

# Policy Brief: Responsive e-inclusion of Europe's older adults as a pre-condition for the take-up of digital public services

## MobileAge

### Policy Priority: Addressing the digital divide in an ageing Europe / Public Services for older adults / Citizens participation

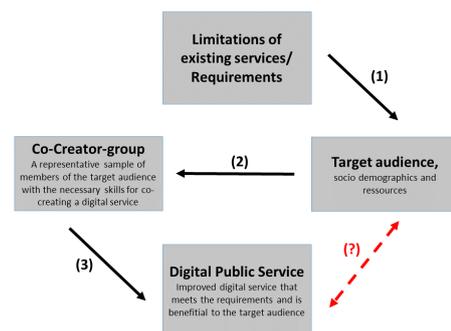
#### 1. Summary

- One reason for the low take-up of digital eGovernment / public services is a lack of users' perceived benefits and user centricity, especially for older persons.
- The best way to develop user centric digital services is to involve users in the development of such services, i.e. via co-creation approaches.
- However, taking advantage of user centric digital services requires digital literacy and skills as well as access to the internet, which varies greatly between regions and age groups. Therefore, the digital divide has to be considered in co-creation approaches.
- The Mobile Age project shows that co-creation is a viable and successful approach to develop digital public services for older adults with older adults.
- In order to achieve a broader outreach of the co-created services, complementary measures for e-inclusion are necessary. They should be appropriate to the kind of services and be responsive to the resources and living conditions of different subgroups of older adults, in particular taking into account the difference between adults in the Third and Fourth Age.
- To monitor, evaluate and govern e-inclusion progress, EU statistics should also represent citizens above 74 years and their ICT use practices to assess the challenges in aging societies.

#### 2. Background: co-creation of digital public services and e-inclusion

For many years the use of eGovernment services has lagged behind expectations. Several studies and declarations assume that a lack of perceived benefits, usability and user centricity are the main barriers. Recently co-creation is considered to be

a promising way to overcome these barriers: if citizens get involved in the definition, design and implementation of public services they can share their needs and ideas and doing so improve the usability and usefulness of the output.



The Mobile Age methodology starts from a certain domain or area and the limitations of existing services, e.g. mobile services related to the neighbourhood of older adults:

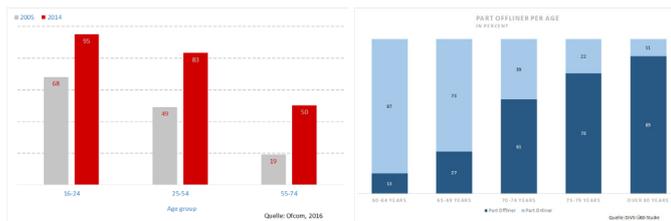
1. defines the target audience in more detail with regard to age-groups and resources,
2. recruits a sample of members of this target group, that is willing and able to engage in a co-creation process, and
3. supports the co-creation process. Output of this process is a co-created digital public service, which is agreed upon by the members of the co-creating group and probably will be used by them.

However, the objective of the process is to achieve a broader outreach and impact. That is, many members of the target audience should use the new digital public service because their representation in the development should have ensured an alignment with their needs and expectations. But there is no guarantee. Using digital services requires having the necessary resources - access to the internet and digital literacy and skills. With particular regard to older adults, there is an age divide or age gap, namely with increasing age the share of people that are using the internet decreases dramatically.

This is not a new insight, and there have been several attempts to fight the digital divide and promote e-inclusion. The European Parliament pointed to the ongoing age divide: From 2005 to 2014 the percentage of internet users among the population has grown for all age groups almost equally and the age

gap has remained about 30 pp (Figure 2, left side).

The full size of this risk, however, does not become visible in the EU statistics, as they exclude older citizens beyond the age of 74. A representative German survey shows that the age of 70 is the turning point



where “offliners” become the majority (DIVSI 2016). While 87% of those aged 60–64 years have used the internet, only 39% aged 70–74 years have, and only 11% of those older than 80 years were at least occasional internet users (Figure 2 right side). Similarly, the UK Ofcom 2016 Internet Use and Attitudes Bulletin shows that only 42% of those aged 75 or over say they have used the internet (Ofcom, 2016).

### 3. Responsive approaches to older citizens in their third and fourth age

In order to enable older adults to benefit from digital public services, we have to consider that there are big differences not only compared to younger generations but also within the large group of older adults with regard to the personal resources. For example, social and cultural capital, financial resources and health as well as aspirations and abilities. A broad distinction can be made between the Third and the Fourth Age (Laslett, 1987). Persons in their Third Age, usually starting with retirement, are still relatively healthy and have time to follow their hobbies, social activities and even for learning. In contrast, persons in their Fourth Age are characterised by declining mental and physical functions, ending finally in dependence, decrepitude, and death. The differences in third and fourth age require different (digital) public services and different support measures.

#### Policy recommendation:

- Older adults—beyond the age of 74 —need to be included in the digital progress reports.
- This requires different methods of data collection as the usual telephone interviews are not working with an older age group. Instead personal interviews are needed.

- Attention needs to be paid to the reasons for the non-use of digital technologies/the internet which may differ from those of younger generations.

### Addressing a lack of interest and perceived low self-efficacy as the main barriers

According to the European Digital Progress Report (EDPR) “the three main reasons evoked by households for not having internet access continue to be the lack of need or interest (46% of households without internet access in 2016), insufficient skills (42%) and the high costs of equipment (26%) and access (22%)”. These factors are not independent: low awareness of potential benefits from accessing the internet at home prevents people from acquiring the necessary skills and investment in equipment and access. Already in 2002 van Dijk pointed to motivational access as the key to bridging the age gap. The report on e-inclusion by the eEurope Advisory Group in 2005 emphasised that e-inclusion is strongly connected with social inclusion and primarily is not an issue of access and technical skills but of social empowerment.

In providing appropriate incentives, big differences between the younger and the older generation have to be considered: while younger people are curious and many like to explore new technology, older people prefer to build upon their existing knowledge and hesitate learning completely new things. Even more important: with increasing age and little learning experience doubts increase whether they will achieve the goals of a course, fear to fail and disgrace themselves. This is called lacking self-efficacy and also applies to a lack of confidence to cope with problems that may arise when using the Internet after having attended a course. Low perceived self-efficacy requires targeted approaches to enhance digital literacy and to provide continuous support. Appropriate measures have to be much more responsive to individual living circumstances and capabilities.

### Public Internet Access Points Need an Update and Extension

To experience the benefits of the internet, you have to get a device and a contract with a provider. Those who do not expect any benefits, hesitate with such an investment. One of the main strategies to overcoming this investment dilemma in older adults and to offer the chance of experiencing the benefits of online services has been Public Internet Access

Points (PIAPS) at the local level. For example, libraries, youth and senior centres, community centres and other organisations that provide desktop PCs with Internet connection and often some kind of introductory training. According to a survey by the Joint Research Centre (Rissola and Garrido 2013), there were more than 25.000 e-inclusion organisations in the EU 27, one for every 2,000 inhabitants. However, in the age of the mobile Internet and mobile devices, stationary PIAPS can no longer provide the opportunity to discover the benefits of this new generation of ICT. Rather this approach has to be adapted to the new possibilities and opportunities offered by the mobile Internet.

### Lending Tablet PCs to Third Agers via Senior

#### Citizen Centres

The Mobile Age project has demonstrated that Third Agers are still mobile and have the ability and the interest in information about events and opportunities to meet and join other adults in their neighbourhood and that they may benefit from apps and digital mobile services. To overcome the barrier of low expectations and low self-efficacy, a programme by the German Digital Opportunities Foundation in collaboration with Telefonica Germany lent tablet PCs to older adults for a few weeks in combination with some coaching via local senior centres. This programme has been running since 2012 and cooperates with public organisations such as libraries, community or elderly care centres, who lend sets of tablet PCs to groups of their visitors and provide some kind of regular weekly support. These kinds of organisations and their staff are trusted by the participating older adults. A recommendation from a recent evaluation study is to focus such projects on a certain gratification such as staying in contact with family and friends or improving the mobility in the neighbourhood rather than offering mere tablet courses (Kubicek and Lippa 2017).

#### Policy recommendations

- In order to promote e-inclusion of older adults it is not sufficient to support WiFi in public spaces. Instead, local government and social welfare organisations should initiate programmes to provide Internet-enabled tablet PCs or smartphones to local institutions, where older adults meet regularly.
- These institutions should then lend devices to

groups of visitors for 8 to 12 weeks with a weekly support offer focusing on services of particular interest to Third Agers. Beneficial apps can be pre-installed. SIM cards are important as they allow individual learning between the weekly meetings.

### Facilitating ICT-use for Fourth Agers in their homes

Older Adults in their Fourth Age are not able to visit these public institutions. But many either live in residential care facilities or still on their own with some kind of mobile care. Recent research shows that people living in residential care facilities in Switzerland can benefit from online services as a “window into the outside world” (Seifert, Doh and Wahl 2017). For people with low mobility, online services offer the chance to live longer in their own home - if they receive the necessary support. For those who are mentally fit, visiting digital ambassadors may serve as coaches. With decreasing physical and mental health, adults in the Fourth Age need digital assistance that makes use of the digital services online services such as eGovernment, e-commerce and e-health for them. In particular, in rural areas where digitalization will lead to a decrease of the number of pharmacies, grocery shops and doctors.

#### Policy recommendation

- Local government and social welfare organisations should set up pilot projects to investigate different ways of providing digital support for older people in their fourth age (who are not able to attend courses) by providing tablet PCs or smartphones and assistance in elderly care homes and their private homes. Such programmes could be financially supported with national or EU funding.
- A selection of apps offering particular benefits appropriate to individual circumstances should be pre-installed. Support should be provided by nursing staff and social workers, who may need to improve their digital literacy in a train-the-trainer programme. Alternatively the role of digital assistants might be created.

### 4. Conclusion

To overcome the Age Gap for Third Agers there is sufficient knowledge to roll out broad programmes

at the local level in particular around senior centres and similar public institutions. In an ageing society with an average life expectancy of up to 85 years we should not neglect the digital exclusion of older adults beyond 74 years because telephone interviews are not feasible and personal interviews at home are more expensive. Older citizens may benefit in many ways from digital public services and compensate for physical limitations, if we improve our knowledge about the different living circumstances and resources and explore appropriate responsive ways to overcome various barriers beyond physical access.

## 5. Approach and methods involved in this briefing

The recommendations presented in this policy brief are based on the findings from the Mobile Age project and a partner project run by the German Digital Opportunities Foundation together with Telefonica Germany. We have conducted in-depth qualitative research in four field sites across Europe (Germany, UK, Spain, Greece) with older adults, elderly care staff and volunteers, and with government representatives that showed the need for complementary action to support the use of our co-created digital services. The partner project, led by the first author, has conducted interviews with 300 older adults in 30 senior centres and homes in Germany (Kubicek and Lipka 2017). We have also undertaken reviews of existing policy paper and literature on digital divide, e-inclusion and technology use by older adults.

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