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i2010- Underpinning Europe's 21st Century Aspirations

What is i2010 ?

The European Union's i2010 initiative aims at providing teeth for the digital economy of the future. Launched on June 1, 2005, i2010 is comprised of a framework of regulatory instruments, research programs and industry partnerships. Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner responsible for the Information Society and Media, explains both the underlying context and vision behind i2010. For many years, she said, "experts have been talking about digital convergence of communication networks, media content and devices. Today, we see digital convergence actually happening. Voice over IP, Web TV, online music, movies on mobile telephones – all this is now reality. To enhance investment in this promising sector of the economy, we must provide a coherent regulatory framework for Europe's digital economy that is market-oriented, flexible and future-proof. And we must focus our research spending on key information and communication technologies, such as nanoelectronics".

Priorities: Social, Economic, Industrial – and Existential

i2010 is accompanied by a new ICT plan for the EU. This seeks to promote the use of information technology by governments and citizens in order to improve industrial competitiveness, support growth, create jobs and address new societal challenges across Europe. The EU Commission has set down three priorities as part of this vision:

1. To create a Single European Information Space, promoting an open and competitive internal market for information society and media services.

For the period 2005-2007, the Commission proposed several action plans in order to intersect the axes of "policy convergence" and "technological convergence". Specific topics covered are the modernisation of rules for audiovisual media services, creation of a regulatory framework for electronic communications, the securing of an Information Society – alongside means to make the management of digital rights effective and interoperable. Priorities over subsequent years include an assessment of policy needs for media literacy, approaches to RFID and mobile TV, the development of high quality innovative content, actions in the direction of security strategy etc.

2. To strengthen investment in innovation and research in ICT. At only 80 Euros per capita, EU investment on ICT research pales in comparison to Japan and the US, with figures of 350 and 400 Euros respectively. Such a state-of-affairs made a strategic reappraisal of Europe's position inevitable. These efforts follow three broad pathways.

The first: to sharply boost European research funding through the FP-7 Seventh Research Framework Programme (see Healthcare IT Management Volume 2, Issue 1 for a detailed overview). One of the key facets of this consists of means to better integrate small- and medium-sized enterprises in EU research projects.

The second and third pathways consist of policies to promote eBusiness as well as ways to buttress the efficiency of research policies and innovation. During 2007-2008, key priorities here include a review of ICT standardisation, an assessment of actions in the areas of eSkills and employability as well as improvement in the quality and performance of public services and innovation.

3. To promote an inclusive European society, better public services and quality of life by using ICT. The Commission's efforts focus on an Action Plan on e- Government for citizen-related services, with several steps taken in 2006.

For the period 2007-2008, the top issue on the Commission's agenda are three "quality of life" ICT initiatives – technologies for an ageing society, smarter, safer and cleaner intelligent vehicles and digital libraries to promote a European culture for all citizens. In order to prevent a "digital divide" (resulting from unequal access to broadband Internet connections), the Commission has put its weight behind a European initiative on e-Inclusion. Health IT is part of the direct purview of programs aimed at e-Accessibility, e-Government and of course e-Health interoperability.

All i2010 actions implemented between June 2005 and March 2007 have been compiled within annual reports on i2010 strategy. The 2006 balance sheet has been widely considered to be positive. (CC)

i2010 and the Lisbon Strategy

Since its inception, the Lisbon Strategy has acknowledged the central, and in some senses, over-arching, importance, of IT. In March 2000, the Lisbon Summit of the European Council established an ambitious raft of objectives aimed at higher growth, more and better jobs and greater social inclusion.

In order to build a meaningful knowledge society, a certain level of prosperity is required to re-anchor the European social model in economic reality – especially given demographic ageing and growing international competition in what has been depicted as a Flatter World.

As part of such thinking, it is accepted that more sustainable social systems require a greater use of ICT for delivering more efficient public services and to reduce their implementation costs. Indeed, the ICT sector is estimated to be contributing almost one fourth of the EU's GDP growth.

According to EU Information Society Commissioner Viviane Reding, "investment in ICT accounts for about 40% of EU labour productivity growth over the second half of the 90s. But it accounted for 60% in the USA, which shows that there is an opportunity for Europe to do better, because recent evidence suggests that Europe's productivity gap with the USA is closely linked to the production and use of ICTs".

Consistent with the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, the i2010 initiative is expected to result in more productivity, better capacities, new opportunities and increased innovation.

Through the Lisbon Strategy and in particular i2010, the European Commission has identified the following areas as politico-strategic priorities:

- î Updating of regulatory frameworks for electronic communications, information society and media services, in order to exploit to the full the internal market
- î Stimulation of investment in strategic research to overcome bottlenecks in the diffusion of ICT innovation
- î Promotion of e-Inclusion and quality of life. On their part, EU Member States were expected via the October 2005 National Reform Programmes to define Information Society priorities in line with the Integrated Guidelines for growth and jobs. Specifically, attention was directed at ICT uptake, ICT infrastructure and ICT for jobs and education.
- î These programs were targeted at:
 - î transposing the new regulatory frameworks affecting digital convergence with an emphasis on open and competitive markets
 - î increasing ICT research in national spending
 - î developing modern and interoperable ICT-enabled public services
 - î using their considerable purchasing power as a force for innovation in ICT
 - î adopting ambitious targets for development of the Information Society at national levels.

i2010 Financing

A key question within i2010 concerns the European Commission's financing of such complex and ambitious projects. Several sources need to be mentioned in such a context:

- î 9.1 billion Euros via the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for the period 2007-2013. The efforts are directly targeted at enhancing the competitiveness of European industry, and led to the creation of this research theme, the largest in FP7
- î 755 million Euros, underwritten through the MEDIA 2007 program and aimed at boosting the European film industry in the 2007-2013 period
- î 728 million Euros from the ICT Policy Support Programme, which, once again, runs through the period 2007-2013. These outlays are aimed at stimulating innovation and competitiveness through the use of ICT
- î 45 million Euros in investment for four years channelled through the Safer Internet Program and aimed at combating illegal or harmful Internet content.

i2010 High Level Group

On March, 20 2006, EU Member States, under the umbrella of an i2010 High Level Group, met for the first time to discuss the future of the i2010 initiative. Established by a Commission Decision and composed of one representative per Member State at Director General level, the Group decided to work on key priority areas such as convergence and content issues and ways to continue building trust and confidence, aside from continuation of efforts in e- Government, e-Health, e-Inclusion etc..

The Group is also open to observers from both EFTA (European Free Trade Area) and EU candidate countries. Its mission and mandate is to

analyse strategic ICT policy-related issues in the context of the i2010 initiative as well as the wider spectrum of the Lisbon Agenda. Reviews and advice on the effectiveness of the i2010 initiatives as well as the use of benchmarks to monitor the implementation process are parts of its 'to do' agenda.

Conclusion

A key theme anchoring the i2010 initiative is 'convergence'. According to EU Commissioner Viviane Reding, convergence is a process: it's still happening, and there are still huge opportunities. If we work together and invest in growth, we will reap the benefits together. (CC)

For further information, please visit: <http://health.europa.eu>

Health-EU Portal for Healthier Choices

Taking responsibility for one's own health is a fundamental challenge for EU citizens.

This is a key reason for the launch of the Health-EU Portal in May 2006. It aims at raising public awareness about health-related issues and providing information on health developments and events across Europe. Its target group includes healthcare professionals as well as scientists, policy makers and members of the general public interested in health issues.

In the initial stage, information on the Portal was restricted to English. However, since the start of 2007, its content is provided in twenty official European languages. The Health-EU Portal is an initiative of the EU Public Health Programme 2003-2008. It is financially supported by the EU programme 'Interoperable Delivery of European e-Government Services to Public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens'. It also matches the aims of the e-Europe Action Plan by providing citizens with simple, concise and scientifically sound online information and promotes greater involvement of both the public and private healthcare sectors.

The Health-EU Portal has been structured into six thematic areas, which bring its relevance to the doorsteps and into the day-to-day lives of EU citizens. The themes are as follows:

î My Health: prenatal health monitoring, nutrition and physical activity, food and product safety, people with disabilities

î My Lifestyle: nutrition, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, travel, sports and leisure, and sex

î My Environment: social environment, environmental health and consumer safety, physical, biological and chemical risks, road safety, and bioterrorism

î Health Problems: mental health, HIV/AIDS, influenza, cancer, heart disease and other non-communicable diseases

î Care for Me: patient safety, mobility, quality assurance, long-term care, treatment, and careers

î Health in the EU: policies, programmes, research, prevention and promotion, health indicators, and statistics

Markos Kyprianou, the EU Commissioner responsible for Health and Consumer Protection, sums up the scale and scope of ambitions behind the initiative. The EUHealth Portal, he notes, "is a very large project bringing together all EU Member States as well as EFTA nations, international organisations and NGOs. Web surfers will have access to over 40,000 links to trustworthy sources. The translation of the Portal into all 20 official EU languages means that up to 1.5 billion people worldwide can use it to help them to make healthy choices". (CC)

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