Information society, eEurope 2002: accessibility of public web sites especially for disabled people

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PURPOSE : to improve the accessibility of public web sites and their content. CONTENT : the eEurope Action Plan 2002, adopted by the Feira European Council in June 2000, is a wide-ranging initiative designed to speed up and extend the use of the Internet to all sectors of European society. The action plan seeks to bring European citizens on-line in all aspects of their lives, allowing them to participate in and benefit from the possibilities offered by digital technologies. This increased use of the Internet will, in turn, fuel the development of the new, knowledge-based economy. These actions comply with the principle of non-discrimination set up in the Treaty on the European Union. One of the action plan's specific targets is to improve access to the Web for people with disabilities: this is the subject of this Communication and its recommendations. This Communication on the accessibility of public Web sites and their content is but one example of the concerted effort which is required to remove access barriers and to ensure that future technologies and information systems do not create new, additional difficulties for people with disabilities. The following conclusions can be drawn from the experiences to date of adopting the existing Web Accessibility Guidelines for public Web sites in the Member States and the European institutions: 1. The Member States and the European institutions are on a dynamic path to achieving adoption of these Guidelines for all public Web sites before the end of the year 2001; 2. National administrations should seek constantly to improve the accessibility of their Web pages and explore new and better ways to deliver Web content and services as new technologies and new versions of these Guidelines are developed. Adoption and implementation of these Guidelines for public Web sites may thus be seen as a first, decisive mechanism towards ensuring an increasingly inclusive Information Society; 3. The Commission will propose to the other European institutions the establishment of an inter-institutional group to promote and ensure the adoption, implementation, and regular updating - following the World Wide Web Consortium/Web Accessibility Initiative developments - of these Guidelines within the European institutions; 4. The resulting accessibility of public Web sites should be monitored and best practices identified. The Commission will compile and disseminate the results of this action. Under the auspices of the High-Level Group on Employment and the Social Dimension of the Information Society (ESDIS), assisted by the eAccessibility expert group, the Member States and the European Institutions have agreed to exchange information and to benchmark their progress to be based on mutually agreed criteria in the areas of adoption and implementation of these Guidelines; 5. The eEurope Web site will present the progress towards adoption and implementation of these Guidelines by the European institutions and the Member States; 6. Measures for awareness-raising, dissemination, education, and especially training in Web accessibility should be promoted in both the European institutions and the Member States; 7. Organisations receiving public funding from the European institutions or the Member States should be encouraged to maketheir Web sites accessible; 8. Within the framework of the eEurope action plan, the Member States could encourage not only national public Web sites but also local and regional public Web sites to comply with the Guidelines; 9. There should be a major initiative devoted to achieving overall accessibility of both public and private Web sites during the year 2003, the European Year of Disabled People; 10. The Member States and European institutions should develop an ongoing dialogue with persons with disabilities and their representatives in order to ensure regular and consistent feedback on these issues.