

## **Telecentre Europe network goes live at EC e-Inclusion event**

Digital inclusion got a boost across Europe today, with the launch of a new network which aims to give everyone an equal opportunity to make the most of technology.

The **Telecentre-Europe** network was launched in Vienna at the e-Inclusion Ministerial Conference. Made up of organisations from sixteen EU member states and a further seven European nations, the new partnership creates a huge opportunity for developing digital inclusion networks right across the continent.

Around 40% of Europe's population – some 300 million people - live in digital exclusion. In today's knowledge based society, digital technologies represent a gateway to personal, economic and social development, and without it the future potential of individuals, communities and whole countries is curtailed.

Telecentres are publicly accessible places that provide access and training to use computers, the internet and other digital technologies. In doing so they help millions of people develop essential 21st century skills that help them find jobs, access public services and improve daily life.

Paul Timmers, Head of the eInclusion Unit and Directorate-General for the Information Society at the European Commission, said: "I welcome the work of the Telecentre-Europe network which has been taking place behind the scenes during this year, and I'm delighted to see the official launch taking place at e-Inclusion conference. The European Commission's e-Inclusion policy seeks to provide digital competences and opportunities for the disadvantaged, and to assure that ICT policy and programs are effective at grass-roots level. The activities of these centres contribute directly to what we are trying to achieve, in line with the goals of the Lisbon agenda and the Riga Declaration on e-inclusion."

Also on hand with praise for the new network was the UK's Deputy Digital Inclusion Minister Wayne David MP. He added: "Across Europe, digital exclusion is beginning to be recognised as a catalyst and even a root cause of social exclusion. The battle against poverty and

inequality now has a digital front, and the members and supporters of Telecentre-Europe are leading the way by joining their considerable forces. Innovation and collaboration will be key in driving back the digital divide, and I'm both excited about the network's potential, and delighted to have been a part of its launch onto the e-Inclusion stage."

Spass Kostov, Project Manager of the iCentres Association in Bulgaria, and a member of the network, explained the benefits to his organisation: "One of the crucial challenges for our national network is to become self-sustainable. Telecentre-Europe represents a great environment to address this issue and come up with good ideas."

Gabi Barna is Managing Director at EOS Romania and Co-Chair of the Telecentre-Europe Steering Committee, alongside Ian Clifford, Business Development Manager at UK online centres. Gabi explained: "Our aim is provide millions of Europeans with the information skills, motivation and access they need to benefit from and contribute to the European knowledge economy. There are great things happening on digital inclusion at local, regional or national levels, but we believe there is a great opportunity for collaboration and motivation at a European level. By sharing wider knowledge and resource we can better tackle digital disadvantage everywhere, and the development of Telecentres-Europe is a bold step towards real and universal inclusion."

Ian continued: "Accepting that some people will never be able to access technology – that digital inequality is *'just the way things are'* - does a great disservice to millions of people. This indifference is accepting that they cannot have wider life chances or better employment opportunities, and that it's okay to limit their choices as consumers, parents, learners and members of a community. As the telecentres on the ground and at the forefront of digital inclusion, we know these outcomes are neither inevitable nor acceptable. Let's include everyone, everywhere, and make digital indifference, and the digital divide a thing of the past."

Sylvie Laffarge, Director of Community Affairs, Microsoft EMEA concluded: "Microsoft is extremely proud and pleased to support Telecentre-Europe. By connecting unique projects across the continent which share certain mission, values and work, we see the potential to take public-access computing and training to new levels, whilst ensuring people across Europe have the opportunity to gain skills critical to the knowledge age."

**Ends**

## Notes for Editors

- Population of EU27 = 540m, 40% do not use internet = 216m (EC, i2010 Interim Report 2008). Population of wider European region is estimated at **730m** (UN, 2008), with around **40% not using the internet** (Benchmarking Digital Inclusion, Gov3, 2005) = **292m**
- **Telecentre-Europe** Network has a growing membership. Founded in April 2008, the Telecentre-Europe community currently includes 151 telecentre practitioners, programme leaders and funding and development partners from 73 organisations in 23 European countries and a further 11 nations across the globe. Visit [www.telecentre-europe.org](http://www.telecentre-europe.org) for further details.
- Telecentre-Europe estimates that the European region contains 100,000 telecentres with more than 250,000 staff and 100,000 volunteers. Average usage numbers from the member organisations suggest that these telecentres work directly with at least 25 million digitally excluded citizens per year across the European region. Individual telecentres often belong to regional or national networks of telecentres in their respective countries.
- The Steering Committee of Telecentre-Europe comprises national or regional telecentre network organisations from Romania, UK, Russia, Spain, Belgium, and Poland.
- **Educating for an Open Society** (EOS) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to achieve e-Inclusion in Romanian communities by providing opportunities for all members to acquire the skills and abilities required for their full participation in building an all inclusive knowledge society. For more information please visit [www.eos.ro](http://www.eos.ro)
- **UK online centres** provide millions of people with access to technology and support in using it. There are thousands of centres across England offering free or low cost access to the internet and email, delivering online courses and encouraging people to progress onto further learning. For more information please visit [www.ukonlinecentres.com](http://www.ukonlinecentres.com)
- **iCentres Association** is a network of more than 100 telecentres in Bulgaria offering affordable internet access, ICT training, and local small business support. For more information please visit <http://www.icentres.net>
- **Microsoft** (Nasdaq "MSFT") was founded in 1975, and is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential.