



# e-Skills and Employability

A learning and networking event for NGOs

Report from the Barcelona Workshop

June 2007



Photo by: Pawel Makowiecki – Institute for Responsible Business, POLAND

Analysis and Report Prepared by:

Maria Garrido  
Nancy Garland



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**Telecentre.org** is a collaborative initiative of Microsoft, Canada's International Development Research Centre and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, which aims to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of community technology programs [www.telecentre.org](http://www.telecentre.org)



**Esplai Foundation** is a nonprofit organization in Spain that works to transform society and favors social inclusion. Esplai manages the *Red Connecta* project, a network of cyber rooms focused on improving the digital literacy of people at risk of digital exclusion, including youth, women, the unemployed, ethnic minorities and disabled individuals [www.fundacionesplai.org](http://www.fundacionesplai.org).

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## Executive Summary

The report on the Presidency Conclusions of the March 2000 Lisbon European Council outlined the basic challenges before Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It emphasized the urgent need to meet a number of strategic objectives, including employment, economic growth and social cohesion, which would require a radical transformation of the European development processes. Furthermore, the report established the primary method for achieving these goals: transformation to a knowledge-driven economy and society, based on the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), innovation and improving existing infrastructure. Thus, the Lisbon strategy has linked the future development of Europe with achieving a dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy, and has established ICT and e-skills development at its heart.

NGOs, civil society organizations, and the telecentres they support are an integral part of the movement toward the 21<sup>st</sup> century European vision. Telecentres – public places where people can get access computers, the Internet and other technologies to gather information, communicate with others and develop e-Skills to find better employment opportunities – are a key development intervention in this arena. On June 19<sup>th</sup> 2007, twenty NGO practitioners from across Europe gathered at the **e-Skills and Employability Workshop**, held at Fundacion Esplai in Barcelona, to share best practices and discuss new ways to grow and sustain efforts to support economic empowerment through this field (SEE APPENDIX 1 FOR LIST OF PARTICIPANTS). Co-organized by telecentre.org and the Esplai Foundation, the workshop provided a venue for participants to share ideas, develop priorities for further growth and programmatic development, and learn new skills to take back to their own projects on e-skills for employability. The term e-Skills refers to the knowledge and basic competences required for the effective use and application of ICTs by the individual that allows her/him to succeed in the knowledge society.

This report summarizes the main themes discussed in the workshop and the next steps to further collaboration and networking among NGOs. The workshop articulated many commonalities between the NGOs. **Motivations** for running programs fell into four categories: to provide bridges to training for clients, to build a competitive workforce, to improve clients' self-esteem and self-confidence, and to create innovative and successful cross-sectoral partnerships. Best practices included integrating employability goals into e-skills programs and collaborating with other NGOs, local or national governments, or the private sector to provide opportunities as varied as more advanced training to job placement. Common challenges included **financial sustainability and improving NGO capacity** (human resources, infrastructure, and training materials).

**In the policy arena**, NGOs discussed concrete strategies to strengthen their voice and to build bridges with the European Union to advance policy issues. The most important step that participant NGOs decided to take was to form a networking platform that consolidated their work and defined clearly their social mission. This network, participant NGOs agreed, can help them find among other things, new funding opportunities for their programs, such as, applying jointly to the European Structural Funds.

In light of these discussions, participant NGOs resolved to establish a mechanism for knowledge sharing through which telecentres can collaborate on developing training curriculum, monitoring and evaluation tools, benchmarking impact to communities, finding funding opportunities and influencing policy at the European level. **Telecentres.Europe** aims to be a viable network of telecentres and practitioners by 2010, serving as a place for members to collaborate and share experiences. It also seeks to be recognized as an organization able and qualified to advise decision-makers on strategies surrounding e-skills and ICT.

Non-governmental and civil society organizations play a key role in bringing the benefits of ICT to those sectors of society that remain on the disadvantaged side of the economic and digital divide. Telecentres are among the key development interventions in Europe whose goals and priorities entirely match the Lisbon strategy and fully embrace the principles of e-Inclusion stated in the Riga Declaration. Through combining innovative approaches to e-skills training with social inclusion programs, telecentres present a unique opportunity to reach those groups that are at the heart of the e-Inclusion goals: unemployed people, vulnerable youth, disadvantaged women, people with disabilities, and the elderly. The commitment to provide all European citizens with a set of basic e-skills and the media competency to thrive in a knowledge-based society was reinforced in the Riga Declaration of 2003<sup>1</sup>. Strengthening the capacity of disadvantaged groups to effectively use ICT-enabled technologies in their everyday lives opens unique windows of opportunity for these individuals to improve their living standards and participate more actively in the democratic life of their communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The Riga Declaration was supported by Ministries and representatives from thirty-four countries, the Declaration establishes e-Inclusion as one of the core building blocks of this ambitious strategy to make the European Union “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/events/ict\\_riga\\_2006/doc/declaration\\_riga.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/ict_riga_2006/doc/declaration_riga.pdf)

## 1. Summary of Barcelona meeting (sessions, participants, format and themes)

The workshop combined knowledge-sharing conversations between participants with presentations of innovative projects, expert panels, and a field visit to one of Esplai Foundation's telecentres. The two-day meeting was very collegial in nature and provided plenty of opportunities for participants to learn from each other and find suitable ways to network and collaborate. Representatives from the private sector and the government were also present, enriching the conversation, expanding partnership opportunities for participant NGOs, and helping create bridges for policy collaboration.

A pre-event survey<sup>2</sup> allowed the organizers to understand more deeply the expectations of participants, and to tailor the themes of the conference included in the agenda. Appendix 2 details the two-day workshop agenda, comprised of four main themes guiding the discussions:

1. Practices that work for running e-skills for employability programs
2. Sustainability and NGO capacity
3. Fitting NGOs into the policy landscape
4. Opportunities for networking and collaboration

The two-day dialogue demonstrated that Telecentres can contribute substantially to Europe's development objectives. The conversations on best practices, sustainability, policy, and networking provided a comprehensive landscape for participating NGOs to sharpen their approaches, management, services, and content to more effectively achieve their social mission and the broader goal of creating a cohesive and inclusive European knowledge society.

### 1.1 MOTIVATIONS OF NGOS FOR RUNNING *E-SKILLS FOR EMPLOYABILITY* PROGRAMS: WHY THEIR ROLE MATTERS

The workshop opened with a group exercise to discuss the motivations, challenges, and opportunities of NGOs running e-skills for employability programs. This session was crucial to set up the collaborative atmosphere that nourished the rest of the event because it highlighted the commonalities that participant NGOs had and the similar challenges they face for sustaining and scaling up their e-skills programs. The differences in country, culture, language, program social mission, and NGO target group seemed to blur when these similarities surfaced. This strengthened the cohesion among participants, while implicitly underscoring the value of collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and resources.

The motivations of NGOs for running e-skills for employability programs highlighted during this session can be clustered into four interrelated categories:

#### 1. PROVIDE BRIDGES TO TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR PEOPLE WITH NO OTHER OPTION TO IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS

The demand for e-skills training programs from people without digital literacy skills is increasing at a dramatic pace, and in many regions of the European Union the training provided by participant NGOs is the only free or accessible program for low-income groups. Providing bridges to these programs for

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<sup>2</sup> The University of Washington designed the pre-event survey, analyzed and presented the data

people who would otherwise face further poverty and marginalization is one of the main motivations guiding the work of these NGOs.

## 2. BUILD A COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE

In many regions of the European Union, the unemployment rate is as high as thirty percent. Preparing older and future generations of the workforce with a set of basic e-skills is an entry ticket for today's job market. The motivation of creating opportunities for the social and economic progress of individuals is at the heart of many NGOs' e-skills training programs. Combining e-skills with employment-related training - entrepreneurship, job searching, on-the-job training, etc - participant NGOs provide disadvantaged groups with the skills necessary to make them more competitive in the job market. This was noted by several participants as completely consistent with Europe's Lisbon agenda.

## 3. IMPROVE BENEFICIARIES SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF CONFIDENCE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

An approach to e-skills training rooted in the motivation for social inclusion is one major driving force of NGOs working in this area. As discussed by the participant NGOs, technical skills alone do not address broader issues of equality and inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Increasing self-esteem and self confidence of individuals encourages people to become more active in the development of their community and to participate meaningfully in society. It also empowers individuals to transform e-skills into life skills and become lifelong learners. These motivations align nicely with the e-Inclusion strategy outlined in the Riga Declaration that links e-skills training with social inclusion as a path toward greater cohesion among citizens of the European Union.

**Why do we run e-skills programs?**

**“To build a competitive workforce that reports back to the Lisbon Agenda”**



Photo by: Mark Surman – telecentre.org

## 4. CREATE INNOVATIVE AND SUCCESSFUL CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are crucial for the implementation and improvement of e-skills training programs. The opportunity to collaborate with other NGOs, the private sector, and the government contributes to building NGO capacity to more effectively reach the target groups, and to make the training more relevant to the social and economic needs of the communities. NGOs are finding innovative ways to collaborate with other actors to expand the array of training and services they provide, to tailor e-skills training programs to the needs of the job market, and to advance policy, to name a few. These partnerships not only bring more resources to the NGOs, but also and probably more importantly, they open windows of opportunity to work collaboratively on a long and sustained e-Inclusion and e-skills strategy.

Even though there is a strong motivation from different stakeholders to collaborate, this is still a work in progress with a lot of room for improvement. The Barcelona gathering provided a venue for NGOs, the private sector, and the European Union commission to find synergies and learn the value that each can bring to the table to develop a long-term and sustained e-Inclusion strategy. However, more work is required to identify where the synergies lie and how these synergies can actually be transformed into bridges for further collaboration, dialogue, and action. Recognizing the commonalities on e-Inclusion goals among public, private, and civil society is only the first step, but further efforts are needed to clearly define the complementary roles each one can play, the incentives, and the commitment to follow the path from dialogue to action.

## 2. Running e-skills for employability programs: Practices that work

This section provides a brief overview of the NGOs that participated in the conference. It outlines the ways they interact with one another both ideologically and in parallel ways with the other organizations, governments and industries in their countries (SEE APPENDIX 3 FOR FULL MAPPING ANALYSIS) for implementing or improving e-skills training programs for employability and social inclusion.

### 2.1 OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANT NGOS E-SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMS

In terms of the **target groups** the NGOs attending the workshop focused, overwhelmingly, on providing training and services for unemployed people (73%), followed by the general population (60%) and programs for youth and children (40%). Thirty-three percent of groups responded that they served seniors, with 20% and 13% reporting they serve immigrants or the disabled, respectively. Some organizations also provide training for civil servants in government agencies.

Though the size of telecentres each NGO administers varies greatly, the NGOs surveyed combined have more than **600 CTCs/Telecentres across 17 countries**. The number of telecentres each NGO administers ranges widely, from 100 in one country to 4 in another. Most of the NGOs that attended the conference have more than three years of experience running e-skills programs, with only two of the organizations reporting having less than one year of experience providing e-skills training. Through their e-skills programs, these NGOs currently **provide training opportunities for more than one million people in marginalized communities**, and they plan to expand their programs considerably over the next three years.

#### PRACTICES THAT WORK

**Trust is key to engage learners in e-skills training**

“All of our e-skills training takes place in local community-based centres trusted by the learners. All the courses have an element of improving motivation and self esteem, as well as skills training and job search”

**Lynda Austin – Black Country Consortium, UK**

### 2.2 INTEGRATING EMPLOYABILITY GOALS INTO E-SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMS

Improving employment opportunities for target groups is a goal for all the NGOs that attended the Barcelona conference. The importance of employability as a goal varies across NGOs. The majority of NGOs consider employability their primary or among their primary goals, while only 5 NGOs consider it one among many goals.

NGOs have less experience running employability programs than they do managing e-skills training programs, but the difference is not very significant. Almost 60% (9 NGOs) have between 3-5 years of experience running employability programs, while six have less than one year’s experience. Again, it should be noted that many of these organizations have social programs that predate their involvement with e-skills in general, and with e-skills for employability in particular.

PRACTICES THAT WORK	
<p><b>Combining e-skills with soft skills training, and access to a network of employers</b></p>	<p>“The center combines four kinds of activities: 1.The Free Employment Information Service, 2.The Counseling Service, 3.The Job Club and 4.Services to Enterprises”. It appeals to all people regardless of age, qualification or duration of unemployment. ”</p> <p><b>Maria Pouliou – Center of Employment and Entrepreneurship of the Municipality of Athens, GREECE</b></p>

The organizations incorporate employability goals into their training programs, services and other activities in a variety of ways. The strategies they use to make employability an objective of their programs depends on their target group, their social mission, the resources available, the capacity of the organization, and the partnerships they establish to serve this goal. Some strategies are:

- a. Providing e-skills and other employment-related training tailored to the local labor demand
- b. Combining different activities – training, employment information service, job counseling, and on the job training - to make clients better prepared for employment.
- c. Offering access to a network of employers and human resources consulting services
- d. Providing e-skills and entrepreneurship training to strengthen the capacity of small and medium enterprises

### 2.3 NGO PARTNERSHIPS WITH DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS: COLLABORATION MATTERS

#### a. NGO COLLABORATION WITH OTHER NGOs OR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Collaboration and partnership with a wide array of actors lies at the heart of NGOs’ strategy to improve the effectiveness of e-skills programs, enhance the visibility of their programs, and reach more people. As highlighted during the workshop, the most extensive collaboration happens among NGOs. In fact, 73% of participating NGOs collaborate on extensive level with other NGOs or community organizations. NGOs use this type of collaboration mostly to provide Basic ICT skills training, other skills training, and job placement services.

#### b. NGO COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL AND/OR NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

NGOs also collaborate extensively with local or national governments. Fifty-three percent of the NGOs surveyed reported that they collaborated considerably with their local or national government, including collaboration to provide job placement services, certification or support

services. Nearly half of these NGOs also collaborate with the government or private sector to tailor e-skills programs to local labor needs, or with government agencies to advance policy initiatives.

PRACTICES THAT WORK	
<p><b>Partnering with governments to provide on-the-job training to youth</b></p>	<p>“We partner with the Secretariat of European Affairs to provide 16 internships for youth at the Secretariat”</p> <p><b>Aleksandra Vidanovic - Balkan Children and Youth Foundation, MACEDONIA</b></p>

Examples of best practices from NGOs collaborating with local and/or national governments:

- Tailoring e-skills programs to local labor needs (iCentres in Bulgaria with the Ministry of State; EOS in Romania with the Ministry of Work, Social Solidarity and Family; LIKTA in Latvia with the Ministry of Labor)
- Certifying e-skills training programs (EOS in Romania with the National Agency for Adult training for a certified General IT skills course; BCC in UK with the Regional Development agency for e-skills and employability training; W2F in Lithuania)
- Providing e-skills training to civil servants (iCentres in Bulgaria with the Ministry of State and Administration; CITEVE in Portugal with Microsoft, the government and the textile industry)
- Advancing national e-skills policy initiative (BCC in UK with Digital Inclusion England Unit; W2F in Lithuania with the Ministry of Education, Science and Labor Exchange; CEE in Greece with the Municipality of Athens; EOS in Romania with Ministry of ICT)

### c. NGO COLLABORATION WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Collaboration with the private sector happens in two different ways: 1) NGOs partnering with local and/or national companies to tailor e-Skills training programs to the job market and to provide on-the-job training opportunities to beneficiaries; and 2) NGOs receiving grant support from private sector's community investment programs. A marquee example of the latter form of collaboration, is Microsoft's Unlimited Potential Community Skills Program that grants software, cash, and curriculum to NGOs around the world (18 of the 20 participant NGOs have received Microsoft's support through this program) . In terms of the first kind of collaboration, currently, only one-third of the NGOs surveyed reported to collaborate with the private sector to make e-Skills training programs more relevant to local labor needs, but NGOs hope this will be expanded significantly in the future.

PRACTICES THAT WORK	
<p><b>Partnering with the private sector to provide e-skill training tailored to the demands of the job market</b></p>	<p>“We have launched 4G University project which is providing made to measure re-skilling courses for suitable disabled job applicants to employers according to their needs of specific job positions.”</p> <p><b>Rudolf Kubik – Charta 77, CZECH REPUBLIC</b></p>

Examples of best practices from NGOs collaborating with the private sector:

- Tailoring e-skills programs to the demands of the job market (Charta 77 in the Czech Republic developed the 4GUniversity program to fulfill employer needs)
- Expanding NGO capacity to provide e-skills training programs (iCentres in Bulgaria partnered with Microsoft to provide e-skills training to different target groups; BCC in UK with Microsoft to regenerate business in local communities)
- Providing certified e-skills training (iCentres in Bulgaria partnered with CISCO IT Academy)

As described above, multi-stakeholder partnerships are pivotal to improve the capacity of NGOs to run more effectively e-skills training programs. The ability of an organization to actively engage with a wide

array of factors can determine to an important extent the success and long-term sustainability of e-skills programs for employability and social inclusion. Building productive partnerships is not an easy endeavor, but the momentum set by the Riga Declaration is opening doors for different stakeholders to acknowledge the value that each brings to the table.

<b>PRACTICES THAT WORK</b>	
<b>Multi-stakeholder partnerships are key to improve NGOs capacity to run effective and more sustainable e-skills training programs</b>	<p>“FIT leads an industry partnership working in collaboration with government, local development agencies and marginalized communities, committed to the socio-economic transformation of disadvantaged people through the development and coordination of innovative ICT training opportunities as a bridge to employment and progression.”</p> <p><b>Fasttrack to IT (FIT), IRELAND</b></p>

### 3. Sustainability of e-skills Programs: NGOs as Social Entrepreneurs

The morning sessions during the second day of the workshop were devoted to discussing the challenges that NGOs face to sustain e-skills training programs and the different strategies that can be pursued to make the programs more effective. All the participants in the workshop acknowledged that sustainability has many different dimensions, but two specific areas came to the fore: 1) Financial Sustainability, and 2) Improving NGO Capacity.

The members of the sustainability panel:

**Mark Surman, Director of telecentre.org.** telecentre.org is a collaborative initiative of Microsoft, Canada's International Development Research Centre and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation which aims to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of community technology programs.

**Sanyu Karani, CEO of Econet.** Mr. Karani is an expert in project management and EU structural funds. He has led the EU Grants Advisory program in cooperation with Microsoft, HP and Intel over the last two years, working with SMEs, NGOs and other stakeholders.

**Melissa Pailthorp, Microsoft Corporate Citizenship.** Ms. Pailthorp is the regional lead for the Community Skills Technology Program for Central and Eastern Europe.

**THE CHALLENGES** that participant NGOs considered major stumbling blocks to sustainably running e-skills programs for employability and social inclusion are:

a. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY:

- Finding donors and sponsors for e-skills programs
- Developing social entrepreneurship approaches for their programs
- Applying to local, national, and EU government funding
- Developing strategies to partner with governments and the private sector
- Establishing for-profit ventures as part of the existing CTC/Telecenters

“The money needs to be considered a social investment that allows the organization to reach that long-term strategy”

Mark Surman – telecentre.org

b. IMPROVING NGO CAPACITY: HUMAN RESOURCES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND TRAINING MATERIALS

- Developing train the trainers programs to improve instructor's quality
- Improving the quality and quantity of training and services offered
- Developing/Sharing localized training materials for different target groups
- Improving resources available for trainers (for example, e-learning resources)
- Measuring social impact of their programs (beyond anecdotes)

#### 3.1 CONCRETE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SUSTAINABILITY AND NGO CAPACITY

The conversation about the many challenges NGOs faced to run effectively and sustain, in the long run, e-Skills training programs concluded with the proposal of five concrete strategies that can help the organizations achieve e-Inclusion goals:

- Build a networking platform that allows NGOs to share best practices, training materials for learners and instructors, and

“Leadership, Strategic Vision, and Cross-sector partnership are key components for NGO sustainability in the long-run”

Melissa Pailthorp – Microsoft

training to improve the management and business skills of NGO staff. Collaboration and sharing allow NGOs to leverage from different expertise and to build a common voice that strengthens their position at the national and European Union level.

PRACTICES THAT WORK: SUSTAINABILITY	
<b>Co-financing is the best strategy for financial sustainability. Bring different private and public sources</b>	<p>“We provide free services to unemployed and pensioners, and other excluded groups. We receive money from the government to train civil servants, and from employers that are willing to pay for their workers.”</p> <p><b>Mara Jakobsone LIKTA, LATVIA</b></p>

- Create multi-stakeholder partnerships and develop cross-border projects to attract the attention of national governments and to have access to the EU structural funds.
- Embrace social entrepreneurship to become less dependent on grants and look at the people you serve as social clients rather than beneficiaries. Having a social value mechanism can incentive people to pay for services they considered vital to improve their living standards.
- Develop long-term sustainability strategies that have: leadership, strategic vision, and multi-stakeholder partners.
- Evaluate and monitor the progress of the projects to show the social impact of the NGOs' programs that goes beyond anecdotes.

Based on the discussions during this session and proposed next steps, the participant NGO resolved to establish a mechanism for knowledge sharing through which telecentres can collaborate on developing training curriculum, monitoring and evaluation tools, benchmarking impact to communities, finding funding opportunities and influencing policy at the European level. The proposed strategy calls for the creation of a network of telecenters that consolidates the voice of NGOs working on e-Skills programs and provides a venue for collaboration and sharing: Telecentres.Europe.

## 4. Fitting NGOs into the policy landscape

In addition to sustainability, the other major theme guiding the discussions during the second day of the workshop was policy. The policy panel highlighted opportunities for NGOs active in providing basic e-skills to disadvantaged communities to participate in and benefit more closely from the EU agenda. The panelists provided an overview of the e-Inclusion and e-skills policy landscape and discussed strategies for NGOs to maximize their opportunities for greater uptake, access to funds, and capacity building at the national and EU level.

The members of the policy panel:

**Pierre Baussand, Policy Officer of the European Platform of Social NGOs.** He leads the Platform work on Fundamental Rights, Anti-Discrimination, Employment and Migration. The Social Platform was established in 1995 and brings together more than forty European non-governmental organizations, federations, and networks which are working to build an inclusive society

**Elena Bonfiglioli, from Microsoft Corporate Citizenship team,** leads the company efforts on skills and Employability and currently chairs the European Employability Alliance.

**Chema Gil, Director of Esplai Foundation.** This organization works with a network of 120 NGOs working in different social inclusion areas, digital literacy is one of them.

**Andre Richier from the EU Commission, Directorate General Enterprise and Industry,** is leading the policy work on e-skills, in particular the preparatory work of the upcoming e-skills communication.

**Sanyu Karani, CEO of Econet** moderated the debate. He is an expert in project management and EU structural funds. He has led the EU Grants Advisory program in cooperation with Microsoft, HP and Intel over the last two years working with SMEs, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Members from NGOs, the private sector, and the EU Commission, shared concrete ideas for NGOs to partake in strategic momentum at the EU level and make their voices heard as a powerful coalition working toward a common vision for Europe's growth and jobs.

### 4.1 LINKING NGO EFFORTS ON E-SKILLS FOR EMPLOYABILITY TO THE EU E-SKILLS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY STRATEGY: WHY THEIR ROLE MATTERS

The policy panel conversation revolved around two basic questions: Why is it imperative for NGOs to participate in policy? And what are some concrete strategies to have their voices heard at the policy level? The momentum in policy that the Lisbon Agenda has created offers a unique opportunity for NGOs to share experiences, engage, and become active in shaping the EU agenda. Not doing so risks leaving the NGO sector outside the policy environment.

As mentioned earlier, the role of NGOs working on e-skills for employability and social inclusion programs is critical to reaching disadvantaged and at-risk groups. Their work mirrors the ideals of the e-Inclusion and e-skills strategy outlined by the Riga Declaration and, for this reason, their participation in policy discussions must be actively pursued. The five major action lines envisaged in the forthcoming EU policy Communication on e-skills (to be adopted on September 2007) provide solid ground on which to establish connections between the NGO efforts on e-skills development to the broader EU agenda and seek opportunities for their participation in the realm of policy. Three of these action lines in this long-term e-skills agenda are of particular relevance for linking NGO efforts to this area.

## 1. PROMOTING A LONG TERM COOPERATION AND MONITORING PROGRESS

The Commission proposes to promote dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders and ensure a continuous monitoring of the progress as well as to promote visibility. Maintaining a continuous dialogue with stakeholders – Member States, industry, trade unions, academia, etc. , is one of the most important activities within this action line. NGOs need to become active participants in the dialogue not only at the European Union level but also through their national governments, industry partners, and other NGOs (for example, the Platform for European Social NGOs<sup>3</sup>). NGO input on the progress of e-skills training programs will serve to better ground the European Union’s agenda in the realities of daily life, providing a window into the challenges of and best practices for effectively reaching disadvantaged populations

“NGOs are only one piece in a long value chain and we need to enable partnerships to make the value change successful”

Elena Bonfiglioli – Microsoft

## 2. FOSTERING EMPLOYABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Commission will launch a major initiative in 2008 dedicated to halving the digital divide by 2010. Several initiatives have already been undertaken toward this goal, including review of Member State policies and initiation of partnerships with ICT industry leaders. This movement encourages multi-stakeholder partnerships, and is already looking toward professional organizations of SMEs to develop education programs specific to the ICT needs of this area. This focus on multi-stakeholder partnerships and education programs provides a significant opportunity for NGOs to take part more formally in this initiative. Many NGOs already pursue missions of social inclusion and/or employability, and have increasingly been including ICT and e-skills training into their programming. Increased NGO participation has the potential to provide a unique competence to the agenda of employability and social inclusion. It will create stronger multi-stakeholder partnerships, help integrate efforts more smoothly into civil society, take advantage of existing knowledge and expertise, and more effectively pursue the goal of increased employability and social inclusion.

## 3. MAKING BETTER AND GREATER USE OF E-LEARNING TOOLS

The Commission currently supports two development and networking activities to promote the greater use of e-Learning tools. The first promotes the exchange of e-skills learning and training resources based on successful projects. Currently this exchange is largely limited to projects supported by the e-Learning program. Here again, the experience of NGOs has the potential to provide a wealth of information, best practices and materials to the joint effort. In particular, the wide range of experiences across the European landscape and the diversity and community-focus of many NGO programs serve to provide a more nuanced picture of the opportunities, flexibility and successful strategies available in e-skills learning and training.

### 4.2 CONCRETE STRATEGIES FOR NGO PARTICIPATION IN THE E-SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY EU AGENDA

The twin agendas of e-Inclusion and e-skills are of paramount importance to achieve Europe’s job and growth goals. They share two important dimensions: employability and digital literacy. NGOs are a key

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.socialplatform.org/>

factor for its success. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and especially partnerships amongst NGOs and also with the private sector are showing signs of progress, but more can and should be done to achieve long term success. Three concrete strategies discussed during the policy session for NGOs to strengthen their voice in the policy realm are:

- The most important step that participant NGOs must take is to form a networking platform that consolidates their work and defines clearly their social mission. This mission needs to outline not only the value that e-skills bring to social inclusion and employability, but also how they can be connected to advance other societal goals (human rights, women's rights, etc.). This network can help participant NGOs find new funding opportunities for their programs, for example, applying jointly to the European Structural Funds
- Engage with different government agencies, not only with those that are working explicitly on e-Inclusion and e-skills agenda. NGOs need to develop partnerships with Ministries of Labor, Science and Technology, Education, etc., to bring a multidimensional perspective to their work and to increase visibility of the value of their work.
- Build on what is done at the national level and take that experience to influence the direction of e-skills initiatives at the international and European levels. Strategize to continue networking and consolidate a voice that empowers NGOs position in the value.

"We need a mechanism to better identify the different roles that NGOs can play and how they can contribute to a long-term e-skills agenda"

Andre Richier - EU Commission

The strongest message that surfaced from the conversation on NGOs participation in policy was clear: Form a networking platform that consolidates the voice of NGOs and demonstrates the value these organizations bring to the Lisbon goal of creating an inclusive European knowledge society.

"Build once voice to the European Union, the national governments, the private sector, and to society as a whole"

Chema Gil - Esplai Foundation

## 5. Conclusion and Next Steps for NGO collaboration and networking

European Union policy and the statements of NGOs at this meeting point in a similar direction, that of strengthening partnerships and working together. Sectors of society are already partnering internally and externally to build a cohesive agenda and provide greater leverage for change. Policy representatives highlighted the fact that in order to bring attention to these issues and programs at a European level, NGOs must work together to build a common platform. This dovetails with the general feeling among NGOs at this meeting that there is benefit to information sharing and collaboration.

In particular, the NGOs described four main areas where collaboration could have great benefit:

1. Working together to develop a social enterprise approach, which would support the sustainability of NGOs.
2. A second area is information sharing and best practices exchange, coupled with programming support. Through this kind of collaboration, NGOs could benefit from other organizations' experiences and build stronger programming from the outset, strengthening both the current and future state of the industry.
3. NGOs also saw benefit in working together to further research and establish benchmarks within the field, an area with significant potential for collaborating with industry and government.
4. Policy advocacy and increased policy participation was another area where NGOs saw benefit to working together, particularly on a transnational or European Union level.

In light of these conclusions and proposed next steps, participant NGOs resolved to establish a mechanism for knowledge sharing through which telecentres can collaborate on developing training curriculum, monitoring and evaluation tools, benchmarking impact to communities, finding funding opportunities and influencing policy at the European level. A core working team was selected to follow-up resolutions that would essentially lead into creation of a telecentre network for Europe. This team has since drafted a Strategy paper for the foundation of a network—Telecentres.Europe—whose mission is “to establish an effective communication and operational environment for national telecentre projects to collaborate, partner, and integrate resources toward achieving the European strategic goals for building the European Information Society.” Telecentres.Europe aims to be a viable network of telecentres and practitioners by 2010, serving as a place for members to collaborate and share experiences. It also seeks to be recognized as an organization able and qualified to advise decision-makers on strategies surrounding e-skills and ICT. Individual NGOs pledged to provide a variety of information and services toward this networking effort, including providing best practices and success stories, evaluation tools, data and statistics. On the relationships side of this network, NGOs also pledged to help with links to conferences, building a virtual community, and establishing partnerships and relationships.

Looking ahead to future meetings of this sector, participants in this conference noted many meeting strengths, including the quality of interaction between NGOs, the interactivity of sessions, and the concrete plans for action that derived from the meeting. They additionally noted the continued need for a clear agenda, opportunities for one-on-one interaction, and participation by different sectors to promote networking outside the NGO community as well as within it. The most important next steps for this sector and this network are continued sharing and creation of partnerships. This collaboration and cooperation supports the organic creation of a network, which will ultimately have the effect of building a shared agenda and stake in the future of this sector. In the words of one conference participant, “we want to join when we find it important for the people of [our city and country].” This network has great potential on so many levels, but at its center it must ensure that it holds value for the NGOs, meaning, in short, that they must see its value for their beneficiaries, the disadvantaged people of Europe.