

COUNCIL RESOLUTION

on 6 February 2003

'eAccessibility' — improving the access of people with disabilities to the knowledge based society

(2003/C 39/03)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

1. RECALLING that the Community has among its tasks to promote throughout the Community a high level of employment and social protection and to raise the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion,
2. RECALLING the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 17 December 1999 on the employment and social dimension of the information society ⁽¹⁾;
3. RECALLING that the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 called for an Information Society for all,
4. RECALLING that the Commission adopted a Communication on 12 May 2000 'Towards a Barrier Free Europe for people with Disabilities',
5. RECALLING that a key objective of the 'eEurope 2002 Action Plan', endorsed by the Feira European Council of 19 and 20 June 2000, is to achieve the participation for all in the knowledge-based economy,
6. RECALLING that on 27 November 2000, the Council adopted a Directive aimed at combating discrimination on several grounds, including disability, as regards employment and occupation ⁽²⁾,
7. RECALLING that one of the objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, approved by the Nice European Council of 7 to 9 December 2000, is to exploit fully the potential of the knowledge-based society and of new information and communication technologies and ensure that no-one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities,
8. RECALLING that on 3 December 2001, the Council adopted a Decision to designate 2003 as the European Year of People with Disabilities ⁽³⁾,
9. RECALLING that the European Parliament and the Council in the Decision No 50/2002/EC of 7 December 2001 concerning an EC action programme, furthering the co-operation between Member States in combating social exclusion, stress the importance of the gender equality aspect of the causes and effects of exclusion in the initial considerations. This section also draws attention to Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty, thus focusing on the fact that removal of inequality and promotion of equality between women and men are among the tasks of the Community, which ought to serve as a goal for all its activities,
10. RECALLING that the Council adopted a Resolution on 'e-Inclusion — exploiting the opportunities of the Information Society for social inclusion' ⁽⁴⁾ which called on the Member States and the European Commission to, amongst other things, endorse actions for: 'tackling technical barriers for people with different disabilities in terms of ICT equipment and web-content, in particular by implementing the respective eEurope actions, monitored by the e-Accessibility Expert Group',
11. RECALLING that the Council adopted a Resolution on the 'accessibility of public web sites and their content' on 20 March 2002 ⁽⁵⁾ that, amongst other things, 'INVITES the High Level Group on the Employment and Social Dimension of the Information Society (ESDIS) to monitor progress in the adoption and implementation of the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines and to develop common methodologies and comparable data so as to facilitate the evaluation of progress',
12. RECOGNISING the existence of a report, submitted as a Commission Staff Working Paper entitled: 'Delivering eAccessibility — improving disabled people's access to the Knowledge Based Society',

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 8, 12.1.2000, p. 1.⁽²⁾ OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16.⁽³⁾ OJ L 335, 19.12.2001, p. 15.⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 292, 18.10.2001, p. 6.⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 86, 10.4.2002, p. 2.

13. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the recommendations made by the ESDIS High Level Group on the basis of this analysis,

CALLS ON MEMBER STATES AND INVITES THE COMMISSION:

I. To tap the information society's potential for people with disabilities and, in particular, tackle the removal of technical, legal and other barriers to their effective participation in the knowledge based economy and society. In doing so to utilise, as far as possible, existing funding mechanisms and facilitate liaison with the appropriate actors, such as the Disability NGOs, and the European Standards Organisations. In particular, via the following measures:

1. promote a more coordinated and focused approach by the key players involved in eAccessibility activities and in the application and development of existing and new instruments in the areas of technology and standards, legislation and persuasion, and education and information;
2. provide a focus for such a more coordinated approach by a web portal, dedicated to eAccessibility issues, to be set up and maintained by the European Commission;
3. raise awareness in order that the development of any technology equipment, methodology or activity, within the scope of the Information Society avoids social exclusion;
4. encourage and empower people with disabilities to take more control over the development of the mechanisms for delivering eAccessibility by support for their increased participation in:
 - (a) technology programmes and projects;
 - (b) standardisation bodies and technical committees;
 - (c) committees looking at legislative and/or persuasive measures and education, training and empowerment initiatives.

II. To consider taking more particular measures in areas identified in the Commission Staff Working Paper on 'Delivering eAccessibility', including:

1. technical/standards instruments:

(a) with regard to the utilisation of the WAI guidelines, to promote common methodologies and comparable data in relation to public websites in the Member States and the European Institutions and to coordinate a monitoring process considering the separate Member States' activities and cooperate with them;

(b) to promote a feedback of standardisation activities and their impact on the real-life situation of the elderly and people with disabilities;

(c) to ensure that the Sixth Framework programme for Research and Technical Development 2003-2006 (6FP) will support actions to promote eInclusion, developing both empowering technologies and barrier-free technologies and including the take-up of results. To consider, while drawing up projects, the consequences for people with disabilities and thus avoid social exclusion;

2. persuasive instruments and/or legislative measures:

(a) to consider the provision of an 'eAccessibility mark' for goods and services which comply with relevant standards for eAccessibility;

(b) to continue the current efforts for greater harmonisation of Member States accessibility criteria (e.g. via their public procurement rules) in order to persuade commercial goods and service providers to offer more eAccessible goods and services;

(c) to promote measures to encourage private enterprise to make their ICT based products and services accessible including requiring accessible products and services for ICT public procurement contracts to be accessible. In this case to promote the utilisation of the possibilities that exist within existing European public procurement legislation to include specific references to accessibility criteria of relevant goods and services;

(d) to ensure that, where possible, exceptions to copyright that are consistent with the legal framework laid down in Directive 2001/29/EC⁽¹⁾ enable the dissemination of protected material in accessible formats for the use of people with disabilities;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 167 van 22.6.2001, p. 10.

- (e) to consider broadening the scope of measures of non-discrimination of people with disabilities;
3. educative and informative instruments:
- (a) to promote the aim that the network of Centres of Excellence and networking in Design for All becomes ever more inclusive and covers all Member States;
- (b) to promote the aim that proposed Design for All curricula are developed and adopted by the relevant educational authorities in each Member State. In this case use, where possible, funds earmarked for such an activity within appropriate 'networks of excellence' projects financed under the European RDT Framework programme;
- (c) to provide awareness raising of people with disabilities and the elderly as well as service providers of the opportunities of modern ICT and the net for people with disabilities and the elderly. Utilise appropriate existing Community structural programmes towards this end;
- (d) to improve the employability of people with disabilities through appropriate vocational programmes targeted towards KBS jobs as well as training in KBS-oriented skills within other vocational programmes. Utilise appropriate existing Community structural programmes towards this end;
- (e) promote the application of principles of and apply existing facilities for lifelong learning to upgrade the skills of people with disabilities;
- (f) to ensure that the multimedia materials and the use of ICT in education do not create new barriers for the integration of students with disabilities into schools and other places of learning;
- (g) to ensure that eAccessibility become a regular part of all education programmes of vocational schools of any level, e.g. Web masters, multimedia authors and software developers. Utilise the eLearning initiative towards this end.
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