

What is a PAAS?

PAAS stands for "Assisted Access Point to Services and Internet".

Assisted Access Points are places which provide assistance free of charge to community members in using on-line local government services. The Points are equipped with tools and technological and electronic resources which community members can use to access Internet free of charge.

Assisted Access Points are run by volunteer groups which organise activities and training for community members. Qualified personnel offer help to users, assisting them in accessing the Internet and using information tools.

Assisted Access Points are a community service which goes beyond the concept of "Internet Point". Their distribution across the local territory (often in rural and mountainous areas), their features, and the essential and active participation of volunteer groups make Assisted Access Points places for exchange and contact with local government, thus promoting participation and social integration.

The goal of the Tuscany Region is to extend the PAAS network to involve an increasingly greater number of Tuscan municipalities. Currently, a joint initiative with the National Union of Municipalities and Mountain Districts (UNCEM) is in the advanced planning stage, and is designed to extend the PAAS network into all non-participating mountain municipalities. In addition, a number of non-mountain Tuscan municipalities currently not participating in the network have already requested their inclusion.

Locations and Access

In Tuscany, 192 municipalities have opened 298 Assisted Access Points in 327 locations. The service is opened to the public in set hours.

They are located in different types of structures and attract different user types. Assisted Access Points can be found in clubs, libraries, senior citizen centres, youth centres, in public welfare and charity offices, others in local promotional centres and in council offices. These different locations characterise the different user types that visit Assisted Access Points, but also the range of services on offer.

Assisted Access Points are characterised by the social context in which they exist. Through initiatives and activities which promote their social importance, Assisted Access Points have become an instrument for the development of the local community, creating conditions that foster all-inclusive participation.

Senior citizens, young people, immigrants, tourists and citizens, each with their different needs, can all find in their local PAAS help to identify the solutions they need. On the one hand, Assisted Access Points provide a door into different social realities, while on the other, they are a tool for knowledge and contact with local government.

The PAAS Network

The 298 Assisted Access Points form a local territorial network of great social and political value, as through activities and initiatives, exchange and communication, they bring together institutions, associations and the community. The objective of all these players is to:

- guarantee access to information to the greatest number of people, break down the digital divide, and take families and community members on-line, in accordance with the objectives identified by the Tuscany Region in its e-Toscana programme and Regional Law no. 1 of 2004;
- promote the social inclusion and involvement of disadvantaged populations, thus fostering greater social participation;
- create opportunities for dialogue and accountability between institutions and the community on issues relating to the Information Society and local and regional policies in general which directly concern the community of reference;
- promote greater visibility and access to electronic government services and private-sector services.

Some Assisted Access Points organise activities and provide services which differ from those generally offered, and which reflect the user base and identity of the local PAAS. These specialised Assisted

Access Points together form a series of **thematic sub-networks** lying within the general PAAS network, constituting a driver for development through the exchange of experiences, ideas and tools.

Services and Activities Provided or Under Development in the Tuscan PAAS Network

The PAAS network is a technological and organisational infrastructure which provides a wide range of services to the community. New services are currently under development.

The main services and initiatives, already in place or soon to be introduced, fall into two categories:

- 1) *general services and initiatives*, which provide a shared identity to all Tuscan Assisted Access Points, and distinguish them from other local structures;
- 2) *specific services and initiatives*. For various reasons (such as their location, the structure of the hosting body, the individual approach of the managing association), Assisted Access Points are able to adapt to the needs of the local community, providing localised and specific services.

These Assisted Access Points, with very precise user bases, are increasingly able to tailor their services to their target users. More specifically, they make up the basis for certain *thematic sub-networks of the PAAS network*, which include specific sub-networks focused on the needs of *senior citizens, immigrants, consumers, young people, or tourists* (the latter on a seasonal basis).

Ø General Services and Initiatives

o Assistance and advice: Assisted Access Points offer assistance to the community in using work stations and identifying and using services and other on-line information.

o Promotion and take-up of on-line local services: at Assisted Access Points, community members can learn and access services offered by local and central government (e-government services, e-health services, etc.) and by the private sector.

o Basic training: the majority of Assisted Access Points have already organised basic training courses for the community. In the future, we expect that training courses will become a permanent feature of Assisted Access Points.

o Local initiatives and activities: the e-Toscana programme outlined a PAAS model based on the capacity of associations to develop, in partnership with councils, local initiatives and activities focused on issues relating to the transformation of the Information Society. Many Assisted Access Points have developed initiatives connected with the local territory and targeted at schools, young people, immigrants and senior citizens. Experience and best practices are shared on the network to promote exchange and their repetition in other areas.

o Activities focused on social inclusion and integration: Assisted Access Points are places of aggregation and participation, an instrument for the development and support of the local community and the promotion of social rights. In smaller municipalities where fewer opportunities exist for social interaction and aggregation, and access to centres and services, the support that Assisted Access Points provide in exercising social rights takes on even greater importance.

o Surveys and feedback on service level satisfaction: after an initial survey of on-line local services, an assessment will be made of service levels offered and observations collected from users. The feedback collected will help improve existing services and contribute to the proposal of new local and general services. Co-operation with the Tuscan Regional Telematics Network will mean that the feedback can be used to improve public services.

o Dialogue with local government and the promotion of local policies: Assisted Access Points are a place for the community to be heard and for dialogue with local government, as well as an important channel for participation in the legislative process. At the same time, Assisted Access Points are a point from which policies and their purposes can be promoted, as can be initiatives and events on various issues.

o Take up of new technologies by the territory and the trialling of new products and services: Assisted Access Points can potentially become an effective instrument for the promotion of the new information technologies being developed in Tuscany and throughout the national territory (National Multi-service Card, digital identity cards, etc.). Furthermore, thanks to their widespread distribution across regional territory and the existing relational network, Assisted Access Points represent a perfect testing ground to trial new services and products developed by public and private research institutes.

o Co-operation with other local structures: each individual Assisted Access Point and the PAAS network promote ties with other territorial structures, such as government public relations offices, libraries, consumer offices, youth information offices and the many other structures present in the region, through the use of electronic instruments for communication, sharing and co-operation.

Ø *Specific Services and Initiatives*

For the disabled

o Assistance for the disabled: Assisted Access Points will soon feature special work stations enabling the disabled and visually impaired to use computers and navigate on the Internet with greater ease; work stations will be equipped with suitable ergonomic tools.

o Information on tourist services that are accessible for the disabled.

o Assessment of the effective accessibility of tourist facilities.

For senior citizens

o Basic computer training for senior citizens.

o Surveys on the needs of senior citizens and the launch of a study for the creation of services tailored to specific needs, particularly in the fields of health, social life, and tax and financial advice.

o Participation in the creation of an Internet archive dedicated to conserving local and regional living memory (“*Percorsi della memoria*”).

For immigrants

o Public office providing information for immigrants, who can turn to their local PAAS for assistance and access to services and information of interest to them.

o Participation in multilingual promotional campaigns targeting immigrants.

o Activities focused on social life and the social integration of immigrant groups.

For young people

o Initiatives for the protection of minors involving the promotion of and information on instruments and organisations for the protection of the rights of the child (with particular reference to problematics arising in the digital world).

o Dissemination of information on new technologies and open source software.

o Assistance for the on-line purchase of tickets to cultural events through the prepaid card system.

o Exchange of local social projects and initiatives with schools and other local territorial structures.

o Information and promotion of public sound and recording studios for musical groups.

For tourists

o Local tourism promotion.

o Information provided through on-line resources on tourist facilities and local events.

o Distribution of questionnaires to identify the needs of tourists and survey of seasonal patterns in the use of Assisted Access Points; launch of a study for the creation of specialist services.

For consumers

o Collection of complaints relating to the purchase of goods and access to a centralised advisory service on issues relating to distribution and purchasing (in particular as concerns landline telephony, mobile telephony, third-party car insurance, banks and bank accounts, house insurance, energy and access), with a view to promoting greater awareness in consumers, today constantly assailed by advertising.

o Information and advice in the field of “minor justice”; in the future, Assisted Access Points will provide specific information on legal channels for specific complaints, whilst information and assistance initiatives may also be developed in the field of *on-line claims settlement*, in partnership with CORECOM.