

Publishable executive summary

E-government for LOW Socio-economic sTatus groups - ELOST



The overall goal of ELOST is to increase awareness of and readiness towards innovative e-Government participation and usage among low socioeconomic status groups (LSGs). The project aims to increase the number of persons from LSGs able to use e-Government services as active citizens in a knowledge based society. To achieve this goal, it is important to understand the existing barriers to e-Government use by LSGs, future trends and potential impact of emerging technologies, along with new social patterns and their impact on low socioeconomic status groups. Mapping the current and future policies, needs, attitudes and readiness of LSGs with regard to e-Government is required for identifying barriers that hamper the participation of these citizens in the e-Government user community and for devising possible ways to overcome them. Fulfilling the goal requires developing a new strategy towards bringing LSGs closer to innovative e-Government. In order to provide a supportive e-Government environment for LSGs a multinational study has been performed on the policies and plans to introduce e-Government among LSGs in various countries.

The ELOST consortium consists of the following partners.

1. TAU - Tel-Aviv University, Israel: ICTAF - Interdisciplinary Center for Technological Analysis & Forecasting (Coordinator)
NIIS- Netvision Institute for Internet Studies
2. ICCR - Interdisciplinary Centre for Comparative Research in the Social Sciences, Austria
3. CIR - Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherche Comparative en Sciences Sociales, France
4. IMI - Institute of Mathematics and Informatics - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
5. TUB - Zentrum Technik und Gesellschaft (Centre for Technology and Society of Berlin University of Technology), Germany
6. UTA - Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Tampere, Finland

ELOST complements other EU projects about e-Government by its unique contribution: extensively focusing on e-Government use by persons from LSGs, defining the barriers pertaining to the different categories of LSGs and relating potential solutions and tools to the various barriers. Several complementary activities have been carried out in order to achieve the ELOST goal:

- State-of the art reports on the LSGs situation in a number of European countries regarding Internet and e-Government usage as well as policy programs and tools in this area.
- A web-based interactive toolbox on e-Government policy tools and programs (to be active and expanding after the project's completion).
- A field survey among citizens from LSGs, including focus groups, investigating their patterns of internet and e-Government use, their attitudes toward new communication technologies and the barriers they face;
- A cross-national comparative assessment on barriers and incentives for e-Government usage among LSGs;
- A complementary foresight study on technology-related barriers to e-Government use, future access means, ubiquity of e-Government services and potential benefit of emerging ICT technologies for LSGs facing different barriers.
- A policy design and formulation process resulting in policy recommendations for inclusive e-Government policy for LSGs.

ELOST have had a close cooperation with all members of society: policymakers in the government and municipalities, representatives from social organizations and representatives from the LSGs.

ELOST results have a major contribution to better understanding of the LSGs needs regarding e-Government usage. It also shed light on their needs and the main barriers that prevent them from using these services. These results, together with the findings of the ELOST foresight study about the potential contribution of technologies, are necessary for designing policy measures that could assist policy makers in the regional, municipal and governmental levels. A roadmap for designing such a policy and the factors that should be included in it are also provided by the ELOST recommendation report.

ELOST findings have been published in several public reports:

- A state-of-the-art review on the LSGs situation in European countries regarding Internet usage in general and e-Government in particular ([D1.1-
http://elost.org/D1-1.pdf](http://elost.org/D1-1.pdf)).
- A state-of-the-art review on policy programs and tools regarding e-Government as well as existing policies and experience ([D2.1-
http://elost.org/D2-1.pdf](http://elost.org/D2-1.pdf)).
- Interactive policy toolbox for e-Government – e4 ([http://e4-
info.eu/wiki/index.php/Main_Page](http://e4-info.eu/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)) System developed on the basis of Open Source Software (Media Wiki) for collaborative knowledge generation and interactive expert exchange, and an open source visualisation tool, TouchGraph. The e4 includes information on policy tools and programs regarding e-Government ([D2.2-
http://elost.org/D2-2.pdf](http://elost.org/D2-2.pdf) and ELOST website)
- Field survey results for each of the participating countries as well as the results of the focus groups. The report includes information on patterns of access and use of the Internet and e-Government among the low socio-economic strata of society ([D3.2-
http://elost.org/D3-2.pdf](http://elost.org/D3-2.pdf))

- Cross cultural analysis on LSGs and e-Government describing in detail their attitudes, barriers and incentives for using e-Government services (D5.2- <http://elost.org/D5-2.pdf>).
- Findings from the Foresight study on technology-related issues pertaining to the future use of e-Government by LSGs, including potential impact of selected emerging ICT technologies (D4.3- <http://elost.org/D4-3.pdf>).
- Policy plan and recommendations (D6.2- <http://elost.org/D6-2.pdf>).

ELOST indicates that LSGs should not be considered and treated as a single entity. There are many groups that fall into the category of an LSG. The groups are varying in each country. Each group may have its own distinctive characteristics and may face different barriers, and, therefore, require different solutions.

ELOST shows that LSGs are not included as a distinct group of e-Government policy in many countries. ELOST policy recommendations suggest that e-Inclusion and inclusive e-Government efforts must give priority to attitude changing processes. LSGs are clearly among the last groups of citizens to embrace information technologies, long after the Internet became a crucial part of everyday life. Diffusion of innovation theory and practice shows that the last segments to adopt an innovation need specialised effort in order to change their minds and hearts and to switch from non users to users. Such an effort should include an extensive use of change agents and opinion leaders. Since processes of changing attitudes can take a long time, they should be given a priority in inclusive e-Government policy planning. For every type of barrier (access, awareness, skills, and attitudes) that inhibits the use of e-Government by LSGs there are several solutions to choose from. Inclusive solutions should match these barriers and needs that in some cases are group-specific. New technologies, such as interactive TV and advanced language processing, may mitigate usage barriers of LSGs in the future. For some people, who may never use electronic means, human intermediaries are essential. Inclusive policy should be planned to address usage barriers of different groups simultaneously. A concrete schedule and time line as well as pre-determined quantitative measurements of success should be set for every policy element.