

European Telework Status Report 1998: Portugal

This is an extract from the country summaries section of the European Commission's 1998 Status Report. The complete report is online at <http://www.eto.org.uk/twork/tw98> in a variety of formats, including Word, HTML pages and Acrobat .pdf files. Links to further information about telework in Portugal are in the Portugal national page at European Telework Online - <http://www.eto.org.uk> .

Summary

The Government of Portugal has a progressive approach to Information Society developments, reflected in the 1997 *Mission for the Information Society* Green Paper. Portugal was one of the first European countries to implement online information services for citizens, with the deployment of public information kiosks in Lisbon in 1993-1994, leading to the InfoCid (information for citizens) programme with some 400 kiosks now deployed across Portugal and a linked Internet service. Portugal has also taken a proactive approach in education, with all schools now connected to the Internet and plans for one linked computer for every classroom by 2000.

This very active approach recognises that Portugal starts from a low level of investment in and use of ICTs and, historically, little activity in Internet Society applications such as telework. During 1997-1998, however, Telework Associations have been formed and Lisbon is the host city for the European Telework Assembly in September 1998. Telework features in the Information Society strategy and incentives for employers and citizens are in place or planned. Focused applications such as telemedicine and tele-learning, with the use of technology to develop and sustain rural prosperity and jobs are higher priorities for Portugal than home-based teleworking.

Telework background and take-up of ICTs

General background:

- Portugal has a historically low per capita GDP and a low investment rate in terms of ICT as a percentage of GDP, leading to Europe's second from lowest density of PCs and Internet users:

	Per capita GDP	IT spend as % of GDP	IT investment		Internet users per 1000 population
			Per capita (ECU)	Scaled (highest = 100)	
Portugal	9,851	1.36	117	16	19
EU lowest country	8,216	0.86	76	10	11
EU highest country*	29,873	3.36	751	100	152
* excluding Luxembourg					

- Portugal has enjoyed relatively low unemployment, especially relative to neighbouring Spain - around 7% in the mid 1970s compared with around 20%, and below the average of the EU. A relatively low proportion of employment is in services (56%).
- Geographic and demographic considerations are important in determining Information Society strategy and development patterns. Portugal is at the edge of Europe, with long road and rail connections, but is culturally at the centre of a potential worldwide network of 200 million Portuguese speakers.

Driving factors:

- Portugal has a history of successful innovation in telecommunications based public services, for example the Multibanco programme, in which deployment of electronic purse applications has been

ahead of more ICT-intensive countries like the UK, the use of networks supporting the collection of road tolls and the early computerisation and networking of Post office counter services.

- More recently, the Government's Green Paper on the Information Society in Portugal (<http://futuro.missao-si.mct.pt/english/greenpaper/green.htm>) has set out a comprehensive, coherent and distinctively Portuguese approach that includes telework as an important element.
- The Portuguese people are noted for their creativity and spontaneity, very positive characteristics in the context of a period of rapid technology-based change.
- The still-recent memories of revolution and constitutional development leads Portuguese political leaders to refer to the country as a "young" democracy, and there is consequently less resistance to further positive change than in countries with long-established institutions and methods.
- A world community of some 200 million Portuguese speakers provides the potential to establish critical mass for a Portuguese language and culture market at global level long before the local market within Portugal itself, and a bigger total "own language" market than for most European countries.
- Difficult terrain within much of the country, together with long distances and journey times to the main EU markets, can be expected to motivate Portuguese companies and citizens to ready acceptance of electronic networking, telework and teletrade in their dealings with the rest of the European Union as well as in the wider world.

Constraints:

- The relatively very low level of ICT use within Portugal presents a market barrier against rapid development of locally based Information Society applications, including home-based teleworking.
- It also presents learning curve and skills problems, in that fewer citizens gain experience of computers and Internet through private purchase and use of the technologies.
- The relatively low per capita GDP makes computers, telephony and Internet costs appear high to Portuguese companies and citizens compared with (for example) perceived costs in Scandinavia.
- The generally understood business rationale for teleworking is weak in Portugal compared with countries such as the Netherlands, with high salaries, high overheads, dense and congested road networks and a generally high-tech economy.

Telework activities and results

- From a more-or-less standing start in 1996, now less than two telework associations emerged during 1996-1997, reflecting rapidly increasing national attention to the Information Society.
- A number of specialist applications (of teleworking or with teleworking elements) are being piloted or implemented, including:
 - University Communication Network (RCU), which provides ISDN access for students and teachers at home, is being offered more generally to higher education after successful piloting in Lisbon, Aveiro and Oporto.
 - Terràvista is an exciting project to provide a global open space for communication in Portuguese.
 - Awareness and familiarity for citizens is being tackled through the schools, with all schools now connected to the Internet and a target of one connected multimedia PC per classroom by 2000.
 - Telemedicine applications are implemented, including remote diagnostic support and tele-radiology.
- A consortium (of Telepac and Tracy) was launched to market telework systems and is implementing pilot schemes.
- The Government announced a commitment to "frame legislation and draw up an organisational framework to recognise and promote telework" in the public administration and has recognised the need to "modernise the contractual framework of working life . . . to reconcile flexibility and security.
- In September 1998 Lisbon hosts the annual European Telework Assembly, during Expo98.

Conclusions

Telework in the form of working at home is not an immediate priority for Portugal, compared with focused applications of teleworking such as telemedicine and tele-learning, and policies designed to (a) accelerate ICT take up by citizens, government and industry (especially small firms) and (b) understand and implement telework and the related applications (teletrade and telecooperation) as a means of addressing the relative geographic isolation of Portugal within Europe and underpinning the prosperity and social cohesion of rural communities. In addition to capitalising on the telework and teletrade opportunities across the Portuguese-speaking world, Portugal also has a need to actively encourage positive outreach by Portuguese entrepreneurs, companies and communities to the higher-GDP countries of Europe, marketing Portuguese skills and capabilities to meet market demand rather than allowing new work opportunities to migrate outside the European Union.