



Strategy paper 2009

Mission

The EASTIN Association is a European network that offers information on assistive technology¹ to all citizens.

EASTIN operates the most comprehensive Internet-based information service in Europe on assistive technology, due to the joint effort of its member Organisations, and to the European Commission which initially financed part of the work.

All partners run established national information systems in their Country, which form the basis of the EASTIN network. The EASTIN website (www.eastin.info) aggregates data of trans-national interest from all such systems and provides – in many 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 information (companies, fact sheets, case studies, ideas), thus allowing for comparisons and offering guidance for appropriate choices.

In the EASTIN website – and in the national systems that take part in the network – any interested people 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 devices; researchers and technicians; policy-makers and public agencies involved in assistive technology provision.

Vision

The vision pursued by the EASTIN association is to become the leading information system on assistive technology in Europe, that delivers to European citizens the best of the knowledge on Assistive Technology available worldwide today, at the highest level of comprehensiveness and accuracy, in all European languages.

By promoting dissemination of awareness, information and knowledge, the association intends to contribute to the empowerment of people with disabilities, and to better service by any professional involved in the disability field.

By providing a comprehensive and detailed overview of the European assistive technology market – independent on 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 that need them.

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

¹ The term “Assistive Technologies” 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.

The EASTIN association is also the forum where its member Organisations share their expertise, help each other to continuously improve the quality of the service they provide in their Countries through their national information systems, 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, so as to increase web visibility (having the Eastin pages among the “top ten” results of the most popular Internet search engines, when dealing with assistive technology topics), and take best advantage of technological advancement to 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 on how to 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 a Consortium of six Organisations² led by the Don Gnocchi Foundation (Milano, Italy) and partially funded by the European Commission within the eTen programme³. It is a non-for-profit Organisation, with registered seat in Milano, Italy.

The founding members of the EASTIN Association are:

- **Fondazione Don Carlo Gnocchi Onlus**, based in Milano, Italy, responsible for the national information system “Portale SIVA” (www.portale.siva.it)
- **Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln**, based in Köln, Germany, responsible for the national information system “REHADAT” (www.rehadat.de);
- **Hjælpe midde linstituttet** (Danish Centre for Assistive Technology), based in Taastrup, Denmark, responsible for the national information system “Hjælpe midde lbasen” (www.hmi-basen.dk);
- **Disabled Living Foundation**, based in London, United Kingdom, responsible for the national information system “DLF-data” (www.dlf.org.uk);

The EASTIN Association also includes other partners that joined in 2009:

- **Hacavie**, based in Lille, France, responsible for the national information system “Handicat” (www.handicat.com)
- **VAPH** (Vlaams Agentschap voor Personen met een Handicap – Flemish Agency for Disabled Persons), based in Brussels, Belgium, responsible for the national information system “Vlibank” (www.vlibank.be)

and one “liason partner” :

- **Ceapat** (Centro Estatal de Autonomía Personal y Ayudas Técnicas - National Centre for Personal Autonomy and Assistive Technology), based in Madrid, Spain, responsible for the national information system “Catálogo de Productos de Apoyo” (www.catalogo-ceapat.org)

The governing Body of the EASTIN Association is the EASTIN Assembly, composed of one representative appointed by each member Organisations. The President is elected by the Assembly. The core funding is ensured by a membership fee each member Organisation pays every year.

² 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)

³ eTEN is a funding programme of the European Commission facilitating the deployment of trans-European telecommunications networks services on the European market. 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.

Action

In the first three years of activity, the EASTIN Association has mainly worked at refining the EASTIN website and its complex search engines; at the same time, all member Organisation have carried out substantial improvements in their national information system, in order to adapt to changes occurred in the national health and social systems, and to fulfil the harmonisation requirements agreed within the EASTIN network.

Today, the EASTIN website has achieved its maturity. It fully works in seven languages; it provides detailed information on over 55.000 assistive technology 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 technological platforms; the system is so robust and flexible that any technical changes in national systems have no drawback for the performance of the Eastin engine; last but not least, all the national system belonging to the network fully meet the national information needs.

Currently, in the pursue of the above vision, the EASTIN Association is moving significant step forwards by undertaking a number of projects:

Immediately (2009):

- To include the Belgian Flemish national information system *VLIBANK* as a new partner;
- To implement all reasonable technical adaptations to the current website in order to maximise the visibility of the EASTIN pages to the Google search engines;
- To implement the technical structure needed to implement all the official languages spoken in the European Union;
- To offer the U.S. national information system *Abledata* the possibility to perform EASTIN searches from within the Abledata system, in such a way to make it easier for American users to know about EU products.

In the short term (2010):

- To make the system fully working in all EU languages (by feeding the system with the appropriate labels, the ISO 9999 items and the keywords in all languages);
- To implement a “google translator” in conjunction to the English free-text descriptions, so that users have the opportunity to activate on-line translation in their own languages;
- To promote a European Seminar – possibly in conjunction with the AAATE – to share information and knowledge on the various models of public AT provision systems in Europe;
- 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.

In the medium term (2011-2012):

- To carry out a major re-engineering of the whole EASTIN website, in order to have it upgraded to state-of-the-art technology (web 2), take advantage of “intelligent” search method, achieve top visibility on the web, exploit user friendliness and meet latest accessibility standards;
- To include a professional video promoting awareness of assistive technology and helping the user to get familiar with the Eastin network;
- Improve translation technology from native language to the “EASTIN lingua franca” (English);
- Adapt to possible revisions of the ISO classification system;
- Consider 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).

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