

# Strategy paper 2014-2016

## Mission

EASTIN – the European Assistive Technology Information Network – is the leading information system on assistive technology<sup>1</sup> in Europe, and world-wide, placing comprehensive and accurate information within the reach of every citizen.

The EASTIN system is operated by the EASTIN Association, a European network of member organisations running established national information systems in their Country.

The EASTIN website aggregates information from all these national systems and provides – in all European languages, and in a user-friendly and accessible manner – a comprehensive overview of the assistive technology products available in the European market, including technical details of each product and related helpful information (companies, projects, service providers, articles, case descriptions, ideas, etc.). It also provides access to further information in the national information system offering guidance for appropriate choices.

In the EASTIN website – and in the national systems that take part in the network – any interested visitors can find useful information for their everyday life or work: end-users of assistive technology, such as people with disabilities and their families; professionals in health and social services; manufacturers and suppliers of assistive products; researchers and technicians; policy-makers and public agencies involved in assistive technology provision.

The EASTIN network also includes National Contact Organisations in most European Countries, that are responsible for keeping the website up-to-date in each national language and are prepared to answer questions posted by people through the website in relation to assistive technology.

## Vision

The vision pursued by the EASTIN association is that every European citizen has ready access to high quality, impartial information about assistive technology, in all European languages.

By raising awareness and disseminating information and knowledge, the association intends to contribute to the empowerment of people with disabilities, to support independence, choice and control in relation to assistive technology, and to inform and develop the work of professionals involved in the disability field.

By providing a comprehensive and detailed overview of the European assistive technology market – independent of any commercial interest and displayed according to common standards – it makes it easier for companies involved in development, manufacturing and supply of assistive technology to make their products known by people all over Europe who need them.

By facilitating exchange of knowledge and experience on how assistive technology provision is organised in the various Countries, it supports the advancement of service delivery systems throughout Europe.

The EASTIN association also intends to be the forum where the partner Organisations share their expertise, help each other to continuously improve the quality of the service provided in their Countries through their national information

<sup>1</sup> The term “Assistive Technology” is meant to indicate any goods or service with technological content which is useful to compensate for certain functional limitations of people with disabilities in everyday life activities and in their involvement at work, in school and in social life.

systems, offer advice and support to partners who wish to create their own national information system if it doesn't exist yet, and discuss strategies to ensure their sustainability.

The EASTIN partner are committed to keep their national information systems and the EASTIN website at the leading edge of information technology and knowledge engineering, so as to increase web visibility, work with any Internet devices, facilitate efficient and user-friendly retrieval of the appropriate information that meets the user's needs.

Within the EASTIN association, the member Organisations have also the opportunity to initiate collaborative projects in the assistive technology area, and to share views that may contribute to the development of national policies.

## Organisation

The EASTIN Association was established in December 2006, as a result of a European project carried out by an international Consortium<sup>2</sup> led by the Don Gnocchi Foundation (Milano, Italy) and partially funded by the European Commission within the **eTen** programme<sup>3</sup>. The European Commission also contributed to further major developments of the EASTIN system within the **CIP ICT-PSP**<sup>4</sup> programme, through the **EASTIN-CL** and the **ETNA** projects.

It is a non-for-profit Organisation, with registered seat in Milano, Italy. Its partner Organisations include **Full Partners**, **Associate Partners**, and **External Partners**.

The governing Body of the EASTIN Association is the **EASTIN Assembly**, composed of one representative appointed by each **Full Partner** Organisations. The President and the Vice-President are elected by the Assembly. The core funding is ensured by a membership fee paid by each Full Partner Organisation every year.

### Full partners

Full Partners include the **four founding members** of the EASTIN Association (from Italy, Denmark, Germany, UK) plus **three members** that joined later from Belgium, France and The Netherlands.

Italy	<b>Fondazione Don Carlo Gnocchi Onlus</b> , based in Milano, responsible for the national information system "Portale SIVA" ( <a href="http://www.portale.siva.it">www.portale.siva.it</a> )
Denmark	<b>Socialstyrelsen</b> (Danish Board of Social Services, who took over the former Danish Centre for Assistive Technology), based in Odense, responsible for the national information system "Hjælpe-middelbasen" or "Assistive Technology Data" ( <a href="http://www.hmi-basen.dk">www.hmi-basen.dk</a> );
Germany	<b>Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln</b> , based in Köln, responsible for the national information system "REHADAT" ( <a href="http://www.rehadat.de">www.rehadat.de</a> );
UK	<b>Disabled Living Foundation</b> , based in London, responsible for the national information system "DLF-data" ( <a href="http://www.dlf.org.uk">www.dlf.org.uk</a> );
Belgium	<b>VAPH</b> (Flemish Agency for Disabled Persons), based in Brussels, responsible for the national information system "Vlibank" ( <a href="http://www.vlibank.be">www.vlibank.be</a> )
France	<b>Hacovie</b> , based in Lille, responsible for the national information system "Handicat" ( <a href="http://www.handicat.com">www.handicat.com</a> )
Netherlands	<b>VILANS</b> , based in Utrecht, responsible for the national information system "Hulpmiddelenwijzer" ( <a href="http://www.hulpmiddelenwijzer.nl">www.hulpmiddelenwijzer.nl</a> )

<sup>2</sup> Fondazione Don Carlo Gnocchi Onlus (Italy); Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln (Germany); Danish Centre for Assistive Technology (Denmark); Disabled Living Foundation (United Kingdom); Ceapat (Spain); IRV (The Netherlands)

<sup>3</sup> eTEN (Deploying Trans-European e-Services for all) was a programme of the European Commission facilitating the deployment of trans-European telecommunications networks services on the European market. Within eTEN, the EASTIN project was partially funded as a "market validation" project; it led to the harmonization of the national information systems of the six Consortium members, and their integration through a purposely developed web engine – the EASTIN website.

<sup>4</sup> CIP stands for "Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme". It included three operational programmes, one of them being the ICT-PSP (The Information Communication Technologies Policy Support Programme). Within ICT-PSP, EASTIN-CL (Crosslingual and multimodal Search in a Portal for Support of Assisted Living, led by Linguatex GmbH, Germany) was a "Pilot type B" project, which helped improve the linguistic intelligence of the EASTIN system. ETNA (European Thematic Network on Assistive Information Technology, led by Fondazione Don Gnocchi, Italy) was a large Thematic Network involving 23 partners from 13 EU Countries, which helped strengthen the EASTIN network and extend the abilities of the EASTIN website and search engine to cope with complex AT information, especially in relation to ICT products.

## Associate Partners

Associate Partners include **the National Contact Organisations** appointed for the European Countries:

Bulgaria	<b>CIST</b> (Center for Information Society Technology), Sofia University, based in Sofia
Cyprus	<b>European University Cyprus</b> , based in Nicosia
Estonia	<b>ASTANGU</b> Rehabilitation Centre, based in Tallin
Finland	<b>THL</b> (National Institute for Health & Welfare), based in Helsinki
Greece	<b>Disability Now</b> , based in Athens
Hungary	<b>NRSZH</b> (National Office for Rehabilitation and Social Affairs), based in Budapest
Ireland	<b>Citizens Information Board</b> , based in Dublin
Latvia	<b>National Rehabilitation Centre Vaivari</b> , Centre for technical remedies, based in Riga
Lithuania	<b>Center of technical aid for disabled people</b> at Ministry of Social Security and Labour, based in Vilnius
Luxembourg	<b>ADAPTH</b> , based in Bertrange
Norway	<b>Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service</b> , based in Oslo
Romania	<b>Fundatia Alpha Transilvană</b> , based in Târgu Mureș
Slovakia	<b>Košice University Access Centre</b> , based in Košice
Slovenia	<b>University Rehabilitation Institute</b> , based in Ljubljana
Spain	<b>Ceapat</b> (National Centre for Personal Autonomy and Assistive Technology), based in Madrid, responsible for the national system "Catálogo de Productos de Apoyo" ( <a href="http://www.catalogo-ceapat.org">www.catalogo-ceapat.org</a> )

Contacts are in progress to establish National Contact Organisations also in the following Countries: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Iceland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland.

## External Partners

They will include additional information providers to the EASTIN system that are not National Contact Organisations.

## Action

Since its foundation, the EASTIN Association has continuously worked at providing contents and improving the EASTIN website and its complex search engines. So far the system has been substantially re-engineered two times.

At the same time, all partner Organisations that run national databases plugged to EASTIN have carried out substantial improvements in their information system, in order to adapt to changes occurred in their national health and social systems, keep the pace of technological development and fulfil the harmonisation requirements agreed within the EASTIN network. Reciprocal knowledge and continuous mutual exchange of expertise has greatly contributed to that.

National Contact Organisations – a strategic development initiated in 2010 – have been established in most EU Countries. Most of them are governmental agencies having key role in national disability policies, others include well-acknowledged user organisations, major health services providers, academic institutions.

An International Seminar on Assistive Technology Service Delivery Systems has been organised in 2012 in conjunction with the AAATE (Association for the Advancement of Assistive technology in Europe), leading to a Position Paper that offers suggestion for improving national policies related to public assistive technology provision.

Today, the EASTIN website has achieved its maturity:

- it fully works in all languages of the European Union;
- it provides detailed information on over 70.000 products available in the European market;
- it provides a wealth of associated information;
- searches can be performed across all national information systems despite their different technical platforms;
- natural-language queries can be carried out in several languages, thanks to the linguistic knowledge base inherited from the EASTIN-CL project;
- products can be searched in a very detailed way – especially ICT-based products – thanks to the taxonomies and the search tools inherited by the ETNA project;

EASTIN Association – Piazza Morandi 6, 20121 Milano Italy – Fiscal/Vat code 05556280963



- the system is robust and flexible in such a way that any technical changes in national systems don't hamper the performance of the EASTIN engine;
- all the national system belonging to the network fully meet the national information needs.

In the pursue of the above vision, in the triennium 2014-2016 the EASTIN Association will mainly concentrate on the following projects.

### *Immediately (2014):*

- to implement the changes in the membership structure as depicted above
- to complete the establishment of National Contact Organisation in the EU and EFTA Countries where they still miss;
- to integrate within the EASTIN system the new functionalities developed by the ETNA project (the new domain model, the upgraded search engine and interfaces, the user rating and comment tool, the data upload tool, the taxonomy management tool);
- to complete the integration within the EASTIN system of the terms list and the Query Processing Component inherited from the EASTIN-CL project;
- to complete the adaptation of the partner's webservices to the new specifications developed by ETNA, in order to fully exploit the contents of the national databases within EASTIN;
- to implement appropriate filters in the EASTIN webservice client to increase quality control of the data provided by the partners (e.g. excluding products whose last update date is too long ago);
  - to initiate working groups within the Association (each led by a WG leader) on the following subjects:
  - pros & cons of a prospective international expansion of the EASTIN system beyond Europe;
  - policy for answering the questions posted by users through the info-request facility;
  - visualisation of users ratings and comments;
  - improving usability and accessibility in relation to latest standards and regulations;
  - search engine optimisation;
  - harmonizing the use of ISO 9999 classification in the national information systems.
- to pilot international expansion by plugging the US Abledata system in the EASTIN and finding out the best way to integrate or differentiate the data.

### *In the short term (2015):*

- to create new EASTIN graphic interfaces that are suitable for mobile or next-generation Internet devices
- to implement a test area where partners having IT expertise can directly develop graphic interfaces prototypes;
- to revise the national procedures of data collection in such a way to take best advantage of the tools available on the EASTIN website (e.g. the function "search recently-inserted product"; compare company addresses; identify possible data inconsistencies) and help each other to solve classification uncertainties;
- to seek opportunities for a new EU-funded collaborative project related to the EASTIN system within the Horizon 2020 programme.
- to explore how EASTIN could participate in (and take advantage of) other world-wide initiatives in the field of assistive technology, such as e.g. the Global Public Inclusive Infrastructure initiative.

### *In the medium term (2016):*

- to improve translation technology from native language to the EASTIN *lingua franca* (English), and vice versa;
- to explore how EASTIN could take further advantage by latest technology advancement (Google customized searches, etc.).
- to explore how EASTIN could be useful for further purposes than originally planned: for instance, to provide evidence for public tenders for the AT procurement (e.g. comparative analysis among products).
- to carry out initiatives (for instance, an event in each Country led by the National Contact Organisation) aimed at promoting AT knowledge throughout Europe, raising awareness on the national information system (in case it exists) and increase access to EASTIN services by citizens.

EASTIN Association – Piazza Morandi 6, 20121 Milano Italy – Fiscal/Vat code 05556280963

