

PS2 Session Report, June 12 “Active Ageing: Supporting Independent Living”

Riga, June 11-13, 2006, “e-Inclusion - ICT for an Inclusive Society” conference

The session was given the challenge by the chair Andreas Disen, Director General, Ministry of Health and Care Services, Norway to consider how ICT can help the European Union to meet the needs of ageing populations.

- The session was timely in view of the increasing longevity and accelerating increase of numbers of elderly people. Whereas this trend will entail increasing needs for care, the participants stressed that older people are themselves important care providers. Ageing means also increased social capital in terms of knowledge, experience and social networks of elderly people.
- Elderly people are an increasingly important consumer group. They have a potential to shape the development of ICT in terms of innovative technologies, products, services and content.
- ICT creates opportunities for the elderly to communicate, increase mobility, enhance independent living, allow for health monitoring and decrease the sense of social isolation.
- Assistive technologies provide support to elderly people and family and informal care providers, social care and health care institutions.
- ICT can decrease stress at work, offer flexibility with respect to where and when work is performed, and compensate for age-related fragilization, disabilities and health conditions.

The key objective for ICT in ageing societies is to help older people to be able to live and work in their preferred environment. Ways to achieve these objectives were addressed from different stakeholders’ views. The general conclusion is that no single actor can provide adequate solutions to complex challenges of ageing societies, and that partnership between public and private sectors and consultation with NGOs representing or speaking on behalf of elderly and people with disabilities or chronic health conditions are necessary.

The perspective of the civil society was outlined by Anne-Sophie Parent, Director, AGE - European Older People's Platform, a network of 150 organizations of older people from the EU-25 and beyond. One of the key identified guiding principles for action is change of attitudes in view to achieve a society for all ages, based on intergenerational solidarity and principles of society for all ages. The centrality of users’ needs rather than technology driven new systems and new services is advocated. Design for all, simplicity, interoperability, life-course approach, integrated care, standardization, safety, affordability and availability are seen as the guiding principles for age-friendly ICT solutions.

The situation in Finland was presented by Vappu Taipale, Director General, The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) who focused on issues of citizen empowerment, promotion of trust, education and mainstreaming, “the aim being to review all policies, activities, projects and research from the angle of ageing”. It is necessary to gain better understanding of the real needs of the elderly, and

to forge closer cooperation between industry and authorities to create a dynamic market in this sector.

The example of practice that works well in its current context is the Andalusia Digital Commitment presented by Juan Reig. The importance of a new social commitment to digital culture in which technology has a central place as new social value is stressed. The Andalusia project is not limited to elderly people, but enhances digital inclusion of the aged through trust and confidence building for connectivity.

Josh Collett, International Liaison, AARP, informed about the activities of the NGO that has over 36 million members in the United States. The Association is actively mainstreaming for best practices for issues important to the elderly, ranging from housing, universal design, transportation, personal independence, to engagement with community.

Lennart Magnusson, Univ. Coll. Borås, Sweden, presented a project on family care. Needs of family carers are addressed via information and training including transfer of practical skills and knowledge about relative's illness, and local support services. Needs of elderly people as care receivers address issues of overcoming social isolation, access to care services, practical assistance, and suitable home environment.

Josep Roca, Univ. Hosp. Barcelona, Spain, outlined the new demands towards health care professionals, the importance of prevention to enhance wellness and treatment of chronic conditions in a life course perspective. Fragmentation of health care and social support services is seen as the generator of inefficiencies and factor of social exclusion of the most vulnerable.

Guus Broos, Executive Board Orbis Medical and Healthcaregroup, The Netherlands, presented the project The Digital Hospital and the Long Distance Care Concept where use of IST for long distance care aims at decreasing dependency of chronic patients on hospitals. Advantages include the improvement in the feeling of security, enhancement of independent living and stimulation of self management of health conditions.

Two areas of major concern are identified by the participated stakeholders.

- There is a need to develop integrated care, encapsulating social services, family and informal carers, primary care and hospitals. Good electronic networking, ensuring security and privacy, is a requirement for the functioning of the integrated system.
- There is a need to develop dynamic markets in closer collaboration between industry and public authorities to meet the needs in care and health sectors.