



European SeniorWatch Observatory and Inventory -
*A market study about the specific IST needs of older and disabled people
to guide industry, RTD and policy*

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National Carers IT Centre

ICT and ECDL training for Family Carers in Ireland.

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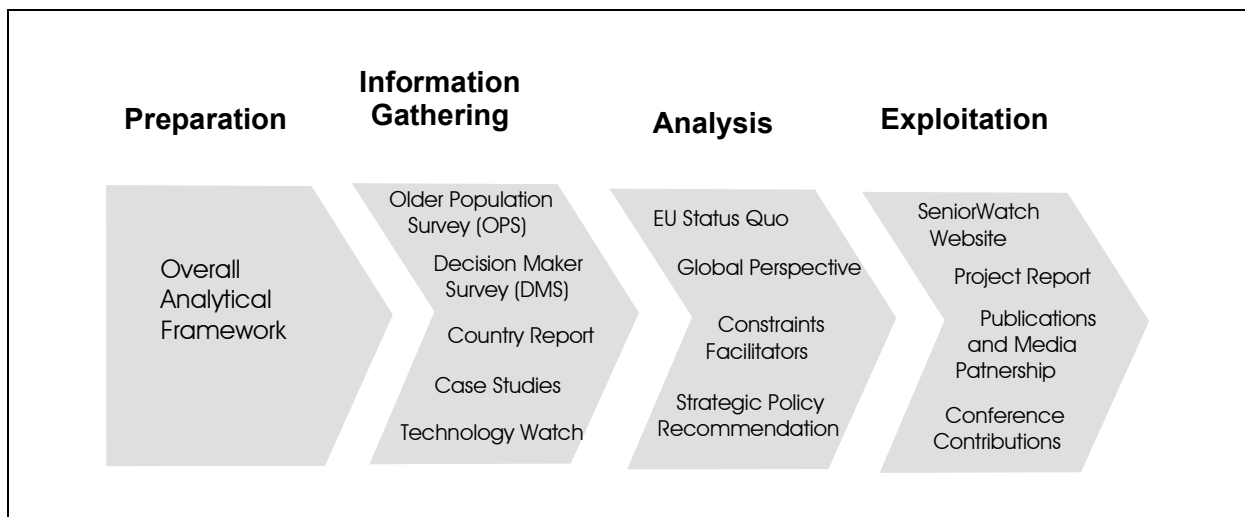
1 Introduction

The SeniorWatch project addresses the need to understand better and to monitor the market dynamics of Information Society Technologies (IST) applications and services targeted at older (and older disabled) citizens. Currently, there is insufficient empirical data about the needs of older citizens which could be met by IST-based applications and services, and a lack of awareness on the part of industry, users and politicians that hampers the rapid exploitation of new market opportunities arising from IST developments. In order to redress this state of affairs SeniorWatch will provide a European single source of empirical information on the market potential of IST-based products and services targeted at older people. The main objectives can be summarised as follows:

- to help and encourage European industry to address the market opportunities, and particularly challenge current competitive advantages of the US industries,
- to enable policy to really influence the current situation and to benchmark achievements between different European regions and countries and to make comparisons with competing world economies (Japan, US) most relevant to the field,
- to inform citizens about what is now possible with the support of IST and, thus, encourage them to demand IST products and services which meet their requirements.

As illustrated by Figure 1-1, these objectives require a comprehensive methodological approach to be applied. On the basis of an overall analytical framework, it integrates a set of complementary research methods such as European-wide surveys of older people and of decision makers in care services, best practice case studies, technology watch work shops and country reports. Synthesising the various types of empirical information gathered with help of these methods will finally enable the project to arrive at an holistic overview, to establish a technology and market observatory, and to derive policy recommendations to accelerate market development. Research results will be exploited by means of different measures.

Figure 1-1: The Project Phases of SeniorWatch



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As part of the project's overall methodological approach the SeniorWatch case studies aim at providing a useful source of information on how the IST-related needs of the target groups in question can adequately be served. They are also intended to help to understand - in a qualitative manner - more deeply specific aspects of the market situation related to IST

products and services relevant for older citizens. To allow a comparative analysis of real-life examples, a common approach for selecting and describing suitable cases was developed. The main selection criteria applied in this context include:

- suitability of the case to provide input to the overall understanding and analysis of the market for IST among older people;
- suitability of the case to serve as an example of a success story (or failure) that can guide and motivate others to take actions that will support the diffusion and take-up of IST by or for older people.

In the following the SeniorWatch case study no.16 is described.

2 National Carers IT Centre. ICT and ECDL training for Family Carers in Ireland

2.1 Description

Family carers and IT

The main goal of the service is to provide computer training to family Carers. Another goal is to empower Carers and also to prepare them for work either in the home or outside. Social interaction is also an important factor. Evaluations of the course has shown that Carers enjoy learning together especially with others of a similar age.

The National Carers IT Centre is a 'hi-tech' facility for Carers and staff of the Carers Association. Situated in the heart of Kilkenny City, the Centre offers the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) to Carers. It is planned to deliver this course to family Carers in their own homes, using the Internet. The facility in James Street, Kilkenny, includes Internet access, ISDN and Interactive Learning. It is an approved ECDL Examination Centre.

The Carers Association is conscious of the emerging opportunities for the use of new technologies in easing the burden of care at home. The National Carers IT Centre has a range of supports, including:

- Advice on 'Smart Homes', which include such items as alarm system, and other devices for carers of persons with dementia tending to wander
- Training programmes for Carers - from the complete beginner to more advanced computer courses
- ECDL programme (training and examinations)
- Training in the use of email to write letters to friends and relations at home, within the EU and Internationally, at high speed and low cost.
- The Carers Web Site - The Internet allows Carers to keep up to date and find out what developments and supports are available for Carers nationally and around the world.
- The wider vision of the National Carers IT Centre is to raise awareness of the potential for IT for Carers, and to empower Carers to benefit from the 'Information Age'.

Most family Carers are late adopters of information technology. There are many barriers that Carers must overcome that prevent them from participating in the information society (IS). These include age (most carers are older people themselves over the age of 50 years), the fact that new technology often appears too complicated, lack of access to a computer and also the lack of time to learn. The Carers Association is helping to overcome these difficulties by providing specific training courses and by facilitating individuals and groups of Carers to gain recognised training and certification in IT. The Association has been running the very successful National Carers IT Centre in Kilkenny and is an examinations centre for the ECDL.

Family Carers are often a very marginalised group. The great majority are women, many of whom have given up educational, training and career opportunities in order to provide full-time care to a loved one at home, which often lasts for years. Their marginalisation is increased by the sense of isolation and physical and emotional stress induced by long-term, high-level care at home. The main impetus for the National Carers IT Centre was realised through the identification of the needs of family Carers in the home. It was realised that

through the use of ICTs, family Carers in the home could communicate with other Carers in similar circumstances as themselves, as well as keep in touch with relatives and friends. Because the Carers Association provides information and supports to individual family Carers and organisations of Carers, the Association expanded their repertoire of supports to include training and education, particularly in the use of IT skills and through IS technologies which help ease the burden of caring and provide opportunities for personal and career development. Some Carers took this opportunity to update their skills with a view to working from home. Carers also realised they needed to develop their skills now in order to help secure paid work when their caring commitment ends.

The main problem the service faced was that due to the nature of their work, family Carers are confined to the home. The National Carers IT Centre aims to ease this problem by providing carers with the skills to use ICTs, communicate with other carers to ease their burden and to increase Carers chances of obtaining employment when their role as Carer ends.

In recent years, the Kilkenny Information Age organisation collaborated with some family Carers in Kilkenny on a project to determine the benefits that could be accrued from the use of new technologies in easing the burden of family Carers. This pilot project involved providing a number of family Carers in Kilkenny with equipment and IT training. This proved to be a great success and many of these family Carers went on to do the ECDL course.

Context

The following organisations are involved:

- The Carers Association – represents Ireland’s family Carers in the home.
- The National Carers IT Centre – IT training centre of The Carers Association.
- The Kilkenny Information Age –donated 6 computers to The National Carers IT Centre and to a number of family Carers in 1999.

The target group for the service is family Carers based in the home. Family Carers care full time for relatives who are both young and in old age, are frail and/or have severe disabilities.

Needs and lifestyles of the target group are:

Work – Family Carers need to be equipped with the skills to return to the workplace, or to work at home.

Education – Family Carers often leave education early or lack the opportunity to continue their education or training.

Communication – Family Carers need to communicate with the outside world, with family members and with other Carers in order to reduce their isolation at home.

Another related service provided by the Carers Association and the National IT Carers Centre is the very successful ‘Care in the Home Training Course’ designed for family Carers. This course also includes an introductory IT Module, which has proved to be one of the favourite modules on the course. Many Carers have expressed an interest in going on to do further IT training.

The Carers Association now also provides information and advice about assistive technologies. Assistive technologies need not be restricted to those that are used directly by the person with a disability or the older person themselves, but also include those that are used by Carers, such as lifting aids, or that are used to deliver services by a care service

provider such as tele-alarms. Units like tele-care systems can help manage the care process in a way that is both non-intrusive and an aid to maintaining independence. Such systems enable specific risk factors to be managed, which can reduce the worry on Carers. Access to information and advice, using the Internet, access to entertainment and education, maintaining independence, security, safety and better social communication, emergency management can all be improved by these technologies. Such technologies include: fall alarms; 'wandering' alarms; pendants worn around the neck of a Cared-for person which can be used to raise an alarm; electronic calendars for people with dementia or those who find it difficult to keep count of the days. To increase social interaction and to empower the Carers. To provide Carers with new and up-to-date skills.

History process

The idea was to encourage the use of information and communications technology amongst older Carers. Particularly those isolated in the home.

Awareness for the service came from:

- Meetings with Carers in each of the 20 Carer Association centres throughout the country through a needs analysis with Carers.
- The IT module on the Care in the Home Training Course was very successful. Many Carers outlined on their evaluation sheets that they would like to go on to do more computer training.
- The National Carers IT Centre frequently publishes articles in the Take Care! Magazine - The Carers Association's quarterly publication. These articles invoked many suggestions and reactions from Carers. Many Carers expressed an interest in computer training, particularly if it could be provided using Computer Based Training methods or through Web Based Training methods.

2.2 Analysis

Impact

Success is frequently measured using questionnaires, feedback and observation. Evaluations are also conducted and each candidate completes an exam at the end of an ECDL Module. The National Carers IT Centre has proved to be a success from a number of points of view:

- The Carers met one morning a week for ECDL training.
- They felt less isolated when they could meet together in the training centre. Those Carers over 55 were there to encourage and help each other along.
- Carers enjoy this course, as it gives them a break. They meet other Carers and can share their experiences with them. The social aspect has helped them to take time out and also to gain important skills.
- They feel empowered and less isolated.
- The Carers doing the course feel more confident about 'dropping in' to use the National Carers IT Centre. The IT Officer is there each day to help those Carers who drop in to use the IT facilities.

Due to Caring commitments at home, one fifth of the Carers did not complete the course. These Carers would prefer to learn from home using a mix of training methods such as computer-based training and perhaps meeting up once a month in the Centre for examinations or tutorials.

Short Title

It was evident from the start that there was an immense interest in the course. Many other suggestions were made for potential courses which were IT related. Some Carers, in particular the over 55's found that computers brought out a creative side to them. One Carer in particular was interested in creative writing and used her computer at home to write stories. She has published a book since.

Factors that influence success are:

- Social interaction. They immensely enjoyed the course.
- Carer empowerment
- Ability and confidence to go on to do further courses
- Carers need a computer at home to practise and put their skills into use.
- Lessons to be learned: for the case:
- Due to caring commitments at home some found that giving the time and commitment to the course a problem.
- The course needs to be kept short and within a certain time frame. This first ECDL course, which is still ongoing and near completion, has gone on longer than first planned, due to a number of Carers not being able to attend classes. This was due to other commitments at home.
- It would be more useful to do a short introductory course first.
- Carers need a pc at home for communication and also to practise for ECDL tests. Some Carers found that to purchase a computer themselves would be too expensive.
- The use of Web Based Training and Computer Based Training methods should be used in conjunction with the traditional classroom training method.

Lessons to learn

Do involve outside organisations that can provide ICT equipment.

Do ensure that Carers are facilitated to learn in an open, peer-orientated environment and at their own pace.

Perspectives

The training is still ongoing, one day a week for a half day. The expectation for the future is that Carers will pursue further training, and use the skills they have learned. It is hoped that some will go on to continue their IT training from home using web-based training methods or other form of computer-based training.

2.3 Acknowledgements and links

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Link

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