

Patients' rights in cross-border healthcare

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The purpose of this Commission Staff Working Paper is to set out the significant contributions that digital technology can make towards a renewed social agenda for Europe. It also identifies certain specific activities that the Commission will undertake until the end of 2008 to help citizens' well-being in the information society.

Not only does ICT technology have a large impact on the economy (for example, it accounts for 40% of Europe's productivity and 25% of the EU's GDP growth) it also has an impact in the social sphere. Digital technologies have empowered millions of citizens and marginalised groups to become more engaged in everyday activities. Healthcare and consumer services are becoming more easily available and more affordable thanks to higher efficiencies. Yet, in spite of the inclusive potential of the information society, it can also have negative effects such as new divides in terms of digital *haves* and *have nots*. This is mostly based on factors such as education, age, income, geographic and sometimes cultural origin, education or disabilities. It is estimated that 30 – 40% of people in Europe still do not fully enjoy the benefits of the information society. Thus, the digital divide can have the effect of reinforcing the social divide. On the one hand, it puts a large part of the population at risk of exclusion from the knowledge society whilst on the other hand, digital exclusion reduces individual life chances for employment, training and access to quality services and world knowledge whilst hampering Europe's ability to develop into a fully functional digital economy.

In order to address the digital divide the following societal challenges will be addressed in the course of 2008:

Demographic challenges

Between 2008 and 2013 the Commission will provide some EUR 150 million to support a new programme of applied research in ICT for more independent living for elderly people. With the action programme, the Commission seeks a triple win for Europe: improved quality of life and social participation for older people in Europe; new business opportunities for European industry; and more efficient and personalised health and social services. The implementation of the joint applied research programme will offer Europe a leading position in the "ageing well" ICT domain.

Improved health through advanced e-health services

In 2008 the Commission is expected to adopt a Recommendation on cross-border interoperability of electronic health record systems. By the end of 2008 the Commission will also propose a Communication on telemedicine and innovative ICT tools for chronic disease management and setting out actions that can help overcome the main barriers preventing the wider deployment of telemedicine – tele-monitoring and tele-homecare in particular.

Empowering EU citizens with digital and media literacy

One of the Commission's key objectives is to ensure that there is a clear European policy in place that is capable and able to tackle the challenge of basic digital literacy. In November 2007 a Digital Literacy Expert Group was established in order to provide the Commission with inputs for a Digital Literacy Policy Review. By the end of 2008, the Commission will present a staff working paper on digital literacy.

Access, affordability, e-accessibility for all

In June 2008 the Commission launched a web portal seeking to promote the exchange of broadband good practice. This portal will also provide an open discussion form on regulatory aspects, public procurement and strategic issues. As regards e-accessibility, the Commission has proposed strengthening e-accessibility requirements in the provision of e-communication services, including accessibility of the single European emergency number 112.