

Working Group on ICT for Societal Challenges

Progress report III Senior Officials Meeting, Brussels, 16 and 17 April 2013

In a global economy, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are the new driving forces of development, as well as progress. The implementation of ICT in the daily routine of social, culture and economic relations has opened a vast range of possibilities of development and eliminated barriers of space and time between regions and communities. The Madrid Action Plan 2010-2012 emphasizes the ICT theme as crucial for development and proposes to “strengthen the integration of both regions in the Information Society and support the development of the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector and the reduction of the digital divide and digital illiteracy” (p. 1.e). The Madrid Action Plan was furthermore reinforced by the Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation (JIRI), which emphasized ICT as a political and thematic priority.

The main aim of the Working Group on ICT for Societal Challenges, is to enhance the cooperation and integration of Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union in ICT and thereby contribute to the mutual development of policies and inclusiveness in the field.

The ICT theme is horizontal to the societal challenges and supports the development of global priorities. With the aim of targeting the societal challenges broadly, the work of the ICT group is focused on e-Inclusion, e-Health, Smart Cities, Technology Platforms and Living Labs, addressing challenges in the fields of social cohesion, inclusiveness, sustainability and innovation. These four topics have been identified by the SOM Working Group on ICT as central for the development and cooperation among both regions.

The thematic priorities developed and implemented by the ICT working group in the timeframe 2011-2013 are:

1. Establishment and maintenance of an EU-LAC Observatory on ICT for Social Inclusion upon the initiatives already existing in the region.
Initial work on the Terms of Reference and scope of the observatory has been carried out under the ALCUE-Net project. The EU-LAC Observatory will be launched end 2013.

2. Networking actions:

- a. Latin American and Caribbean Network of Living Labs connected to the European networks
The network was created in early 2012 and gathers all relevant Living Labs and stakeholders in the LAC region with focus on sharing good practices and experiences.

- b. Thematically oriented Latin American Technology Platforms connected with European Technology Platforms
Initial talks with LAC TPs. During 2013-2014 specific networking activities will be carried out under the ALCUE-Net project.
 - c. Network of Smart Cities: promote the opportunities of Latin American megacities
Cooperation is at an initial stage, since Smart Cities was included as a topic in late 2012. The “ICT for better living” workshop on 15 April 2013 included a specific session on Smart Cities.
3. Joint projects in the use of ICT as a tool for local development
Initial talks on the establishment of a joint EU-LAC call in ICT. Process of defining possible topics and orientations.

The initiatives will be evaluated yearly in terms of impact through indicators such as number of visits to the web sites, the number of projects that are being promoted by the Working Group, as well as the number of participants and beneficiaries of the promoted projects.

The work of the ICT Working Group benefits local, national, regional and bi-regional development, creating synergies of research lines, critical mass through joining of forces and saving of resources in a multilateral cooperation scheme. Furthermore, the Working Group cooperates closely with the existing initiatives in the biregional context, such as RedCLARA, ECLAC, the five Latin American Technology Platforms and their European counterparts, the European Network of Living Labs, bi- and multilateral projects in the ICT field and cooperation projects funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union such as AMERICAS, while making efforts to build on previous projects like Pro-Ideal, FIRST and FORESTA. The INCO-Nets supporting cooperation with Latin America, Central America and the Caribbean, ALCUE-Net, ENLACE and EUCARINET respectively, also work toward strengthening participation at the bi-regional level.

The participating countries in the ICT Working Group are:

LAC participants

- Chile (co-leader) (Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica – CONICYT)
- Argentina (Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación Productiva – MINCYT)
- Bolivia (Ministerio de Educación – MINEDU)
- Colombia (COLCIENCIAS)
- Mexico (Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología - CONACYT)
- Nicaragua (Consejo Nicaragüense de Ciencia y Tecnología - CONICYT)
- Peru (CONCYTEC)
- Uruguay (Ministerio de Educación – MEC; and ANII)

EU participants

- Finland (co-leader) (Ministry of Education and VTT)
- Austria (Ministry for Science and Research - BMWF)
- France (Ministry of Higher Education and Research)
- Portugal (FCT)
- Spain (Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad – MINECO)
- European Commission