

# TECHNOLOGY FOR EVERYBODY

## European project iAge helps elderly into the digital era

Until 2030 the number of people of 65+ will increase more than 50%. The European Union doesn't see this as a problem, but as an opportunity. Today's elderly are healthier, more mobile and active than ever before. This target group often encounters problems to find their way to the digital highway of the internet and social media.

The traditional model of offering seniors a sort of 'centralized training' is no longer tenable. This is because the courses offered five years ago are no longer relevant to the technology of today.

## HEALTHY SUSPICION

In August 2010, Europe decided to start with the digital agenda. Through this agenda, Europe started a list of goals to achieve by 2020. This is only one of the seven initiatives of the 'Europe 2020'-strategy. Through this digital agenda, Europe aims to create a digital, unified market that's sustainable and economic but also brings social benefits.

"We live in an age where ICT and internet are implemented everywhere. Just think about your job, hobbies and social contact. If internet is the only way to subscribe your child for a summer camp or you can only apply for a job online, then it's crucial that everyone has access to it," says Justien Jonckheere, project manager social and e-inclusion at Mentor vzw. This organization is one of the many partners of the iAge project. Mentor vzw is a non-profit center for training, counseling, guiding and giving advice to job seekers and employees

Elderly often have a sense of suspicion with technology, says Ryan Heath, spokesperson of Neelie Kroes, European commissioner for the digital agenda. "If you're older, you've seen all the bad things that technology can do as well. I mean, the nuclear bomb is a form of technology as well. The word is also used for things you don't understand. Technology is the word for everything that people feel is not part of their daily life. We need to demystify it. People who are suspicious are not wrong but they do need to defend their position."

## DIGITAL INCLUSION TO TARGET GROUP

Mentor vzw is one of the partners of the iAge project. This project aims to improve strives to elderly. This is done by encouraging social e-inclusion, active participation on the labor market and the use of ICT in the development of services and facilities for the elderly at home. iAge is a partnership between ten regions in six countries. Mentor vzw tries to achieve the objectives in South West Flanders together with the intermunicipal organization.

"There is certainly a lot of attention for the subject from Europe, yet the resources allocated for accessible training and workshops for seniors are still too limited for everyone and especially the vulnerable groups. That's why there needs to be a comprehensive and intensive approach with sufficient follow-up and repeating at accessible locations and with adequate support from a professional counselor. The project resources are often only good enough for a test phase and achieving some groups but without the structural funds, these projects can't be continued so the initiatives often fall entirely on the shoulders of volunteers," says Justien Jonckheere.

Technology is changing every day and it's not always ensured to be user friendly. That's why the employees of Mentor vzw prefer to work with tablets.

"The tablets are less intimidating, they are more intuitive and the people don't tend to have the feeling that they can do something wrong with them," says Justien Jonckheere.

"That's the nature of progress," tells Ryan Heath, "You learn how people use the technology and if you're smart, you adapt to it. Apple is a great example of this. The point is you look at these two year olds that are using the tablet now. They can use it, because it's user friendly. There is no other way a two year old could figure out how to do it unless it's designed to fit with their brain. Technology is reflecting how people are."



MENTOR VZW PRESENTS THE RESULTS OF THE IAGE PROJECT TOGETHER WITH THE INTERMUNICIPAL ORGANISATION LEIEDAL

# Jean Lambert: “We can still learn quite a bit!”

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## **Do you think Europe will reach its set deadline of 2020?**

It's possible, but only with continuing investment in both access to technology and people feeling they have the necessary skills and confidence to make systems work for them

## **A lot of people still have prejudice about technology, especially older people; does it make it harder to reach the goal?**

Yes, it does. But it's not only prejudice: people want to feel that their information is safe – whether that is financial or personal information and that they will not fall victim to fraud: the speed of technical change can also leave people feeling left behind.

## **Is this prejudice mainly caused by the media or by the fact that they didn't grow up with technology as the new generation is?**

I don't think – for once – that the media is necessarily the cause. It's not entirely generational either: there may be an element of urban / rural and so an issue of access and familiarity involved. Even in some countries with relatively good infrastructure, there can be problems in certain areas and for certain social groups.

## **Do you think Europe gives enough attention to this theme?**

I think Europe is aware of the issues: some national governments need to do more to catch up: there are also some developing countries that could teach us a lot!