inclusion of people with disabilities", 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 "Towards full citizenship of persons with disabilities through inclusive new technologies", 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 steps

■ Presentation at the 2010 IGF of a code of good practice on information, participation and transparency in Internet governance: access to information, participation, 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.

■ Preparation of a mid-term review report on the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (to be finalised by the end of 2010);

■ Preparation of a report and recommendations to member states on improving the participation of people with disabilities in political and public life (to be finalised by the end of 2011).

www.coe.int/t/dgap/democracy
www.coe.int/t/dc/files/themes/handicap

COUNCIL   CONSEIL
OF EUROPE   DE L'EUROPE