E-Inclusion in Lithuania: state policy approach

Rimantas Petrauskas[1], Auste Kiskiene[2], Tatjana Bileviciene[3]

1 Introduction

The European Commission's strategic policy framework i2010 – A European Information Society for growth and employment[4] – announces a European initiative on eInclusion in 2008. One of the three main priorities of i2010 framework is to foster inclusion, better public services and quality of life through the use of ICT (information and communication technologies). eInclusion is one of the issue areas addressed under this priority. The 2006 Riga Ministerial Conference on ICT for an Inclusive Society[5] provides strategic guidance and is a major step towards this initiative. Future work in the field of eInclusion shall build on national, regional and local initiatives, and link with European policies[6] already in place. All relevant authorities, industries, users and civil society

1 Mykolas Romeris University, Faculty of Economics and Finance Management, Department of Informatics and Statistic.
2 idem.
3 idem.

4 Reed, 'i2010 – A European Information Society for growth and employment. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social committee Cand the Committee of the Regions. COM(2005) 229 final '.

5 More about conference http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/ict_riga_2006/index_en.htm (visited 2007 08 30).

6 Common Actions for Growth and Employment: The Community Lisbon Programme. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. COM(2005) 330 final.

representatives are invited to jointly contribute. In line with i2010, eInclusion policy addresses issues in the fields of active ageing, geographical digital divide, accessibility, digital literacy and competences, cultural diversity and inclusive eGovernment.

eInclusion is about using ICT to remove obstacles which limit or prevent people from participation in the economy and wider society. It also seeks to overcome barriers to ICT products and services that exclude people and create a new form of exclusion, i.e. digital exclusion. eInclusion also seeks to find new digital opportunities for traditionally excluded social groups to become equal participants of the modern information society. eInclusion is an important aspect in building an inclusive Europe with greater social cohesion and mobility, highly participative democracies, better quality of life, and enhanced opportunities for employment and education[7].

Everyone benefits from eInclusion initiatives, which impact on all society by creating more opportunities, access and equality. Such initiatives play a significant role in our daily lives with products and services designed to meet our changing needs. In particular, however, they benefit those at risk of exclusion. In other words, eInclusion helps people overcome barriers so they can participate more fully in society, regardless of disabilities, age, gender, ethnicity, and educational achievements, financial and technological resources. eInclusion shall reach out to everyone no matter where they live in Europe, including rural, remote or economically disadvantaged regions.

eInclusion is just one aspect of the broader range of policies designed to promote social inclusion and cohesion. While exclusion from the Information Society does not by itself necessarily lead to social exclusion, it is broadly true that the socially excluded tend to have limited access to ICT. Policies to promote eInclusion can form part of a wider mix of policies to promote social inclusion and can be a first gateway to inclusion for

[7] eEurope 2005: An information society for all. COM(2002)263 final.

certain groups. Lithuanian eInclusion policy and other public and private initiatives are aimed at strengthening information society and fighting digital divide, which most of all affects socially disadvantaged people, such as disabled, elderly, minorities, etc.
This article aims to analyse Lithuanian eInclusion policy and describe public and private initiatives to fight digital divide, which are examples of good practice and innovative projects. In the first part of the article authors describe overall eInclusion issues and main aspects of eInclusion related policy. The second part is dedicated for Lithuanian eInclusion issues. Authors analyse eInclusion policy in Lithuania and main related conceptual and legal documents, discuss Lithuanian state websites adaptation for disabled persons and present good practice and innovative eInclusion projects examples. The article concludes with the statement that despite existing efforts to correspond to the needs of those who are affected by the digital divide, it is still important first of all to work with the attitude and priorities of responsible institutions, i.e. organisations of disabled persons, as eInclusion issues usually are not placed in the first row of their priorities.

2 ICT and inclusion processes

eInclusion refers to the interactions between ICT and social inclusion processes[8]. These interactions may have few different forms and outcomes:

- Replication and/or reinforcement of existing disadvantage. If traditionally disadvantaged groups are also disadvantaged in relation to their access to ICT and in relation to the opportunities/benefits that such access can offer for their social, economic and other spheres of life, such situation creates even wider gap between them and the rest of society;

[8] eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union. Executive briefing. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/eaccessibility/ (visited 2007 08 10).

- Emergence of new forms of exclusion for other groups. If lack of access to ICT and their benefits affects opportunities and outcomes in social, economic and other spheres of life, for example, for older or disabled people, such situation results in the creation of new form of exclusion, i.e. digital divide;
- Positive opportunities for reducing exclusion for at-risk groups. If access to and utilization of ICT is facilitated and promoted in ways that can result in positive outcomes/benefits, i.e. better access to services, increased employment opportunities, or increased engagement of communities of interest, such situation enables ICT to fight the existing social exclusion.

Digital inclusion is a crosscutting issue, involving a number of interrelated social inclusion agenda, as well as the ever-developing ICT. Digital inclusion is, therefore, social inclusion with an ICT stream.

Individuals and communities can use ICT to enhance their quality of life, overcome difficulties and fulfil their potential. ICT is an important route to the equality of access to information – the essential aspect of creating social equality. ICT social and communication applications have been shown to promote social cohesion and identity. People need information and support to optimize their use of ICT including communal access and structures to facilitate home use, appropriate technology, adapting ICT and accessing special equipment, ICT skills development in line with technological developments, relevant content and user-friendly web searching tools, participation as a citizen and creating content.

ICT can be used as a tool to promote social inclusion, i.e. projects for single parents could focus on work at home support using ICT or projects for homeless people might include publishing creative writing on the web. Another project might tackle crime, isolation and community cohesion through wiring up a housing estate. If ICT is introduced to a community from the perspective of addressing a community need it is more likely to inspire individual

interest and to reach sustainability. Initiatives that attempt to provide ICT for its own sake are less likely to succeed.

3 Description of overall policy approaches addressing eInclusion in Lithuania

Mykolas Romeris University participated as a national correspondent for Lithuania in eInclusion@EU project, which was launched under the European Union's Information Society Technology (IST) program in 2004. Under this project there were designed three information gathering tools to be used by the national correspondents for the data and information gathering processes in their own countries. National correspondents had to address issues of eInclusion and eAccessibility, ICT and their contribution to active ageing and equal opportunities in work and employment and selected aspects of the national situation in relation to research and policy activities in the field of eInclusion and activities directed towards monitoring and benchmarking eInclusion. All project work and analysis was carried in the three waves of information gathering in 2004-2006. Results of the analysis which was carried under the eInclusion@EU project can be the background for deriving main aspects of eInclusion policy in Lithuania[9].

3.1 *Main aspects of eInclusion related policy*

eInclusion related policy and research activities can take many different forms: from full-fledged policy programs or policy statements to grassroots initiatives, from basic research projects and technology development to market implementation studies.

---

[9] eInclusion@EU National Information Gathering Template: Wave III on Selected aspects of the national situation in relation to research and policy activities in the field of eInclusion and activities directed towards monitoring and benchmarking eInclusion in Lithuania.

They are likely to be found in many different areas of the wider field of eInclusion. It can be distinguished few types of eInclusion related public policy activities: inclusive online services, independent living, eServices for social inclusion[10].

Inclusive online services. Along with the spread of ICT into all corners of everyday life comes an increasing pervasiveness of online services: eGovernment, eHealth, eLearning, eCommerce, etc. The emergence of these services lends a new urgency to the question of access and the digital divide as described above. If such vital services are increasingly provided by means of online media it needs to be ensured that inequitable access and/or utilization of online media does not result in a medical, educational or any other structural divide counteracting the goal of a cohesive society. Ways must be found, both through research and through political activities, to ensure that this threat is avoided and that online services are accessible by all people, particularly those that are of public interest such as eGovernment, eHealth and educational online services.

Independent living. The concept of independent living seems, at first glance, to be rather self-explanatory. In general terms it describes all measures, technologies or activities helping older people and people with disabilities to live as self-determined or independent as possible[11]. From a technology point of view, this encompasses four key application domains: assistive technology (i.e. devices compensating in some way for motor, sensory or cognitive difficulties, screen-readers for a computer, text-to-speech relay services for telephone), smart homes (i.e. networked dwellings responding to specific needs threatening the independence of older people, providing facilities ranging from simply detection and action - turning lights off or on, locking

---

[10] Reed, 'eInclusion revisited: The Local Dimension of the Information Society'. Staff working document of Commission of the European communities SEC(2005) 206.

[11] Reed, Law on social integration of disabled persons. No. I-2044, 1991 11 28`.

doors and providing alarms - up to fully automated electrical systems and networking components within the home environment), remote social and medical care (i.e. solutions that allow some medical services to be provided to the home, communication with a care centre via voice, transmission of biomedical data or, linked to smart home technology, dwelling based monitoring) and so called ambient intelligence solutions (i.e. the creation of a living environment where humans interact in a natural and non-invasive manner with computational services that help them in their everyday tasks, a concept similar to that of 'ubiquitous computing')[12].

eServices for social inclusion. The understanding nowadays is that the information society is not all risks, but also offers a number of opportunities or even clear-cut benefits for societal at-risk groups. This means that ICT in general but even more specific applications and services can help those people to increasingly participate in societal life. The focus for this sub-issue is on eServices facilitating the inclusion of disadvantaged people. The concrete type of such a service depends largely on its target group or groups, which can range from older and disabled people to the illiterate, immigrants and people with a low level of educational attainment. Examples are, for instance, online learning platforms for illiterate people lowering the barriers to participate by means of their anonymity or online services offered to low-income households via alternative platforms like digital television.

3.2 *eInclusion policy in Lithuania*

[12] Influence of modern technologies on quality of life of disabled persons. Report of European Council Committee of Rehabilitation and Integration of Disabled Persons (CD-P-PER). http://cm.coe.int/Ap/rehab/ntn/rd/2001/p-SG.35.6e (visited 2007 08 30).

There is a certain interest from the government bodies to promote eInclusion in Lithuania. That indicates the specific body of Government of the Republic of Lithuania – Information Society Development Committee. This Committee continues the work of earlier existed Ministry of Telecommunications and Informatics. The main function of this Committee is regulation of information technologies and telecommunication and coordination of development of information society. In Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (Parliament) a special committee on development of information society exists. In 2001 Seimas passed a resolution on priority work on knowledge society and knowledge economy in Lithuania[13]. This resolution was a complex of suggestions for the Government to develop knowledge and information society. It covers education (computer literacy requirement in schools, increased number of students in the field of informational technologies), eGovernment, eBusiness, and knowledge economy fields.

Information Society Development Committee takes part in formation process of comprehensive state policy on information technologies and telecommunication. In 2001 Government of the Republic of Lithuania has passed resolution on 'National concept of development of information society' and in 2005 'Strategy on the Development of Information Society in Lithuania'[14]. It is acknowledged in 'National concept of development of information society' that many people in Lithuania do not know how to use and cannot use information technologies, especially in rural localities (in 2001 only 8 % of population used internet, in rural aeries – only 1 %). However the situation as regards internet and

---

13 Reed, Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning confirmation of Lithuanian national conception of development of information society. No. 229, 2001 02 28.

14 Reed, Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning Confirmation of Strategy on the Development of Information Society in Lithuania. No. 625, 2005 06 08.

computer usage is rapidly improving in Lithuania: in 2004 29 % of all population used internet and in 2006 – 42 % of population did the same. The 'Strategy on the Development of Information Society in Lithuania' is focused not only on improving computer literacy and internet penetration but is also oriented towards development of public infrastructure of electronic services. It is planned to achieve that by 2010 40 % of inhabitants will be using public electronic services and 70 % of public services will be provided according to 'one window' principle.

With reference to the main documents on information society mentioned above, the main policy areas can be distinguished: people, public administration, eBusiness, Lithuanian language and culture. eInclusion covers programs related to people training and education. The main goal is to ensure, that people could use information technologies and telecommunication, be more flexible and adjust to changing circumstances. Programs of people training include computerisation of schools and libraries, creation of public internet access spots, digital community project, development of qualification of educators on information technologies, use of open code, promotion of remote studies, development of qualification of unemployed people through the use of ICT. Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Agriculture and Information Society Development Committee takes part in eInclusion programs related to people. Public administration area[15] also includes several eInclusion oriented programs: development of computer literacy of civil servants, integration of disabled persons in information society. The main target of the latter program is fulfilment of Web Accessibility Initiative. Almost all web pages of government institutions are

---

15 Reed, Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning confirmation of strategy of public administration development till 2010. No. 488, 2004 04 28.

ready for the use of disabled persons (www.lrv.lt, www.smm.lt, www.ivpk.lt).

There are several practical Governmental initiatives to stimulate eInclusion in Lithuania. For example, in 2000 Government of the Republic of Lithuania passed the concept of e-government[16] and introduced program 'Vartai'. It aims to develop e-government, e-education, and e-business and enable people to get all public information and actively participate in state's life. This program encourages wide internet usage in schools and libraries, creates public internet spots, where using internet is for free.

In February 2004 Ministry of Social Security and Labour signed Cooperation treaty with telecommunication enterprise 'Lietuvos telekomas' (currently 'TEO LT'). Additional protocol on project 'Voice and internet services for disabled persons and organizations of disabled persons' was also signed. This treaty and project provide cheaper internet and telephone services for disabled persons. The aim of such Project is to create an opportunity for disabled persons and organizations of disabled persons to use contemporary communication, help them to integrate into society and promote their employment. In July 2004 Ministry of Social Security and Labour with telecommunication enterprise 'Lietuvos telekomas' started a project called 'Wider way to the World'. The main purpose of this project was to integrate disabled persons to society. There were donated 46 computers to 25 day centers for disabled persons during this project[17].

In 2000 Ministry of Education and Science passed 'Strategy on information and communication technologies in education'. In 2001 program 'Education for information society' was prepared.

---

[16] Reed, Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning confirmation of conception e-government. No. 2115, 2002 12 31.

[17] Social Integration of Disabled Persons (2005). Report of Statistical Department of Lithuanian Republic Government. http://www.ndt.lt/files/File/statistika/statistika_2005.doc (visited 2007 08 30).

This program includes web page www.emokykla.lt, computer net in comprehensive schools, public internet spots in schools, promotion of computer literacy in schools. The main aims of computer net are: to use information technologies for improvement of education process, to encourage wide usage of information technologies in after class activities, to modernize management of schools and to improve functioning of schools' libraries.

eInclusion and eAccessibility is also very important when ensuring equal opportunities for all people to employment and general social integration. In the Republic of Lithuania the European directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 is implemented with reference to the appendix of the Law on Equal Opportunities[18]. This Law determines implementation of European Directive 2000/78/EC and of European Directive 2000/43/EC of June 29 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial and ethnic origin.

National Program for Social Integration of Disabled Persons for the year 2003 – 2012[19] has a provision related to eAccessibility. 10.2 clause deals with accessibility of information for disabled persons. This clause determines the necessity to adapt public information to the needs of disabled persons. National Program refers to the Concept of Adaptation of Information Environment to the Needs of Disabled Persons. This Concept is created to fulfil the aim of adaptation of public information to the needs of disabled persons and creation of special supporting equipment for disabled persons.

The Association of Environment Adaptation for Disabled of Lithuania was recently established under the support of Open Society Fund-Lithuania (OSFL - one of the network of

---

[18] Reed, Law on Equal Opportunities. No. IX – 1826.

[19] Reed, Lithuanian government resolution regarding confirmation of national programme of 2003-2012 years of social integration of disabled Nr.850, 2002 06 07.

foundations established since 1985 in Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Haiti). The main objectives of the organization:

- To monitor projections and the building of new buildings processes;
- To participate in the expert groups accepting the exploitation of newly built or renovated buildings with the evaluation of their correspondence to the needs of the disabled;
- To initiate and implement different programs on adaptation of city environment as well as the public institutions (schools, universities etc.) and nongovernmental organizations to the needs of disabled people;
- To provide an assistant on adaptation of the accommodation owned by a disabled person to his needs;
- To provide training and information to the public officials on the needs of disabled people and the friendly environment in general.

Although the objectives of the Association cover wide range of issues, the activities are limited by the financial possibilities and are mainly based on the monitoring the fulfilment of the requirements for public buildings and areas and not to the adaptation issues of private accommodations owned by the disabled. Innovative initiatives like 'smart house' are not affordable yet.

4 Main public policy documents related to eInclusion issues

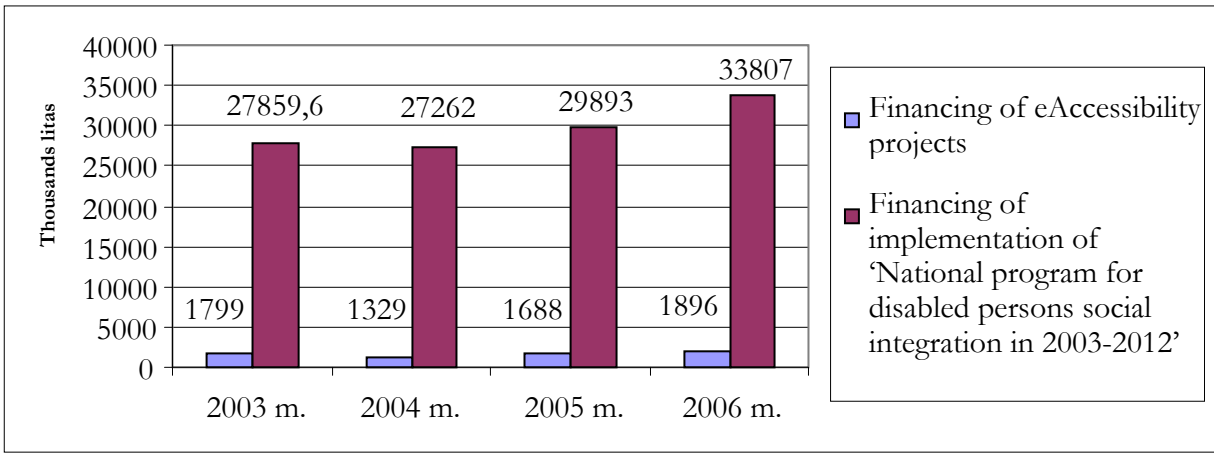
Positive development in state policy is reflected in 'Conceptual framework for adapting the information environment to the needs of people with disabilities' (hereinafter 'Conceptual framework'), which was adopted by the decision No T-5 of Director of Information Society Development Committee under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in January 21, 2005. This document needs special attention as it is the main conceptual document in the sphere of eInclusion issues in Lithuania. 'Conceptual framework for adapting the information environment

to the needs of people with disabilities' is a part of 'National program for disabled people social integration for 2003-2012'.
This conceptual framework set a list of requirements for the creators of information environment (content creators, designers, programmers), which have to be fulfilled in order to adapt information environment to the needs of disabled people. Common requirements embrace provisions that all content must be accessible to people with visibility and hearing disabilities, all functions must be accessible with keyboard (without mouse), etc. However conceptual framework is rather consultative and provides creators of digital content with methodical guidelines how to make content more accessible for visually impaired.
There are several other legal acts which are important legal documents regulating technical aids for disabled people guaranteed or supported by the state. It is worth to mention 'Catalogue of means of technical aids for disabled people'[20] (hereinafter 'Catalogue') and 'Description of supply with means of technical aids for disabled people and the order of compensation of their purchase expenses' (hereinafter 'Description'). As it is stated, technical aids for disabled people enhance human activity; provide opportunity to move freely and independently.
The Catalogue contains a list of means set by the International Standard LST EN ISO 9999:2001 'Technical Aids for Disabled People. The Classification'. The Description specifies the order of supply and compensation of purchase expenses of technical aids.
State position towards the disadvantaged groups of the population specified in its legal acts is very important in the field of eInclusion. Sometimes it might be one of the main driving forces for innovation, an adviser for nongovernmental organizations or an efficient listener to the needs of disabled or elderly people.
The main instruments presently offered or available for the above mentioned target groups might be called a very basic ones in order

[20] Reed, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0. W3C Recommendation 5-May-1999. http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT.

to improve quality of life in general and lowering their dependence on other people in particular, i.e. an improvement of medical, social and professional rehabilitation of disabled people by means of provision with technical aids, such as wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, anti-bedsore mattresses, sticks, etc. New possibilities opened by a very fast developments of ICT and other technologies (i.e. smart house solutions) are not into consideration yet.

As it is indicated in the Picture 1 below only a small amount of all financial means allocated for the implementation of 'National program for disabled people social integration for 2003-2012' are devoted for the eAccessibility projects. Such projects aim at enhancing possibilities of disabled persons to get equal access to information and other benefits of information society. This situation shows that eInclusion issues are not among the priorities of 'National program for disabled people social integration for 2003-2012' and reveals weakness of eInclusion public policy implementation.



(Source: Report on Creation of Universal System of Integration of Disabled Persons (2006). VITI, Vilnius)

Picture 1. Sponsorship of projects of access of information environment of disabled

5 Lithuanian state websites adaptation for the disabled persons

Another aspect of eInclusion public policy is adaptation of state institutions' websites for the disabled persons. This aspect clearly shows how are implemented declarative statements of conceptual and programming documents, related to eInlcusion issues.

Decision No 480 by the Lithuanian Government on 'Common requirements for internet pages of government institutions'[21] set several principles for the governmental internet pages, which have to be implemented in order to create more opportunities for all citizens to use services of information society. According to this Decision all governmental internet pages have to be adapted to the needs of disabled persons[22]. This Decision is implemented in practice, and now almost all internet pages of government institutions are adapted to visually impaired people, for example, www.ivpk.lt, www.lrv.lt.

During the research websites of main Lithuanian state institutions' were analyzed:

- Seimas (Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania) and its administration;
- President of the Republic of Lithuania and his administration;
- Government of the Republic of Lithuania;
- Ministries and other state institutions.

Links to these institutions are presented on Government's website in point 'Links'. Purpose of this analysis was to establish how these websites are adapted for disabled persons. Authors didn't analyze particular technical solutions used on certain websites. If website is

---

[21]Reed, Lithuanian government resolution regarding common demands for internet sites of governmental institutions Nr. 480, 2003 04 18.

[22] Reed, Instructions from the director of the Information Society Development Committee, No. T-40, 2004 03 31.

adapted for disabled persons it was decided by particular link. Durin the research 120 objects were analysed.

Analysis revealed that only one website of the three main state websites has link 'adapted for disabled' – Government's website (www.lrv.lt). Parliament's website only has link 'text version'.

Only nine websites of ministries' websites have such link, it means only 69,2 % of all state institutions' websites. If we analyse both websites of ministries and its institutions this amount markedly increases. Eleven of 13 groups (85%) – or ministry's website or its institution's websites are adapted for disabled persons (but from all 74 websites only 21 are adapted – 29 %). Only three websites (13,6 %) of 22 Parliament institutions are adapted for disabled – it is Office of Parliament Controller and Investigation Centre of Genocide and Resistance, Lithuanian national radio and TV. 33 websites (28 %) of all 120 analyzed institutions are adapted for disabled persons.

It is interesting to analyze what particular websites have such links. Sites of Environment Ministry (www.am.lt) – both website of Ministry and of Agency of Environment Protection, of Environment Protection Inspections; Treasury Ministry (www.finmin.lt) – website of Taxes Inspection is adapted. Social Protection and Labour Ministry's website (www.socmin.lt) isn't adapted for disabled persons, but sites of Service of Labour Market Education and Invalid Affairs Service are adapted. But the site of Social Insurance Fond isn't adapted. Sites of Roads Direction and State Transport Inspection of Communication ministry (www.transp.lt) are adapted; site of State Patient Till of Health Protection Ministry (www.sam.lt) is adapted. Websites of Education and Science Ministry (www.smm.lt), Economy Ministry (www.ukmin.lt), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.urm.lt), Justice Ministry (www.tm.lt) are adapted for disabled persons. But portal of Legal Information Centre (www.infolex.lt) isn't adapted to disabled persons.

Websites of environment protection, cultural and education institutions are adapted for disabled persons in the best way.

Websites of such important institutions as State Tax Inspectorate, State Patient Fund, and Department of Statistics are also adapted for disabled person. However, some very important institutions such as Social Protection and Labour Ministry, Social Insurance Fond, Labour Market do not have adapted versions of their websites for the disabled persons. And portal 'Government Electronic Gates' hasn't link 'adapted for disabled persons'. Internet site of Lithuanian Republic Prosecute Office (www.lrgp.lt) is adapted for disabled persons.

Analysis of state institutions' websites shows that there is no systematic and crosscutting policy of adaptation of such websites for the needs of disabled persons. Moreover, among three main political institutions (Parliament, Government and President) only Government has a version of its website for the disabled. Thus there could be observed a wide gap between declarative statements in political documents and practical intentions to fight digital divide problems.

6 Examples of good practice and innovative projects

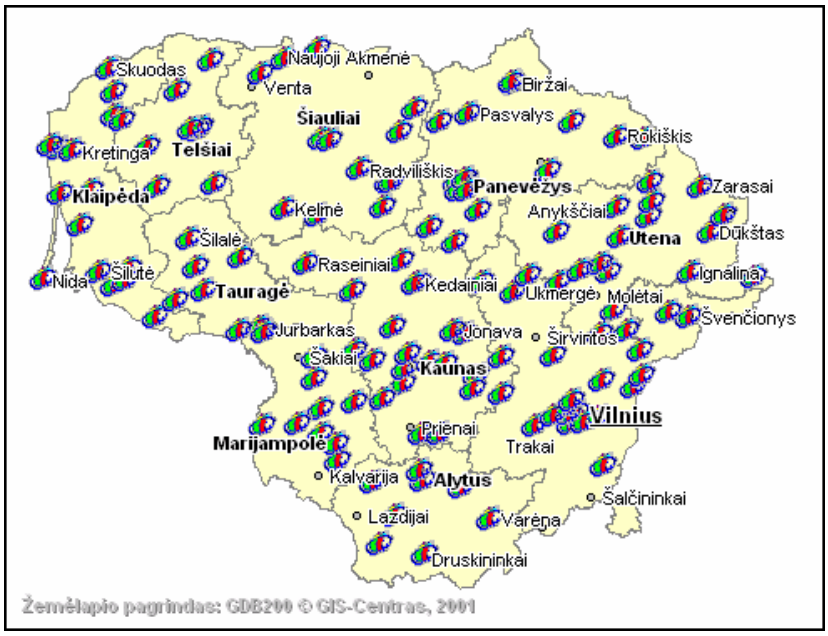
There could be observed private initiatives aimed at enhancing positive outcomes of interaction between ICT and social inclusion processes in Lithuania. Such examples of good practice usually fight accessibility and computer literacy problems. Several good practice examples are described below. Success of such projects lies in public-private partnership, bottom-up initiative and down to earth solutions of eInclusion problems.

Window to the Future. In 2003 alliance 'Window to the Future'[23], formed by leading mobile and fixed telecommunication and IT companies, largest commercial banks and Vilnius City Municipality, implemented project 'IT Training for Society'. The aim of this project was to provide 20000 Lithuanian residents with

[23] Window to the Future website www.langasiateiti.lt

opportunity to participant in basic internet usage courses for free. The project was intended to emphasize positive features of internet usage, encourage people to use computers and e-services at home, and invite to adapt knowledge obtained in courses in internet centers. Courses began in spring 2003. In December 2003 there were 20000 Lithuanian residents, who have taken part in these courses. 60 % of participants were people of age 35-60, 35,37 % of participants were people of age 18-35, the rest participants were more than 60 years old. Average age of participants was 40 years. 80 % of participants were women. The smallest group of participants were retired persons (2,45 %). The results of the courses are evaluated as positive. 89,84 % of participants declared that these courses had encouraged them to further improve their computer literacy. 65,2 % of participants evaluated courses as very good, 17,95 % – as good.

Another 'Window to the Future' project is focused on the establishment of public internet access points. 'Window to the Future' together with the Ministry of Interior established around 200 public internet access points in Lithuania during 2002. Ministry of Interior and 'Window to the Future' cooperates in developing unified strategy for the establishment of public internet access points and in coordinating activity of such points. This initiative was followed by the project 'Establishment of Public Internet Access Points in Rural Areas' implemented by the Ministry of the Interior and sponsored from Phare social-economical cohesion programme, supported by the EU. 300 more public internet access points were established during this project. Currently 'Window to the Future' together with partners implements project financed by EU Structural Funds during which 400 more public internet access points are going to be established in Lithuania. Picture 2 shows how already running public internet access points are spread across Lithuania.



(Source: Alliance 'Window to the Future', http://www.langasiateiti.lt)

Picture 2. Public internet access points in Lithuania.

RAIN. Project 'Rural area information technology broadband network RAIN'[24] aims to provide broadband access for all rural public sector administration institutions, hospitals, laboratories, schools, museums, libraries, public internet access points and also for rural residents and business companies. This project is supported by the EU Structural Funds and implemented by Institute of Informatics and Mathematics together with Ministry of Transport and Communications and Ministry of Education and Science. Project started in 2005 and it is planned to provide broadband access to 80 % of all rural education institutions, 75 % of all rural public sector administration institutions, 75 % of all

[24] More about project http://www.rain.lt

rural health institutions, 75 % of all rural public internet access points. Currently project managers announce that they are already in a halfway of building broadband infrastructure. A feasibility study for the second stage of this project – RAIN II – has been already approved by supervisory committee of project implementation. In the second stage it is planed to create infrastructure which enables already existing and newly established communication operators to provide broadband internet services in not less than 98 % of the territory of Lithuania.

WWW-GOLDEN-AGE (SOCRATES /GRUNDTVIG 2 project[25]). Aim of this project is to introduce IT to older people, educate them to work with Internet, check and improve teaching methods, create network of organizations, engaged in older people education, create positive image of older people in communities, help to solve social problems, encourage cooperation of older people form different countries. Organizers are going to held seminars for older people. IT courses shall provide older people with opportunities to earn for a living, integrate them to society and cooperate with other people from the EU countries. Project started in July, 2004 and is going to proceed for 3 years.

Screen phones. TEO LT (formerly known as Lithuanian Telecom) company has recently introduced a new product of telephonic devices a so called 'screen phone'. Among the other advantages of the product, the company has emphasized the most important of it – a possibility to see a person you are talking with at a real time. As one of the beneficiary groups or a group for which the new product could open a completely new communication possibilities, were the people with hearing disabilities named by the company as well. The possibility to see a person you are talking with and the technical abilities of free hands' equipment of the product would open new possibilities to communicate in gestural language between the members of the target group as well as with public institutions intended or mostly used by the people with deaf

[25] More about this project http://www.pmvc.ktu.lt/

disability. Despite the potential benefits for specific disadvantaged groups, no projects are initiated yet. Though on the request of the State Board of the Deaf Association and with a special offer of the company, four pairs of the telephone devices were recently (May 2006) installed in the premises of nongovernmental organizations of deaf people (at the National Rehabilitation Centre of Deaf People, Vilnius Rehabilitation Centre of Deaf People, Lithuanian Federation of Sport of Deaf People and at the Kaunas Rehabilitation Centre of Deaf People).

7 Conclusions

It is widely accepted that ICT have a potential to play a major role in creating a more inclusive society. ICT products and services with measurable benefits can enrich people's lives. Especially people at risk of social, economic or digital exclusion may benefit from purposefully created digital services and equipment. ICT can improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of public services offered by national, regional and local administrations by meeting the needs of all citizens and businesses. However there are still differences in possibilities to use ICT among various social groups and these differences form a new from of social exclusion – digital divide. There are few signs that digital divide is narrowing between different social groups. Especially disadvantaged are traditionally excluded social groups, such as disabled persons, people with low level of income and education, elderly.

Process of information society development is directly connected to state institutions' activities. These institutions tend to use different ICT applications for modernising public administration. ICT open new opportunities to extend public administration functions into the cyber space and provide residents with better services. ICT ensure cheaper and simpler process of information acceptance, process, keeping and transmitting. All kinds of institutions and enterprises more and more of its activity and information relations extend to electronic communication space.

Seeking to provide an equal rights and opportunities for disadvantaged social groups to be socially and economically integrated into society it is important to reduce digital divide they are confronting. eInclusion programs are very important tools for combing ICT and social integration processes and seeking positive outcomes for disadvantaged people. Reduction of digital divide may take different forms and require different means. For example, one of the most important grounds for reduction of digital divide for disabled persons is adaptability of internet information environment for their special needs. Information networks and e-mail can become one of the most important mean of education, communication, social integration for disabled persons. The other very important issue is to provide disabled and other disadvantaged people with special adapted electronic equipment which could help them to be equal participants in information society.

Currently eInclusion issues are getting more and more attention in Lithuania not only from state institutions but also from private sector. Success of some eInlcusion projects which can be used as good practice examples from Lithuania usually lies in public-private partnership, bottom-up initiative and down to earth solutions of eInclusion problems. However governmental initiatives are still more in the form of conceptual and declarative documents than in real actions. This clearly shows analysis of state institutions' websites adaptability to the needs of disabled persons. Moreover, only a small amount of state financial sponsorship is allocated for the implementation of eInclusion projects.

Not only shortage of financial sources influences the hard access of information environment for disables persons. Average 25-30 millions litas are distinguished for implementation of programs of disabled persons' organizations. But such organizations often choose others priorities of projects because shortage of knowledge, specialists and competence. Projects which aim to increase access of information environment compose only the small part of supporting measures of governmental program of

social integration of disabled. Although the sponsorship of social integration projects for disabled persons from 2003 till 2006 remotely increased, financing of eInclusion projects decreased from 6,5 % in 2003 till 5,6 % in 2006.

References

1. i2010 – A European Information Society for growth and employment. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social committee Cand the Committee of the Regions. COM(2005) 229 final.
2. Ministerial Declaration Approved Unanimously on 11 June 2006, Riga, Latvia. http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/ict_riga_2006/index_en.htm (visited 2007-08-30).
3. Common Actions for Growth and Employment: The Community Lisbon Programme. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. COM(2005) 330 final.
4. eEurope 2005: An informatikon society for all. COM(2002)263 final.
5. eAccessibility of public sector services in the European Union. Executive briefing. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/ resources/eaccessibility/ (visited 2007-08-10).
6. eInclusion@EU National Information Gathering Template: Wave III on Selected aspects of the national situation in relation to research and policy activities in the field of eInclusion and activities directed towards monitoring and benchmarking eInclusion in Lithuania.
7. eInclusion revisited: The Local Dimension of the Information Society. Commission of the European communities. Staff working document. SEC(2005) 206.
8. Lithuanian Law on social integration of disabled persons. No. I-2044, 1991 11 28.
9. Influence of modern technologies on quality of life of disabled persons. Report of European Council Committee of Rehabilitation and Integration of Disabled Persons (CD-P-PER). http://cm.coe.int/Ap/rehab/ntn/rd/2001/p-SG.35.6e (visited 2007 08 30).

10. Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning confirmation of Lithuanian national conception of development of information society. No. 229, 2001 02 28.
11. Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning Confirmation of Strategy on the Development of Information Society in Lithuania. No. 625, 2005 06 08.
12. Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning confirmation of strategy of public administration development till 2010. No. 488, 2004 04 28.
13. Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning confirmation of conception e-government. No. 2115, 2002 12 31.
14. Social Integration of Disabled Persons (2005). Report of Statistical Department of Lithuanian Republic Government. http://www.ndt.lt/files/File/statistika/statistika_2005.doc (visited 2007 08 30).
15. Lithuanian Law on Equal Opportunities. No. IX – 1826.
16. Lithuanian government resolution regarding confirmation of national programme of 2003-2012 years of social integration of disabled Nr.850, 2002 06 07.
17. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0. W3C Recommendation 5-May-1999. http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT.
18. Resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government concerning common demands of state websites. No. 480, 2003 04 18.
19. Order of Director of Committee of Information Society Development. No. T-40, 2004 03 31.