Assistive technologies, especially those based on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are a powerful driver for inclusion and quality of life of people with disability and elderly people. Indeed they contribute to compensate for functional limitations and help tackle barriers in all types of environment, thus playing an increasingly central role in equalising opportunities. However, ensuring access to ICT assistive equipment, systems and services is not straightforward. Information on ATs and e-accessibility solutions is patchy, not well distributed or simply absent; the needed knowledge and expertise are in the hand of few specialists scattered throughout Europe; the ICT AT market is still a niche dominated by highly specialised SMEs.

Handling these issues is the main objective of the European Thematic Network on Assistive Information and Communication Technologies (ETNA), a project founded by the European Commission within the frame of the ICT PSP. Set up in January 2011, ETNA is an EU-wide network involving 23 leading Institutions, each with acknowledged commitment in the ICT AT area, in 13 Countries. It is coordinated by the Biomedical Technology Department (Polo Tecnologico) of the Don Carlo Gnocchi Foundation (www.dongnocchi.it), the largest private non-profit provider of care and rehabilitation services for people with disabilities and elderly people in Italy.

The ETNA Network will implement, over a period of 3 years, a European Web Portal providing unified access to all ICT AT resources available on the Web in relation to the needs of all stakeholders, involved as AT users, professionals, developers and policy-makers. The Portal will provide information on European ICT assistive products, on related organisations and services, and will allow access to repositories of freeware, open source software products and tools useful for e-accessibility. Such a Portal will initially stem from the already-existing website of the European Assistive Technology Information Network (EASTIN, www.eastin.eu) - the most comprehensive European information service on AT - which aggregates the contents of the major national providers of AT information in the various European countries. Within the ETNA project, the EASTIN will evolve into a more powerful search engine (EASTIN 2.0) based on a multilingual and user-friendly interface, so as to have a considerable impact, in terms of spread of knowledge, dissemination and awareness raising about themes concerning participation and inclusion of people with disabilities.

The Portal will be developed in collaboration with ATIS4All (Assistive Technologies and Inclusive Solutions for All project (www.atis4all.eu)), another Thematic Network that will take care of the EASTIN 2.0 online community. In this way, the joint Portal is supposed to serve as a platform to share expertise, ideas, views, resources and field experience, thus becoming a reference point within the AT domain.

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