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Set of Voluntary Recommendations on Using Digital Technologies to Provide Services for Older Adults in Poverty Condition in APEC Economies

APEC Digital Economy Steering Group

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Set of Voluntary Recommendations and Opportunities for the APEC Economies to Promote Digital Inclusion and the Provision of Services Through Digital Technologies Among Older Adults in Poverty

Based on the research findings, the research team has formulated the following voluntary recommendations to be implemented in APEC economies:

i. Communication between the private and public sectors to offer affordable digital devices and services for the older adult population

Scarce economic resources limit the sustained use of quality digital technologies. Although there is a wide variety of devices and services on the market, the offer should correspond to the needs of older adults. In this regard, it would be recommended that the public and private sectors work together to offer digital technologies at affordable prices considering socioeconomic aspects.

The private sector can leverage its resources, expertise, to manufacture and distribute digital devices at more affordable prices. By partnering with the public sector, initiatives can be developed to offer subsidies, discounts, or financing options specifically targeting older adults. This collaboration ensures that cost does not become a barrier for older adults to access digital devices and services.

Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that the older adult population has often been overlooked in the digital marketplace. This group may be under-engaged due to a lack of technology designed specifically for their needs, coupled with limited access to affordable options. Therefore, concerted efforts are necessary to foster the interest of both sectors in delivering devices and services to this often-excluded market, tapping into its significant business potential.

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ii.   Enabling network approaches to the delivery of digital inclusion services

Social and private organizations bring different areas of expertise and perspectives to the table. Social organizations often have a deep understanding of community needs and challenges, while private organizations possess technical knowledge, resources, and innovative solutions. By creating collaboration mechanisms through public policy aimed at the establishment of joint initiatives, these actors can leverage their respective strengths to design and implement comprehensive digital inclusion services that effectively address the needs of older adult populations.

In particular, social organizations understand the unique challenges faced by groups with untapped economic potential and can provide insights into the most appropriate digital inclusion strategies. This invaluable experience can be leveraged to ensure that digital services are relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the specific needs of the communities they serve.

iii.   Participation of older adults in the design of digital technologies

Digital technologies are typically designed with a specific user in mind: one that is of young age and has none of the difficulties of use that are common in the older adult population. The obsolescence of devices hinders the sustained use of digital technologies by a population that does not have sufficient economic resources, nor the motivation and skills to adapt to rapid technological changes. If older adults are expected to be able to utilize these technologies, an effort must be made to actively include them in their design.

This implies the firsthand inclusion of their perspective regarding factors such as legibility, accessibility, ease of use, and others.

iv.   Incorporating the demands and needs of older adults in digital access policies and address the digital divide in policies aimed at older adults

In several economies, digital inclusion is not a priority in policies related to the welfare of older adults. However, evidence suggests that this may limit their access to various basic services and economic opportunities. In this sense, it would be essential to identify the perspective of older adults in terms of potential benefits.

Given the heterogeneity of the digital divide, it would also be essential to incorporate the age variable in digital access policies. To this end, the opinions, expectations and wishes of older adults should also be considered.

The implementation of policies with these characteristics is fundamental for the implementation of new projects. With this in mind, successful digital inclusion for older adults requires a collaborative effort that spans government, private sector, nonprofit, educational, and community-based organizations. These agencies must work together to address the unique challenges and opportunities associated with bridging the digital divide among older adults, ultimately improving their quality of life and access to essential services.

v.   Implementation of projects that promote the use of digital technologies with the support of older adults' social networks.

Family, friends, and peer networks are fundamental for older adults, as they provide support for various daily activities. Consequently, older adults may feel more motivated and comfortable embracing digital technologies when they receive support from their social networks. Thus, key agentswithin their social circles or trusted professionals in healthcare or

other services can provide guidance, encouragement, and hands-on assistance, which can help older adults overcome barriers and build confidence in using digital tools.

It is through these links that access to, and use of digital technologies can be promoted. Indeed, it is not only a matter of motivating use, but also of strengthening confidence in digital services and creating a nexus for learning digital skills. It would be important for policy makers to consider these "points of contact" to facilitate outreach to older adults in the implementation of projects.

This is important for all older adults, particularly those still "offline". Thus, the process of including the older adults that are entirely without digital skills will require a strategic approach, in which social networks will have an important role.

vi.   Strengthening digital literacy among older adults

Digital literacy equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively and confidently use digital technologies. It empowers them to navigate the digital landscape, access information, communicate, and engage in online activities. By improving digital literacy, individuals become active participants in the digital world, enabling them to fully benefit from the opportunities and resources available online.

Consequently, efforts must be made to include digital literacy in domestic level public policies to foster the digital inclusion of older adults in poverty. This requires the elaboration of frameworks that ensure the existence of digital literacy programs at local level for older adults in poverty domestically.

These programs would need to be designed in such a way that they are appropriate to older adults' characteristics and would be carried out by professionals with experience in communicating with this population. Delivery models should be designed be able to address the variable characteristics of older adults within specific economies, with consideration for teaching methods, locations, and languages, and the construction of welcoming learning spaces for older adults.

Robust evaluation processes will need to be designed and applied to these programs, particularly regarding their effectiveness on the participant's acquisition of skills, to allow for a continuous learning and improvement process.

vii. Considering geographical factors and physical access

Geographical factors significantly influence access to digital infrastructure, such as broadband internet connectivity and mobile network coverage. Urban areas often have better infrastructure compared to rural areas due to factors like population density, infrastructure investments, and market considerations. Neglecting geographical factors can perpetuate the digital divide, leaving rural and remote communities at a disadvantage in terms of digital inclusion.

Attention to the factors such as digital skills will not be sufficient to guarantee older adults in APEC economies are able to utilize digital technologies if the basic connectivity conditions are not satisfied. Thus, baseline levels of availability, accessibility, and affordability regarding access to the internet must be satisfied in all economies.

By recognizing and addressing these disparities, policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders can work towards bridging the urban-rural divide, reducing inequalities, and ensuring that all

older adults, regardless of their geographic location, have the opportunity to benefit from digital technologies.

viii. Fostering joint initiatives among APEC economies

Although the characteristics of OAP in APEC economies is varied and responds to specific sociodemographic and economic variables, joint efforts across APEC economies are encouraged as they provide an opportunity for economies to share their successful strategies and best practices in addressing digital exclusion among older adults. Economies can learn from each other's experiences, identify effective approaches, and adapt them to their own contexts.

Collaborative efforts would allow economies to pool their resources and expertise to tackle digital exclusion. By combining financial resources, technological infrastructure, and human capital, joint initiatives can have a greater impact in implementing comprehensive programs and services for older adults. Joint initiatives could thus potentially facilitate the exchange of tools, resources, and technological solutions that have been developed and proven effective in different economies. This includes educational materials, training modules, digital platforms, and assistive technologies. Sharing these resources allows economies to leverage existing solutions, adapt them to their specific contexts, and accelerate their digital inclusion efforts for older adults.

Additionally, APEC economies should be encouraged to cooperate towards the sharing of data, research findings, and evaluation results related to digital exclusion among older adults. This exchange of knowledge would permit the construction of a robust evidence base, identify trends, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, contributing towards evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement of digital inclusion strategies.