



***eEurope* Advisory Group**

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

eEurope 2005 Action Plan: An Update

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The eEurope 2005 Action Plan is part of the strategy set out at the Lisbon European Council to modernise the European economy and to build a knowledge based economy in Europe. The mid-term review of eEurope was adopted in February 2004 and endorsed by the spring 2004 Telecom Council. The present communication follows up the mid-term review by proposing a set of revisions. The new actions proposed here do not substantially change the balance or structure of the Action Plan. The eEurope 2005 targets are retained as is the emphasis on exchange of good practice, benchmarking and open co-ordination.

The set of fifteen actions proposed here aim to complement the existing actions in order to achieve the specific objectives of eEurope and to speed up its progress. A summary of state of play in all actions is given in Commission staff working paper SEC(2004) 607 .

Broadband: Policies on broadband are now high on the agenda. For this reason, all Member States committed to come forward with national broadband strategies by the end of 2003. This process is in progress for the Union of 15 Member States but has to be extended to a Union of 25 Members (*Action 1*). In addition, as the territorial coverage of broadband widens, attention turns to remote and rural regions where the population is dispersed and market pull is weak. A Digital Divide Forum will be launched in June 2004 to look into this issue and develop strategies to address it where necessary (*Action 2*). Broadband without the inherent benefits of IPv6 would dramatically limit the range of innovative services and applications and the Commission will take stock of progress with National IPv6 Task Forces (*Action 3*).

On-line public services: eEurope has always placed great emphasis on the potential for public policy to catalyse progress towards the knowledge-based society through bringing public services on-line and in so doing to make such services more efficient and cost effective. Much progress has been observed in all three fields considered by eEurope over the past five years (i.e. in e-government, e-health and e-learning) and considerable additional benefits have been delivered. However, the mid-term review of eEurope pointed out that more could be done in each of these areas to enhance interoperability and build-up pan-European co-operation. To this end a series of new actions are proposed to facilitate a smoother roll-out from research and piloting into wider deployment. In particular, and in keeping with the open method of co-ordination, processes of consensus building and exchanges of good practice are proposed that draw on the participation of all stakeholders. First, as regards the wider deployment of research results across all three areas, a process is proposed to promote voluntary and multilateral commitments to priorities for the deployment of on-line services (*Action 4*). In addition, actions are proposed in each field of on-line public services to increase interoperability and good practice exchange. In e-government a good practice framework that encourages mutual learning and the identification of barriers to the transfer of experience will be brought to a full operational level by 2005 (*Action 5*). In e-health the commitment of all Member States to develop a roadmap for e-health will be complemented by an inventory of best practices on interoperability in e-health (*Action 6*). In e-learning, a roadmap of future developments is proposed to create a common agenda amongst the diverse stakeholders from education, training, research, industry and the public sector (*Action 7*).

e-Business: In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, the support of e-business through eEurope has been an essential component. More specifically, it has been active in ensuring an enabling environment for e-business, focusing in particular on interoperability and standardisation, removing the legal obstacles to the use of e-business and facilitating the take-up of e-business by small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Here three actions are proposed to improve the

framework conditions for the take-up of e-business. First, it is proposed to review the impact of the e-signature directive (*Action 8*). Second, in order to set the framework for m-commerce, a blueprint on mobile payments will identify priorities and practical steps towards interoperable solutions (*Action 9*). Third, bearing in mind the large potential of digital rights management systems to create a safer environment for content production and distribution, a high level group has been launched with the aim of identifying issues at EU level in terms of technological, economic and legal aspects of digital rights management systems (*Action 10*).

Two actions in e-business are proposed concerning the promotion of interoperability and the exchange of good practice. First given that insufficient interoperability of business applications continues to impede the adoption of e-business, an Enterprise Interoperability Centre is proposed to disseminate the results of a new Integrated Project on enterprise interoperability (*Action 11*). Second, the activities of the e-Business Support Network, already launched under the *eEurope* 2005 Action Plan, will be complemented by the collection and structuring of SME best practices on e-business into an on-line database (*Action 12*).

During the consultation for the mid-term review, the issue of **e-inclusion** was repeatedly identified as a high priority in an ‘Information Society for All’. However, it is necessary to understand in more detail the various facets of this complex issue and then to convert this intelligence into a practical agenda for action. Thus it is proposed to reassess the priorities for e-inclusion and to address them in the form of specific and realisable targets (*Action 13*).

The **benchmarking** exercise is an essential component of the open method of co-ordination that underpins *eEurope*. It also provides a picture of the state of play of the information society in Europe. Considerable effort goes into the collection of the benchmarking data, but currently the results are not presented in a way which gives the highest possible visibility to developments in the European information society. Nor, so far, have the data been analysed to draw out the impact of *eEurope* on progress towards the targets and the implications for policy development. Thus it is proposed that the visibility and analytical value of the benchmarking exercise be enhanced by developing an integrated web-platform, “*eEurope Online*”, providing up-to-date information on *eEurope* developments (*Action 14*).

Finally, the mid-term review of **the Lisbon Strategy** will be presented in spring 2005 at the time when *eEurope* will have entered its final year. Thus it is appropriate to begin a process of review and reflection on the contribution of *eEurope* to the Lisbon Strategy and to prepare for renewed contributions to the Lisbon Strategy in its second phase to 2010 (*Action 15*).

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1. INTRODUCTION

eEurope is part of the Lisbon strategy to modernise the European economy and to build a knowledge based economy in Europe with improved employment and social cohesion by 2010, and thus it is one of the main instruments to build an “Information Society for All”.

The *eEurope* 2002 Action Plan, which was endorsed by the Feira European Council in June 2000, focused on connectivity, i.e. getting Europe on-line. The final report on *eEurope* 2002 showed that the majority of its 65 targets had been met. Nearly all business and schools were connected to the internet; the number of households connected had nearly tripled and Europe had the fastest research network in the world¹.

However, by the end of 2002, there was little evidence to show that the success in getting Europe on-line had been translated into new jobs and services. Nor were the increases in productivity observed elsewhere, notably in the USA, as visible in Europe. Connectivity was there, but use was lagging behind. Moreover, given that access to internet was widespread, policy attention naturally began to turn to the demand-side issues of usage and impact.

The Barcelona European Council therefore called on the Commission to draw up an *eEurope* action plan focusing on “the widespread availability and use of broadband networks throughout the Union by 2005 and the development of Internet protocol IPv6 and the security of networks and information, eGovernment, eLearning, eHealth and eBusiness”².

The resulting *eEurope* 2005 Action Plan was adopted in May 2002. Stimulating use and creating new services were its new central goals and it was endorsed by the Seville European Council³. The overall aims are that, by the end of 2005, Europe should have modern online public services (e-government, e-learning, e-health) and a dynamic e-business environment, based on a widespread availability of broadband access at competitive prices and a secure information infrastructure.

The Member States gave their commitment to implement the Action Plan in the *eEurope* Resolution of February 2003⁴, which also welcomed the intention of the Commission to hold a mid-term review of the action plan “in advance of the Spring European Council 2004” in the context of an Enlarged Union. In parallel, the *eEurope+* 2003 Action Plan had been launched in June 2001 on the initiative of the then 13 candidate countries. *eEurope+*, which had the same targets as the *eEurope* 2002 Action Plan, came to a close in February 2004, with the publication of its final progress report at the Budapest Ministerial conference⁵.

The mid-term review, based on a wide consultation during 2003, confirmed the relevance of *eEurope*’s objectives and their adequacy to the challenges of the information society in a

¹ See *eEurope* 2002 Final Report, COM(2003) 66 and *eEurope* 2002: Progress made in Achieving the Targets SEC(2003) 407.

² Barcelona European Council, Presidency Conclusions, paragraph 40, <http://europa.eu.int/en/Info/eurocouncil/index.htm>.

³ *eEurope* 2005 Action Plan, COM(2002) 263.

⁴ Council Resolution on the Implementation of the *eEurope* 2005 Action Plan, 2003/C 48/02.

⁵ *eEurope+* 2003 Action Plan – Final Progress Report

Union of 25 members. In the review, a consensus was expressed on the need to focus on updating and fine-tuning the initiatives and strengthening the implementation mechanisms. The mid-term review Communication was adopted in February 2004.⁶ Moreover, the spring 2004 Telecom Council invited the Commission to bring forward a revision of the action plan in time for the June 2004 Council.

The present Communication provides this revision of the *eEurope* action plan and gives a detailed exposition of the range of actions where improvements can be made. In summary the main conclusions were that the revision at mid term should aim at:

- Enhancing the pan-European dimension; initiatives mostly remain nationally or regionally focused and opportunities for more effective exchanges of practice are missed,
- Tackling the barriers to the further rollout and take-up of broadband. This depends in part on making content more attractive and abundant. Content markets in turn will benefit from workable approaches to the protection of copyrighted content and the implementation of interoperable DRM solutions,
- Addressing interoperability and standards, especially to permit widespread access that is technology-neutral,
- Realising the pay-offs from ICT investments in terms of productivity growth, job creation, higher efficiency and service quality,
- Making a stronger link between benchmarking efforts and policy outcomes, the measurement of demand and evaluation of impact of *e-Europe*, and
- Reinforcing the social cohesion aspects of *eEurope*, particularly as regards regional imbalances and the potential for multiplatform delivery of *e-services* to widen accessibility.

These conclusions have guided the revision of the Action Plan itself, which was the main purpose of the mid-term review. In overview, the new actions proposed here do not substantially change the balance or structure of *eEurope*.

In keeping with the aim to fine-tune rather than fully revise the Action Plan, the structure of this Communication broadly follows the lines of the existing *eEurope* 2005 Action Plan. The Communication starts by considering broadband strategies and access. It then looks at the issues of deployment of on-line public services, followed by a third section on creating the right context for *e-business* adoption. In view of the imminent establishment of the European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA) the issue of a secure information infrastructure is not treated separately here. Rather, security issues are mainstreamed into *e-business* and on-line public services.

The issue of *e-inclusion* emerged from the consultation for the mid-term review as a new priority and a preliminary action is proposed on this topic. Section six on benchmarking reaffirms its importance as a basis for the open method of coordination but also as a way to

⁶ COM(2004)108.

communicate more widely the progress made on eEurope. Finally, in light of the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy and the fact that eEurope will enter its last year of operation in 2005, a new action is introduced to review progress so far and to reflect on new options for the future.

The present Communication describes recently launched actions and new actions which the Commission proposes to speed up progress, but does not therefore review the original ones. However, a tabular overview of all original and new actions and an indication of progress made is given in an accompanying working paper (Annex 1).

2. BROADBAND

Broadband is currently one of the highest priorities in the eEurope Action Plan. All 15 Member States are putting into place national strategies and these are being analysed with a view to stimulating further progress following the 2004 June European Council. Further work is proposed in order to maintain this momentum and to extend it to new Member States.

Certainly, the importance of broadband reflects the rapid expansion of broadband availability and take-up. The mid-term review Communication and the Communication ‘*Connecting Europe at High Speed*’ drew attention to the very high rate of growth of broadband connections in Europe, which doubled in 2003. The issue of territorial coverage is in most of the national broadband strategies. Further initiatives at the EU level have been launched, in particular the Growth Initiative. The lag in demand requires greater insights into the conditions for a wider use of broadband. This will be investigated through studies to be launched by the Commission during 2004. However, it is also important to unblock bottlenecks to the development of markets for on-line content, for example through work on Digital Rights Management (DRM) systems and by building confidence in e-business. (These are addressed in Section 4).

2.1. National broadband strategies

At the European Council in spring 2003, the 15 Member States committed to adopting national broadband strategies⁷. The Commission will present a synthesis of these strategy statements to the Telecom Council. However, the current exercise only covers 15 Member States. It is necessary to extend the exercise to the full Union of 25 Member States and to maintain momentum by identifying key areas for further action.

Action 1: New Member States should adopt national broadband strategies by the end of 2004. Technological developments, growth of the broadband market and exchange of experiences require an update of national broadband strategies. Member States should complete a comprehensive update by the end of 2005. The Commission will continue monitoring progress in the implementation of national strategies and will review progress and developments in the first half of 2006 as part of the evaluation of eEurope 2005.

⁷ “Connecting Europe at high speed: national broadband strategies” COM (2004).369

2.2. The Growth Initiative and the Digital Divide Forum

The eEurope 2005 Action Plan sets widespread availability and use of broadband as one of its main targets.

Investment in electronic communications must be primarily industry led, but public authorities can play a role, particularly in remote, rural or disadvantaged areas where demand may be insufficient to attract commercial investment. Where private investment in information infrastructure in less favoured areas is held back by fears of insufficient profitability, there is a risk that eEurope will not meet its goal to develop an "information society for all". To this end, specific actions have been taken, articulated around the use of the Union's structural funds, to overcome shortfalls of demand in rural and remote regions and economically disadvantaged urban areas. Revised guidelines have been issued on the criteria and modalities to be met for implementation of structural funds in support of electronic communications so that it is compatible with state aid rules.⁸ The European Initiative for Growth⁹, endorsed by the European Council in December 2003, highlights the opportunity of using financial instruments, including the Structural Funds to ensure widespread availability of broadband as already proposed by eEurope 2005.¹⁰ To give further impetus, new Digital Divide "Quick-start projects" will accelerate provision of broadband in under-served areas using a technology-neutral approach. Public intervention may complement commercial investment but should not pre-empt private initiatives nor distort competition, and should always be based on a technology-neutral approach.

The recently adopted Commission White Paper on Space Policy and the Communication "Connecting Europe at High Speed"¹¹ both announced a Digital Divide Forum, which will be launched in June 2004. Rather than creating a new entity, this Forum will be an on-line forum for discussion which gathers input from existing committees and groups under the co-ordination of the eEurope Advisory Group¹² in order to bring together stakeholders in the area of the information society and analyse how to bridge the territorial aspect of the digital divide. The work of the forum focuses on the possibilities of extending territorial coverage of broadband infrastructure in the EU, reaching hitherto under-served regions, thus contributing to bridge the digital divide.

The Forum will have three aims. First, it will analyse the main factors determining the broadband digital divide and give practical suggestions on the way forward to reduce the gap. Second, it will examine alternative technological options, with particular attention to access over different broadband transmission media. Third, it will monitor the broadband quick-start projects within the European Initiative for Growth and the exchange of good practices.

Action 2: During 2004, the Commission will set-up the Digital Divide Forum and produce a first outcome by mid-September 2004. The draft report of the Forum will be opened to wide

⁸ SEC (2003) 895.

⁹ http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/doc/telecom_en.pdf
COM(2003) 690 final.

¹⁰ See EC COM(2003) 65 "Road to the Knowledge Economy" and COM(2003) 690 "A European Initiative for Growth".

¹¹ "Space: a new European frontier for an expanding union - An action plan for implementing the European Space Policy", COM(2003) 673; and "Connecting Europe at high speed: recent developments in the sector of electronic communications," COM(2004) 61.

¹² "eEurope Advisory Group" is the new denomination of the "eEurope Steering Group" mentioned in the MODINIS Decision N°2256/2003/CE.

public discussion by July 2004 and will provide input to the Commission report on the Growth Initiative in spring 2005.

2.3. IPv6

The conclusions of the Barcelona European Council¹³ highlighted “Network Security and Internet Protocol IPv6” as one of the areas suggested for ministerial focus. The new Internet Protocol, IPv6, together with Broadband is a key enabling technology for eEurope and the Information Society. The provision of Broadband without the inherent benefits of IPv6 would dramatically limit the range of innovative services and applications which are a pre-requisite for an advanced Information Society. Some Member States have already created National IPv6 Task Forces aiming to facilitate the uptake of the new version of the Internet Protocol and developed national plans that include compliance with IPv6 in public tendering.

Action 3: During 2004, the Commission will take stock of the progress achieved in the uptake of IPv6 in Europe and produce a report by the end of the year, as foreseen in the Communication on Next Generation Internet¹⁴ adopted in February 2002.

3. PUBLIC SERVICES ON-LINE: TOWARDS DEPLOYMENT

The eEurope 2005 Action Plan places a particular emphasis on the importance of stimulating the take up of ‘on-line public services’ in the areas of e-government, e-health and e-learning. This is for at least three reasons. First, the potential for ICT to contribute to efficient delivery of public services is huge because they represent a very large part of European economic activity, a large number of jobs and considerable purchasing power. The eEurope Action Plan recognises that the significant weight of public services can be used to catalyse progress towards the knowledge-based economy. Second, the take-up of ICT can promote more efficient and effective delivery of services to European citizens. For instance, in the recent UK government efficiency review it was estimated that public administration costs could be significantly reduced through greater use of ICT. In particular, ICT can increase the cost-effectiveness of the public sector in order to better meet the constant pressures to raise value for money or do more with less. Third, these services are largely under the direct influence of policy makers. Indeed, eEurope gives priority to these areas in part because of the direct leverage that policy makers have on the pace of innovation in services.

The mid-term review communication on eEurope identified considerable progress on the roll out of on-line public services. But, there are concerns that demand for such on-line services lags behind their availability and that the potential efficiency gains from applications of ICT are not yet widely demonstrated. The actions proposed in this section provide steps towards a greater efficiency and wider take-up of on-line public services in the main fields of e-government, e-health and e-learning.

There is already considerable EU-level effort to develop on-line public services. The IST programme has major research activities in each of the fields (e-government, e-health and e-learning). The eTEN is the European Community Programme designed to help the deployment of telecommunication networks based services (e-services) with a trans-European

¹³ <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/02/st07/07172en2.pdf>.

¹⁴ COM(2002) 96 final.

dimension¹⁵. While, the mission of the IDA-programme (Interchange of Data between Administrations) is to co-ordinate the establishment of pan-European telematic networks between administrations. e-Government actions are supported by a common policy framework, the Communication on e-government and the targets in the 2005 Action Plan. This includes the work of IDA to develop interoperability measures, for use by sectoral networks and which has a strong orientation towards pan-European e-government services to citizens and enterprises.¹⁶ These efforts are already embedded in the *eEurope* framework for example, in the 2005 Action Plan a target was set that an Interoperability Framework for pan-European services would be established by the end of 2003. In January 2004, the Commission met this objective by publishing a consultation document on a European Interoperability Framework.¹⁷ Promotion of and political commitment to e-government has been reinforced through Ministerial Conferences in 2001 and 2003.

Despite these efforts, the application of IST is not rolling out smoothly from pilot stage to wide deployment to deliver the very significant potential increase in quality and efficiency of public services. In particular, responses to the consultation for the mid-term review found a need for further efforts on interoperability and the deployment of pan-European services.

On interoperability in e-government, Member States identified various issues as very important, examples cited included common citizen identifiers, e-authentication and data vocabularies. In e-health there is a need to create European wide interoperability guaranteeing citizen-centred continuity of healthcare and patient mobility. In e-learning, the absence of interoperability is seen as slowing down the application of research results in educational environments, as a barrier to the creation of a flourishing content market and as preventing users from creating and sharing their own content.

The *eEurope* 2005 mid-term review communication also noted that public e-services such as e-health and e-learning are nationally and regionally focused and should develop a pan-European dimension. In support of this target, a major step forward has been taken with the recent adoption of the IDABC Programme (Interoperable Delivery of pan-European e-government services to Public Administration, Business and Citizens Programme) by the European Parliament and Council.

In keeping with the instruments for implementing the *eEurope* Action Plan (i.e. joint setting of targets, benchmarking and exchange of good practice), the actions proposed here emphasise the treatment of the interoperability and pan-European services as well as the exchange of good practice, in particular a more structured exchange of best practice and transferability of lessons in e-government, a systematic evaluation of lessons from previous initiatives and increased efforts to exchange such experiences in the form of good practice frameworks.

A number of significant actions to increase interoperability and good practice exchange in electronic public services have been started since the launch of *eEurope* 2005. For example, in

¹⁵ See Decision No. 1376/2002/EC of 12 July 2002 & No. 1336/97/EC of 17 June 1997 of the European Parliament and of the Council on a series of Guidelines for trans-European telecommunications networks.

¹⁶ For the current IDA programme, see the Guidelines Decision No 1719/1999/EC and the Interoperability Decision (No 1720/1999/EC), which were respectively amended on 21 October 2002 in Decision No. 2046/2002/EC & No 2045/2002/EC.

¹⁷ <http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/ida/export/files/en/1674.pdf>

e-government, in addition to the Interoperability Framework, a good-practice framework is being established during 2004 to follow up the Ministerial Conclusions of the e-Government Conference in Como in July 2003 and the e-government Communication.¹⁸ In e-learning, the recently launched eLearning Programme¹⁹ reinforces community effort to support the exchange of experience and good practice across Europe.

The first action proposed aims to achieve wider deployment across all three areas of e-government, e-health and e-learning (and possibly more widely to embrace, for example, the issue of e-inclusion). In particular, the aim is to set the stage for a more effective development of trans-European on-line services by a setting up a process to identify priority fields for action and in particular to feed the results into considerations on how to follow-up the current eTEN programme.

Action 4: Identification, by the end 2005, of a detailed list of priorities for a wide deployment of ICT solutions for the delivery of public services in Europe. The action will be in two steps. Step one will be to launch in 2004 a prioritisation of areas of action in which completed research and development projects and other advanced work could support innovations in public services in Europe. Step two, to take place during 2005, will involve exploring the priorities and implementation proposals in more detail through multi-stakeholder working groups. Amongst other aims, it will provide inputs to the work-programme of any successor to the eTEN programme. The emphasis would be on establishing a commitment to common platforms and/or standards for the deployment of e-services on a voluntary and multilateral basis.

However, despite the common challenges of achieving interoperability and transferring experience from one place to another, there are different issues at stake in each of the main areas of public services. Thus a series of more focused actions is proposed to tackle this issue in each public service domain treated by eEurope.

3.1. e-Government

A good practice framework for e-government was launched in 2004. This initiative implements the e-government Communication and the Telecom Council conclusions of November 2003, both of which identified continuity and a comprehensive approach as key factors in the process of exchanging good practices. The development of good practice in e-government requires a continuous and effective collaboration between the different public authorities in the Member States, the European institutions and the private sector.

Action 5: Bringing the good practice framework for e-government to full operation by middle of 2005, through:

- *Facilitating the exchange of good practices and learning from experiences at local, regional, national, European and international level.*
- *Providing continuity in good practice exchanges.*

¹⁸ *The Role of e-Government in Europe's Future* COM(2003) 567.

¹⁹ Decision No 2318/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council December 2003 adopting the eLearning Programme.

- *Addressing critical issues that hamper the transfer of good experiences such as the legal aspects of the process of re-using successful developments, the ownership of the systems and their relationship with the public tendering procedures to be followed, and procedures for engaging in public-private partnerships.*²⁰

3.2. e-Health

The Commission has recently adopted an Action Plan in the area of e-health and one of its main aims is to promote the sharing of best practices and the measurement of progress.²¹ Member States have expressed the need for development of standards addressing the interoperability of diverse systems and services and to explore the possible role of open source applications to achieve this objective. Many countries have proceeded with accreditation of e-health systems that are becoming models for other regions, such as those in the United Kingdom and Belgium. Another example of conformance testing and accreditation is the interoperability guidelines of Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise in Europe (IHE). It should be noted that the development of an ICT infrastructure for collecting data on mobility of patients and professionals and linking centres of reference would contribute to the follow-up of ongoing reflection processes on patient mobility.

Action 6: The compilation of an inventory of best practices on interoperability in e-health by the end of 2005. This builds on the commitment that by the end of 2005, each Member State is committed to develop a national or regional roadmap for e-health, focusing on deployment, setting targets for the interoperability and use of electronic health records, and issues such as the reimbursement of e-health services. This action will provide the basis for agreeing attributes and norms beyond existing standards that define good quality products and services.

3.3. e-Learning

The interim report 'Education & Training 2010' recently adopted by the Council confirms that the pace of reform in education and training in Europe needs to speed-up if we are to achieve the targets set in Lisbon.²² In particular, it highlights the need to strengthen co-operation in Europe and to foster the organisation of education and training systems around quality, access and openness to the wider world. For this to happen, research should work hand-in-hand with education and training, and new services need to be developed based on a learner-centred approach and sound pedagogy. In most cases, the integration of ICT into lifelong learning requires fundamental changes to the way learning is supported, with organisational change within the institutions involved. This can only happen successfully and in a sustainable manner through partnerships between the various stakeholders including teachers, trainers, educational authorities, ministries of education and labour, learners, employers, trade unions and private sector actors.

Action 7: The establishment, by the end of 2005, of a roadmap of activities to foster closer co-operation between the stakeholders of education, training, research, industry and the public sector in order to further the deployment of lifelong learning services based on e-learning. This action will put in place activities to foster co-operation between the various

²⁰ N.b. the Commission is preparing a Green Paper on public-private partnerships in the European Union.

²¹ 'e-Health - making healthcare better for European citizens: an action plan for a European e-Health Area' COM(2004) 356.

²² http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html.

communities of stakeholders and set targets to further the deployment of lifelong e-learning. It is proposed to launch this activity through a major conference in the first semester of 2005.

4. CREATING A SECURE AND DYNAMIC FRAMEWORK FOR E-BUSINESS

eEurope has been active in ensuring an enabling environment for e-business, focusing in particular on interoperability and standardisation, removing the legal obstacles to the use of e-business and facilitating the take-up of e-business by small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These initiatives are being further strengthened, building on progress achieved so far. But with the emergence of new services and applications, overcoming a lack of trust and confidence in using on-line services is increasingly perceived as a prerequisite to innovation in e-business and the full deployment of e-services. Priority to e-business related security issues is therefore increasing; a recent example being the recommendations of the Communication on unsolicited commercial communications.²³

Similarly, the Commission's proposals on a Framework Directive on Unfair Commercial Practices²⁴, and a regulation on enforcement cooperation²⁵ are aimed among others, at increasing consumers' confidence in the market, and providing more transparent and efficient cross-border enforcement of consumer protection rules.

In addition to these activities, and in line with the conclusions of the mid-term review of eEurope, three new actions are proposed that should improve the environment for e-business. The first looks to full implementation of measures in the e-Signature Directive. The second aims to increase consumer confidence in e-business through the implementation of secure and effective mobile payment systems. The third addresses the issue of digital rights management, which has been identified as one of the critical conditions for the emergence of vibrant markets for on-line content.

The other actions proposed in this section fall into the category of raising awareness and exchanging good practice. The wide adoption of e-business suffers the same challenges as on-line public services, failures of interoperability, the lack of common standards and the need for more effective exchange of experiences. Progress in this area remains slow due to the large number of actors involved and the complexity of issues at stake. The Commission proposes to support this progress by providing platforms for the main actors to meet and agree targets and milestones for making progress.

4.1. e-Signatures

All Member States have now implemented the general principles of the e-Signature Directive. However, a number of issues remain on the legal and market aspects of the application of the Directive. Firstly, there is currently no market demand for qualified certificates and related services. Secondly, greater interoperability of e-signatures is called for by the Directive as necessary to achieve the wide spread-use of electronic signatures and related services.

Action 8: The Commission will present a report analysing the operation and the effects of the e-Signature Directive with the aim of further promoting e-signatures. Promotional

²³ Communication on Unsolicited Commercial Communications or 'spam', COM(2004) 28.

²⁴ COM(2003) 356 final.

²⁵ COM(2003) 443 final.

activities shall focus not only on those e-signatures based on qualified certificates but should take into account also other applications and new technological developments such as mobile communication technologies.

4.2. e-Payments: a blueprint for mobile payments (m-payments)

Confidence and trust in online ordering and payment is essential to stimulate e-business and mobile commerce²⁶ (m-commerce). As noted in the mid-term review, particular efforts are needed to establish effective procedures for micro-payments and to address policy issues relating to m-payments.

This action focuses on payment services for mobile phones and mobile communications devices. Mobile payments have the potential to become an important segment of the retail payment market and therefore contribute to the efficiency of the European Single Payment Area. They are also a pre-condition for the development of a successful marketplace for advanced mobile services in the European Union.

Yet, in spite of high expectations, no mobile payment system has yet gained significant market acceptance. In this context, there is an increasing difficulty for each individual initiative to reach critical mass and remain viable in the long term. This leads to fragmentation and delay in the emergence of m-commerce (an important sub-segment of e-business).

Action 9: A Blueprint on Mobile payments will be endorsed by the main stakeholders by the end of 2005. *The aim of the Blueprint is to set priorities and to identify a pragmatic roadmap for interoperable mobile payments, taking into account existing initiatives as far as possible notably standardisation work carried out in the field by the European Standardisation Organisations. To be effective, the Blueprint should be endorsed by a critical mass of market actors in both the financial and the telecommunications sectors. In addition, it should obtain the support of relevant public authorities.*

4.3. Digital Rights Management

One of the main advantages of broadband is its potential to offer a seamless web of audio, video and data services to the end-user. However, the future of content distribution on broadband networks and mobile applications is largely dependent on the conditions under which this rich media content can be created, delivered and sold to end-users.

The advent of broadband networks and their capacity to transmit large volumes of multimedia content at high speeds emphasises the importance of ensuring that digital content is available under the appropriate conditions, which meet the interests of all stakeholders. In this context, Digital Rights Management (DRM) technologies can potentially provide the right incentives for development, notably a secure environment for ensuring remuneration of rightholders, payment for e-content as well as preventing illegal copying. This would encourage content producers to make their content available and thus entice users to take-up broadband.

The availability of DRM systems and services is a key component of the e-content distribution. Technological protection measures and DRM systems are currently available and business models are being tried out with varying degrees of success in the market place

²⁶ Mobile commerce and payments refer to commerce and payments through mobile communication network.

notably for the distribution of online music or movies. The legal framework for technological protection measures and DRMs is provided by the Copyright Directive (2001/29/EC).

However, the situation is far from satisfactory. Market developments are held back by a lack of consensus between stakeholders on implementation of DRM in relation to factors such as interoperability and standardisation, privacy concerns of consumers, balance between the remuneration for private use and the application of technological protection measures or DRMs, the impact of the use of DRMs on copyright exceptions and the effectiveness of DRMs in the control of piracy.

With the objective to facilitate the smooth introduction of DRM systems, a dialogue with a range of stakeholders representing the value chain can help to provide orientations for further progress. In collaboration with the relevant services of the Commission, a High Level Group on Digital Rights Management has been established.

Action 10: During 2004 the High Level Group on Digital Rights Management will provide an overview of technological, economic and legal challenges to DRM and strategic recommendations for how to move beyond dialogue to action.

4.4. Towards the wider adoption of e-business

In the eEurope 2005 Action Plan, a target was set that by the end of 2003 there would be private sector-led interoperable solutions for electronic transactions, security, signatures, procurements and payments. Despite considerable efforts this target has not yet been met.²⁷ Moreover, the mid-term review communication notes that insufficient interoperability remains a major impediment to the adoption of new business models that could enhance productivity and competitiveness. To this end further stimulation actions are underway. The eEurope Standardisation Action Plan notably supports the creation of a dynamic e-business environment, which will build on input from the Integrated Project under the 6th Framework Programme for Research and Development and an Enterprise Interoperability Centre. Also, a conference on interoperability is planned during 2004.

Action 11: Create the appropriate conditions for an Enterprise Interoperability Centre to become operational by the end of 2005. The insufficient interoperability of business applications continues to impede the adoption of new forms of collaboration in which business processes, resources, skills and, eventually, knowledge are shared. Very often rather than lacking standards, it is the proliferation of standards that hampers interoperability. In this context a new Integrated Project has been launched under the IST priority of the 6th Framework Programme with a view to contributing to Enterprise Interoperability Support. The results will be disseminated through an 'Enterprise Interoperability Centre' which will become operational after its business plan is approved by the Commission services by April 2005. All stakeholders, including the private sector and Member States will be invited to play an active role in the work of this new centre in order to promote a common platform for debate on interoperability issues.

Also, it is proposed to increase the articulation between e-business, innovation and entrepreneurship policies and initiatives by building upon existing and successful forums like

²⁷ See: for example the CEN-ISSS e-business standards focus group report published in July 2003, <http://www.cenorm.be/cenorm/businessdomains/businessdomains/informationssociety/standardizationsystem/ebusiness+and+ecommerce/ebusiness+focus+group/reportfinal.pdf>

the European e-Business Support Network (eBSN). At the same time, specialised consultancy advice is being offered to SMEs to define e-business strategies with a view to optimising the use of ICT, adapting business processes and implementing necessary organisational changes. Bringing these strands together improves the possibility to support a more effective exchange of best practice and a wider recognition of how ICT can enhance the business performance of SMEs.

Action 12: The establishment by the end of 2005, of a database of SME best practices with regard to e-business. *A first step in this process will be to organise a conference on 'e-business, innovation and entrepreneurship', to review the impact of policies at regional, national or European level on e-business. Moreover, case studies of SMEs representing best practices in using e-business or in introducing innovative ways of conducting businesses or designing innovative products will be fed into a database. This collection of best SME practices will be disseminated through existing channels like the European e-Business Support Network. In addition, the potential to create a network of ICT centres of excellence harnessing the expertise and resources of SME, technology developers, and academic and research organisations will be explored during 2004 with a view to identifying success factors for the efficient diffusion and use of ICT and e-business in European SMEs. Links will be developed with forums like the eBSN, where appropriate.*

5. ACTION ON E-INCLUSION

The power of the new technology is that it offers striking new ways of strengthening inclusion. ICT will facilitate the development of mainstream products and services that are more and more accessible, such as assistive technologies to interface in a seamless manner with a wide range of other devices. Web distributed services can also make it easy to have access specific services any time, anywhere, improving accessibility for people with reduced mobility.

European efforts in research and technological development are contributing to the state of the art. The Sixth Research Framework programme has a specific area focused on e-inclusion within the Information Society part of the programme. Its goal is to promote e-inclusion as a core building block of the information society. It aims to use technical solutions to ensure our vision of a society based on equal access and participation for all in Europe. Public authorities may need to play an active role, ensuring that the possibilities offered by these technologies exploited in an inclusive manner will not create new barriers.

The consultation on the mid-term review highlighted a concern about e-inclusion and digital divide issues and there was a consensus on the need for further action, notably in the light of enlargement and the increasing socio-economic impact of ICT. The actions called for were of two types. First, a need was identified for better and more comprehensive data and analysis to assess the extent of regional and social imbalances in ICT diffusion and the reasons for low user adoption in certain groups, such as women. Second, specific practical actions should be reinforced and newly developed to address e-inclusion, for example:

- guidelines on multiplatform approaches to increase access to and widen use of e-services, e.g. through Digital TV, mobile platforms or wireless area networks;

- implementation targets for European e-accessibility and usability standards (e.g. public procurement, Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines, Design for All and labelling) and further research in this area;
- further development of public internet access points;
- Raising awareness and digital literacy in a gender sensitive way, in particular among those groups at risk of exclusion and with specific needs (such as disabled and elderly people, those with low education and income, immigrants etc.), as well as provision of appropriate contents and services.

Action 13: By mid 2005, e-inclusion priorities should be reassessed on the basis of a thorough analysis of the background to e-inclusion, laying out a series of specific and realisable targets. This reflection will provide support to other EU level initiatives relevant to e-inclusion, notably in the areas of social inclusion, employment, education and training, or research & development. More coherent, strategic and integrated approaches should be developed, ensuring that policies in relation to e-inclusion and e-accessibility reinforce and are reinforced by other policies to promote social inclusion, particularly in the context of developing National Action Plans to promote social inclusion. Ultimately, considering growing ICT pervasiveness, greater e-inclusion will contribute to cohesion and growth goals set in the Lisbon strategy. Preparatory steps will be taken in 2004. The Commission will analyse the situation and provide policy guidance, notably through the eEurope Advisory Group and the High Level Group on the Employment and Social Dimension of the Information Society²⁸.

6. BENCHMARKING eEUROPE

A key aim of this update is to improve the implementation of eEurope. Benchmarking is central to the implementation of the Action Plan. It is fundamental to the open method of coordination used by eEurope. An improvement to the availability and relevance of the benchmarking indicators should enhance the value-added of the action plan.

It is recognised that the revision of eEurope should not generate new statistical burdens on Member States and enterprises. However, the mid-term review strongly indicated the need to examine the extent to which the actions promoted under eEurope are delivering benefits. To do this an additional emphasis is needed on analysing impact. In addition, it is vital that the measurement efforts gain a higher level of visibility. Thus, the revised Action Plan will focus on bringing benchmarking into the spotlight through three main points of focus:

First, indicator measurement should be more visible and easier to use. Up to now, data has been made available on the eEurope web site and analysed annually in a Commission benchmarking report. In order to raise the visibility and impact of the eEurope Action Plan the Commission will establish a new domain on eEurope benchmarking indicators on the Eurostat dissemination database, which will be accessible free of charge on the internet and implement a thorough review of its on-line presentation of eEurope in order to combine wider data sources with analytical background.

²⁸ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/knowledge_society/esdis_en.htm

Second, more analysis of impact is required. The detailed analysis of benchmarking data will continue to be presented in advance of the European Council but this data should be supplemented with analysis of the impact of measures undertaken within eEurope, especially in the context of its contribution to the Lisbon targets. One simple example is the provision of comparable data for third countries. Other examples are attention to outcomes of eEurope actions in terms of contributions to growth, job creation, service efficiency, cohesion and sustainability.

Third, the policy relevance of benchmarking should be increased through striking a better balance between timeliness and robustness of data. The Council Resolution on eEurope specified that most benchmarking indicators should be obtained from surveys undertaken by national statistical institutes and co-ordinated by Eurostat. This has the benefit of producing high quality statistics. It was not possible to provide first quarter 2003 data for all 15 Member States in advance of the spring European Council 2004, however, a new regulation on Community statistics on the Information society will ensure annual updates for the majority of benchmarking indicators within the EU 25 on a timely basis. Ways should be sought to complement the national surveys with a flexible response system to give up to date guidance to policy makers.

Action 14: The implementation of 'eEurope Online' - an integrated web-platform for eEurope, supported by a flexible response data gathering and reporting mechanism. The action has two components:

- *Integrated web-based information service on eEurope: the first phase, by end 2004, will produce a reformatted web site presenting all benchmarking data and links to other relevant sources, such as the NewCronos Eurostat database. The second phase to be completed in mid 2005 will be to provide analysis of official statistics.*
- *A flexible response data gathering and reporting mechanism: the Modinis Programme will be used to complement the national statistical institute surveys through targeted data gathering exercises for areas for which official statistics are not available. Commission proposals will be presented in the course of 2004 following consultation with Member States.*

7. THE CONTRIBUTION OF ICT TO THE LISBON STRATEGY

The eEurope initiative was launched in support of the Lisbon strategy. When the current eEurope Action Plan enters its last year in 2005, the Lisbon Strategy itself will be undergoing a mid-term review. It is therefore appropriate to launch now a detailed analysis of the role of ICT in achieving the Lisbon targets. The growing evidence that ICTs are essential to increasing productivity and inclusiveness provides a key demonstration of the relevance of ICT stimulation actions such as eEurope. However, it is time to reflect whether the specific instruments and targets adopted for eEurope are the right ones or whether a greater impact could be achieved through a new battery of policy tools. At the same time, across its life eEurope has emphasised connectivity, readiness to adopt ICT and, more recently, the delivery of services. In the mid-term review communication the point was made that the emphasis now needs to turn towards delivering solutions. This implies a shift of emphasis away from supply to demand and away from measuring adoption to looking at impact.

In addition, the Lisbon Strategy is based on the principle of a set of policy objectives that is balanced across the economic, social and environmental domains. ICT has a major role to play in each of these areas. Thus it is timely to consider whether the scope of any successor to eEurope should be adjusted to permit a greater engagement on social and environmental sustainability, as far as growth is also central to achieving the other Lisbon objectives. A close alignment will be pursued with the new Financial Perspectives, where the successor of eEurope will build amongst others on the closer articulation between deployment, research, and regulatory policies that are advocated in the Financial Perspectives.

Also, it will be necessary to consider the impact of eEurope on the international scene. Numerous partner countries have shown their interest in the EU approach. Several countries have taken the eEurope initiative as a reference for developing their own actions. Policy and regulatory dialogues between the Union and its partners have been established, which find a natural extension in the implementation of co-operation programmes.²⁹ This is the case with partner countries in Asia,³⁰ Latin America³¹ and the Mediterranean.³² In addition, the key areas and themes of eEurope 2005 correspond closely to those identified for the advancement of the global information society, in particular in the framework of the UN World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), which held its first session in Geneva in December 2003.

Action 15: The Commission will submit, ahead of the spring European Council in 2005, a strategic analysis of eEurope in the context of the synthesis report and orientations on the support of ICT to the Lisbon Strategy in its second phase to 2010. There will be two key elements to the Commission's proposal. Firstly, during the latter half of 2004 a process of evaluating the contribution of eEurope to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy will be launched. The evaluation will build on existing evaluations and impact assessments to create an overall assessment of the impact of eEurope. Secondly, a process of reflection on options for the future will be conducted with the assistance of the eEurope Advisory Group.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This Communication presents an update to the eEurope 2005 Action Plan. The aim is to address certain areas which were identified as important fields of action during the consultation for the mid-term review. The Communication can be seen as a series of preparatory steps towards the establishment of a new policy framework for ICT policy in Europe. To this end it emphasises stakeholder dialogue and exchange of good practice in order to identify pathways towards progress rather than the specification of radically new targets. In addition, it emphasises the importance of undertaking a phase of review and evaluation before any successor to eEurope is proposed or launched. In particular, it is necessary to make explicit the role of ICT in achieving the Lisbon Targets of growth, cohesion and sustainability.

²⁹ For example, EU accession countries have adopted an eEurope+ Action Plan, inspired by eEurope, and the Northern European countries have developed a comparable strategy. Also, South-East Asia and emerging economies like Brazil, Mexico and Morocco have adopted "e-strategies".

³⁰ ASIA IT&C has worked together with Asian developing countries since 1999, supporting projects in fields such as agriculture, teaching, health, transport, tourism and electronic trade.

³¹ "@LIS" (Alliance for the Information Society) launched in 2002 in Seville.

³² "New Approach for Telecommunications Policies" (NATP) and a programme for the development of the Information Society (EUMEDIS)

The Lisbon Strategy is a strong political commitment to ensure that the European Union becomes the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010. If the European Union wants to play a leading role in the global Information Society, it is necessary that all three pillars of Lisbon Strategy are fully implemented in ICT policy. These are growth and competitiveness, cohesion and sustainability. These provide an orientation for consideration of the next steps beyond 2005 and beyond the timeframe of the current eEurope Action Plan. New policy guidance such as safeguarding citizen-user-consumer interests, providing industrial policy tools and increasing e-inclusion should be taken into account.

However, to make such a review and preparation phase worthwhile it is essential to have the full engagement of Member States. The Commission therefore invites all 25 Member States to reconfirm their commitment to the eEurope 2005 Action Plan and its current targets. In addition, it requests the Member States to play an active role in assuring the success of the new initiatives in particular with regard to the deployment of new services in e-government, e-learning and e-health.