

## **AGE contribution on Ethical Aspects of Inclusion of Elderly Persons, by Anne-Sophie Parent, Director, Bled – 12 May 2008**

### I. Issues related to exploration:

As a recent Eurobarometer showed, the vast majority of older people wish to stay at home or in their community for as long as possible. With changing family patterns and new relations between generations, older people's needs are rapidly changing. More and more older people live alone or have no relatives close by to support them. Older people tend also to live for longer and a significant number of them develop disabilities or chronic illnesses and this brings about new care needs.

A majority of older workers would also prefer to remain at work if their working conditions were adapted and their LLL needs were met.

E-inclusion initiatives can help provide older people with the support they need to help them remain active in the labour market and in their community, take care of their health and keep abreast with the knowledge based society.

But that requires ICT products and services to be developed from the inception phase with older people's needs in mind and build with enough flexibility to respect individual choices. The last thing older people want is to be forced to change their way of life and use technologies that are not adapted to their needs (examples of such products or services that were not developed with their needs in mind are: digital television and e-banking which excludes older people with visual or dexterity problems or those who are not digitally literate).

Older people, in particular the very old, are often very dependent on a series of services aimed at helping them live independently and remain active in their community. They are however often "captive" users of these services and this raises ethical issues for the various e-inclusion initiatives set up to ensure that they remain included in our knowledge based society.

Due to their limited financial resources, their lack of knowledge about the benefits that ICT can bring them, the lack of interoperability of the different products they need, the gap between what the products can bring and what older people perceive to be their needs (often new ICT products offer too much

possibilities but not the right ones), mean that older people enjoy in fact very limited or no right to self determination. ICT solutions are often "imposed" on them by care professionals, relatives or social services funders (for example, agencies funding LTC may impose ICT solutions which are cheaper for them but which do not meet the wish or needs of the older person).

AGE is convinced that with the rapid ageing of our population, there is a business case for the promotion of a "Design-for-All" approach in product development. Ensuring that products are designed from the beginning to be "age-friendly" is the only way to guarantee that mainstream ICT products will remain accessible and affordable to older people, the most rapidly growing section of our population.

Interoperability is also key to ensure that the various services that older people need will remain affordable, user-friendly and genuinely inclusive (i.e. not intrusive).

Older people's wish to self-determination remains very strong until their last days. Some say it is even stronger when they reach retirement age as they see this period of their life as the time when finally they can choose to lead their life the way they want. The wish to self determination is even stronger among the baby-boomers than among previous generations and it is expected to remain strong when the baby-boomers will reach very old age. This should be kept in mind when we develop recommendations: the right to self determination will become an even greater issue that it is today.

One way of ensuring that the products and services developed do support self determination is to involve older people in the development of these services. But I would like to raise a word of caution here: consulting a few older people is not enough (risk of tokenism). A genuine consultation process should be put in place with organisations representing older people including very old and dependent people. Measures should be implemented to enable them to build the capacity to contribute a coordinated input to the consultation process. Older people's organisations are much less equipped than organisations of persons with disabilities to provide technical input to such debates. Some of them have started to work on these issues but they are often reactive (providing information on new products to their members) rather than proactive (providing technical advice to the industry) in these debates.

On this issue, the key recommendation is to build the capacity of the "older people's sector" to provide constructive and reliable input to those who develop products and services and to policy makers.

## II. Issues related to prioritization:

The right to self determination and choice implies that the ethical dimension of the following 3 issues is properly addressed:

- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Adequacy

Accessibility: products and services must be designed for all, including the elderly to ensure that this growing section of our population is not going to be excluded from the benefits of the information society. Self determination implies that older people should be able to choose from a variety of solutions designed with their needs in mind.

Affordability: with the growing risk of poverty among older people, in particular older women, it is crucial to ensure that products and services remain affordable to those who need them. Self determination implies that older people should be able to choose from a variety of solutions that they can afford. Developing products for the wealthier segment of the ageing population (a restrictive approach promoted by some under the label of “silver economy”) is not going to help respond to the needs of the growing number of older people with low income (pensions are expected to decrease rapidly in the coming 20-30 years).

Adequacy: older people’s needs change rapidly, their expectations change also rapidly. Products and services available to them should meet these changing needs and be flexible enough to enable individual choice. Older people are often reluctant to use new products and services because they are perceived as not “useful” or “inadequate”. The gap between what new ICT products can deliver and what end users would feel useful needs to be bridged.

## III. First elements of key recommendations/guidance

AGE recommends that

- Mainstream ICT products and services must be developed from the inception with older people’s needs and expectations in mind.
- With our rapidly ageing population there is a business case for mainstreaming older people’s needs in ICT products and services (Design-for-All)
- Products/services should be designed so that privacy is protected and non discrimination is guaranteed. With the increasing privatisation of insurance and social protection

services such as dependency insurance, it is important to ensure that data collected on older users through ICT services is not going to be used for example by insurance companies to increase the fees or deny coverage to older people presenting specific risks.

- New ICT products are developed with the aim of improving the quality of services provided to the elderly including the prevention of elder abuse.