Executive Summary

Study "Policies for senior citizens in a digital world"

The objective of the study was to work out recommendations for policies to support senior citizens in their use of digital media. The recommendations are addressed to professionals working on projects involving senior citizens, as well as decision-makers in the public, private and educational sectors.

The study explores the various aspects of assisting elderly people in their use of digital media, and includes a collection of practical knowledge, tips and educational strategies for successful work with this target group.

The study was conducted by means of secondary data analysis of relevant literature, collection and evaluation of examples from Austria and abroad, 21 expert interviews, and a focus group with seniors. The results of the study were also informed by the authors' expertise.

Main recommendations:

- An open, intensive and respectful engagement with the target group is required. Furthermore, the approach should be unbiased, with a positive approach to aging.
- Given that working with seniors is demanding, any targeted educational agenda needs to incorporate certain quality standards.
- Policies aimed at familiarising seniors with the internet need to reflect seniors' different lifestyles. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution for this target group.
- Educational opportunities should show a broad diversity so as to meet seniors' different needs and levels of knowledge.
- In order to address the different preferences and needs of seniors, educational programmes should be regional, accessible and low-threshold.
- An interdisciplinary approach is recommended, interlinking with other areas, such as preventive health, social engagement, volunteer work, political participation, strengthening of social integration, improvement of economic situation, etc.
- Traditional courses should be complemented by more informal learning settings, e.g. "Weekly Question-and-Answer (Q&A) sessions at venues such as training institutes, cafes or shopping centres, "IT regulars' tables" at the local village hall or community centre, etc.
- Policies should be formulated in such a way as to show senior citizens how digital media are relevant to their individual lives. Examples and explanations should be as realistic and practical as possible, and the knowledge acquired should be applicable to seniors'

daily routines. Also, course descriptions should explain how the knowledge acquired can be applied to various situations.

- If they are to use new devices, seniors need competent technical support and/or helpful, unbiased, cost-free sales advice.

- Simple, pre-formatted user-friendly and ready-to-use devices are recommended for older customers. Unnecessary apps and applications should be deleted and operating instructions such as font size, brightness, etc., explained. Manufacturers and suppliers should focus on usability and user-friendliness in devices for older customers.

- Sales personnel should undergo special training to learn how best to serve senior citizens. Training should raise awareness of seniors' needs and expectations, and sales personnel should be taught that a patient, understanding and straightforward approach in their dealings with the target group is particularly important. An appropriate level of language is also required: technical terms should be avoided wherever possible, or explained or 'translated' into terms familiar to the target group.

- Some seniors are rather suspicious of new technologies. In this case, sales personnel should combine awareness of senior-appropriate usability requirements with a sympathetic approach to seniors' mistrust of "technology".

"Additional" policy needs identified by the study include the need to:

1. Expand the range of regional initiatives;
2. Increase standards of quality;
3. Strengthen initiatives run by businesses;
4. Create public relations and media campaigns;
5. Create low-threshold opportunities;
6. Develop target-group related content;
7. Set up a hotline or a dedicated service helpline called *"Digital Coaching for Senior Citizens";*
8. Establish *a "Going online"* database;
9. Establish device-testing points;
10. Issue *"Digital Champions"* certificates;
11. Launch a *"CEO-coalition":* telecommunications providers or Internet service providers offer support for "potential future users";
12. Subsidize internet fees;
13. Carry out development-orientated studies to evaluate the effectiveness of the policies.