[IE] Information Society Commission Issues Report

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The Information Society Commission was established by the Irish Government in 1997 to monitor Ireland's progress as an Information Society, to promote awareness of new technology and to advise the government on Ireland's development in this area. Its third and most recent report, compiled in December 2000, assessed Ireland's current position and made recommendations for future development.

The Commission highlighted what had been achieved during the three-year period, including: the liberalisation of the telecommunications market, the enactment of the Electronic Commerce Act, 2000 (IRIS 2000-8: 11) and the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 (IRIS 2000-8: 13), the increase in Ireland's international connectivity due to the Global Crossing cable project (an agreement between the Irish Government and the owners of the world's first global fibre-optic network to link Ireland with the US and 36 major European cities), Ireland's position as the largest software-exporting base in the world, and the increased awareness of information technologies in business, the public service and in the general community.

However, the Commission also identified major challenges that still have to be addressed, the most fundamental being: the slow move from awareness to adoption of new technology; the cost of communications services in Ireland is still too high; the local loop has yet to be unbundled; the introduction of digital television is behind schedule; broadband access is available unevenly throughout the country; there is a shortage of skilled workers in the high-technology sector, and there are differences among socio-economic groups in regard to access to, and use of, new technologies.

In order to meet these challenges, the Commission has developed a set of principles designed to ensure that the development of the Information Society progresses as a matter of urgency. As well as a number of general principles, the Commission also set out specific principles in regard to priority areas. These areas include: partnerships between industry and community groups to facilitate increased involvement in the Information Society, encouraging Irish business to use e-business, making high-speed, low cost networks available in every part of the country, and providing an appropriate legislative framework that will facilitate the development of a progressive and inclusive Information Society.

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