



FEANTSA

DIGITAL INCLUSION & HOMELESSNESS

EVENT REPORT

On the 15th of October, practitioners, developers and organisations interested in digital and social inclusion gathered in Brussels for the first-ever event on Digital Inclusion & Homelessness hosted by FEANTSA.

A simple question underpinned the decision to organise an event on digital inclusion and homelessness:

Why is digital inclusion for vulnerable groups important?

The response to such a question was two-stranded:

- ✓ Because vulnerable groups are suffering discrimination in their use of technology
- ✓ Because prejudices are being exercised in the use of technology to address homelessness

At present, several good practices addressing vulnerable groups and homelessness are circulating in different EU member states¹. During the event, five of these good practices were presented: Surviving in Brussels (Belgium), Entourage (France), Soliguide (France), Arrels Tracker App (Spain) and Reconnect (France).

Surviving in Brussels

This digital tool is only available in the city of Brussels. It was presented by Laurent d'Ursel, President of DouchFlux², a non-profit organisation working for social integration of the most vulnerable in the city of Brussels.

Surviving in Brussels is an online platform that aims to bring together different actors from the homeless sector into one handy database. The platform shows information about shelters and places where one can take a shower, receive legal and administrative advice, do laundry or meet new people, among other things.



¹ For more information, see: FEANTSA's recommendations for an inclusive agenda in the next Digital Single Market Strategy. Luís Vilachá, FEANTSA 2019. <https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2019/10/11/digital-inclusion-and-homelessness-feantsas-recommendations-for-an-inclusive-agenda-in-the-next-digital-single-market-strategy?bcParent=27>

² For more information about DoucheFlux, <http://www.doucheflux.be/qui-sommes-nous/>

The platform is available in four languages (FR, NL, EN and RO). The platform compiles services in the city of Brussels, the format of which is shown in the picture above. Each category of services has been allocated an image to make it easier to search for.

➔ Specificities:

1. It is a cooperative tool:
 - Open data allows for mutualisation of reliable and verified information
 - Open source presents the possibility for other cities to develop their own platform by receiving all necessary codes and information
 - Open content presents the possibility of copying articles without paying copyright
2. It commits to a standardized set pictograms and vocabulary.
3. It includes a 'Did you know?' element – facts sheets on different themes and issues.

Entourage

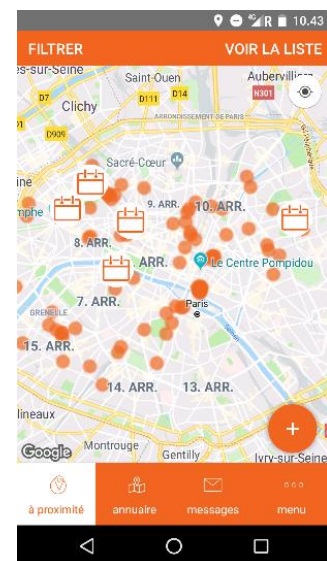
This app aims to break down the barriers that prevent citizens from connecting with one another and thus, to help those experiencing homelessness to build their social capital.

Entourage's mission is the creation of a social connection between residents and people in great need. Entourage facilitates neighbourly solidarity by connecting residents, charities and people experiencing homelessness. To realise this, the app allows its users to:

- Take action by joining solidarity actions
- Gain knowledge of local charities and their services
- Become informed by accessing tutorials and getting advice

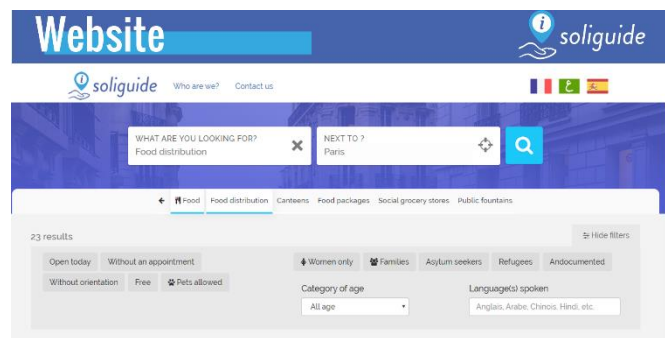
➔ Specificities:

1. The app fosters new social and digital behaviour towards people experiencing homelessness.
2. It has been received well among NGOs working with destitute citizens.
3. It is a co-creation project that includes everybody to optimise effectiveness.



Soliguide

This digital tool focuses on providing both beneficiaries and practitioners with information to cover basic needs such as shelter, food, and hygiene services, but also regarding legal and administrative support.



The app is based on a strong database that allows all kinds of users to identify and be served with their needs.

It is also worth noting that Solinum, Soliguide's matrix organisation, has recently presented a broad report on the use of smartphones and technology by people experiencing homelessness in different cities of France.³

➔ Specificities:

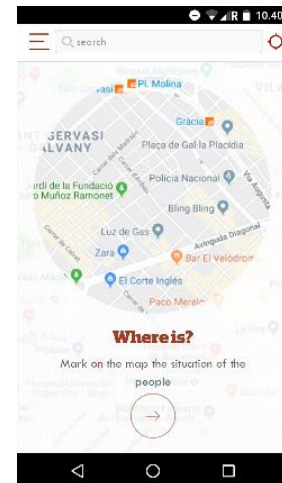
1. The digital tool is adapted to the needs of all kinds of profile users.
2. It is based on a strong database to connect social and digital needs.
3. It is informed by a broad report on the current use of technology by people experiencing homelessness.

Arrels Tracker App

This app addresses both practitioners and broader society. Its goal is to help find people experiencing homelessness on the streets and to report that information to Arrels' social workers. The app collects data about the number of people sighted, their gender, if they have dogs and their exact location.

Since 2016, the app has received more than 1400 inputs from app users.

Regarding data collection, Arrels only collects geodata and numeric information together with a short optional description of the situation. Pictures, names or identification are not possible with their Tracker app.



➔ Specificities:

1. It is an open source: A Polish version of the Arrels Tracker App is already being used in the city of Gdansk. The data is still managed by Arrels.
2. It depends on citizenship engagement to inform social workers about people experiencing homelessness in Barcelona.

³ Precarité Connectée. Solinum 2019. <http://www.solinum.org/precarite-connectee-6-recommandations-pour-linclusion-numerique-des-sans-abri/#comment-7>

Reconnect

This app offers beneficiaries the opportunity to digitalise their documents so that they are safeguarded and available at all time.

The app can only be accessed by social workers once practitioners and beneficiaries know each other. Reconnect's project is

currently available in more than 500 social centres reaching out to as many as ten thousand beneficiaries in France.

Reconnect's app makes it possible for beneficiaries to use the app to show their documents instead of bringing them in paper.

The data collected by the app is managed by Reconnect.

→ Specificities:

1. The app offers an innovative solution to prevent beneficiaries' from losing and/or getting their crucial documents damaged when sleeping rough.
2. It makes it possible to use the app instead of paper to show copy of official documents.



Second session: Round table – A window of opportunities after 2020?

During the second part of the event, the session included more topic-oriented content. A specialist in adult learning education, a political analyst on e-health/m-health, and a project manager currently working on EU funded projects on ICT tools for vulnerable groups took the floor to explore the concept of digital inclusion in depth.

David Mallows: The concept of digital taste

David Mallows conducted a presentation in which he introduced the concept of digital taste. A concept developed by Professor Steve Reder from Portland University (US).

According to Steve Reder, modern technologies provide opportunities for everybody to extend and deepen access to meaningful education and, thus, prevent social and digital exclusion. However, learning how to use modern technology is not enough these days. People need to like it and find it useful. Here arises the issue of digital taste. A successful path toward digital inclusion must be four-stage and include digital taste. This path must account for:

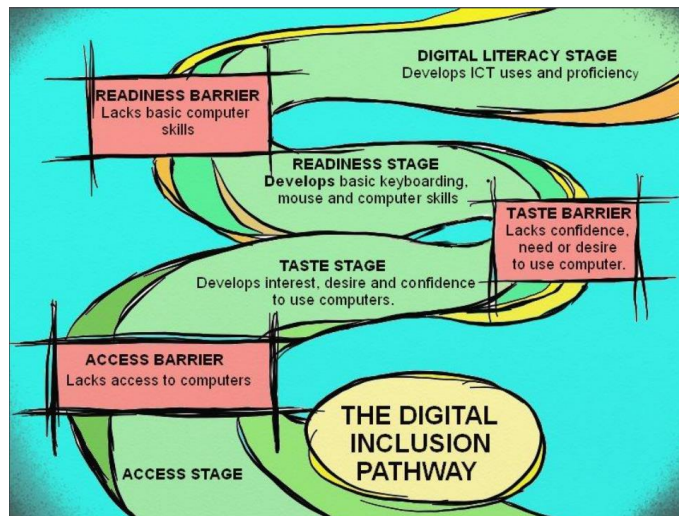
- **Digital access:** Those lacking a computer or a mobile phone in the first place will face immediate issues in, for example, digital administration.

- **Digital Taste:** People need to develop a desire to engage with the tools, using technology needs to be meaningful.

- **Digital Readiness Stage:** Once people have developed the 'taste' for certain digital tools, they are far more likely to succeed in using these tools.

- **Digital Literacy:** At this stage people have acquired enough digital skills to participate in the digital world.

In other words, David Malloes illustrated that even though digital skills are crucial in order to activate the taste to use technology, is not enough to create well designed and 'cool' tools. It is about finding a way to convince people to use them. If digital taste isn't included while teaching learning skills, the whole process of digital inclusion might end up being a waste of time and resources.



Simona Guagliardo: Finding common 'evidence'

In her presentation, Simona Guagliardo emphasized the importance of having evidence to support the work for digital inclusion. She highlighted how difficult it can be at the policy level to support the work for digital inclusion because of the lack of available data and, moreover, the difficulty of collecting sensitive data.

Nevertheless, Simona Guagliardo pointed out that the current General Data Protection Regulation,⁴ also known as GDPR, can be used as a valuable tool when handling and managing sensitive data, as in the case of vulnerable groups. For Ms. Guagliardo, GDPR should not only be understood as a tool to protect and support people's digital rights against data breaches and/or misuse, but as a tool to engage with beneficiaries. In other words, using and managing the data should result in a co-creating process between those aiming at using the data for creating and developing new digital tools and those whose data is being used for those purposes.

In her presentation, Simona Guagliardo also emphasized the challenges and opportunities offered by the enormous amount of data we are constantly creating in using modern technology. According to her, in order to properly use this huge amount of data, it is crucial to advocate for a better ICT infrastructure, so that more people can be engaged in the use of digital tools, and data is better protected and used.

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2016/679

Alessia Sebillo: Building projects to prevent digital exclusion

In her presentation, Alessia Sebillo presented the several European projects to prevent digital exclusion in which DIESIS is currently involved. Alessia Sebillo explained how age, gender, and lack of skill, are all causes for digital exclusion in Europe.

She explained that the Digital Europe Programme⁵ will help to improve connectivity (better internet access), build digital skills (digital training programmes) and increase accessibility (improving digital services and staff training) among EU citizens.

Finally, Alessia Sebillo presented two projects that DIESIS is currently working on with the aim of improving digital inclusion.

- **The MEDICI project:** This project aims at mapping any activity that addresses digital deprivation: lack of access, lack of skills, or poor quality of internet use.
- **Newtalents4eu:** This project aims to design and pilot an innovative path for labour integration of refugees. This path will be based on a specific IT skill development programme and the cooperation and mobilisation of public services, employers and social and economic partners.

Conclusions

The Digital Inclusion & Homelessness event showed how the use of modern technology can help to ease social workers' daily work with vulnerable groups. The event allowed participants to envision several key factors that must be considered when working toward digital inclusion and offered more insight into a handful of concrete ongoing projects.

It is not enough to develop digital tools or teach future users how to use them. We must also work to invite curiosity, develop an appetite, and help future users identify a need, for using digital tools so they don't overlook available technology or refuse it for being too complicated. Tools must be designed to appeal to users.

Furthermore, throughout the event, it became clear just how important data is when working on digital inclusion. We learnt how crucial it is to use and support the work for digital inclusion by using GDPR, not only to prevent data misuse and data breaches, but also to initiate a co-creating process, so that both developers and beneficiaries are involved when developing new tools.

Digital inclusion cannot be achieved by agreeing on the importance of including digital tools into social workers daily work. If we are to work together for an effective agenda for digital inclusion that includes the most vulnerable, we need to focus our strategy on three basic points:

⁵ Digital Europe Programme, European Commission, 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/digital-europe-programme-proposed-eu92-billion-funding-2021-2027>

- 1) It is necessary to develop training modules for both practitioners and beneficiaries that foster their digital appetite, thus generating a more positive approach towards using digital tools in their daily work with vulnerable groups.
- 2) We must learn from each other's good practices by repeating positive sharing experiences like FEANTSA's event. This collaboration will allow for a more effective improvement of digital inclusion.
- 3) We must develop a common data protection strategy to handle and manage sensitive data from vulnerable groups in accordance with GDPR. This should be an inclusive process that involves developers, practitioners and beneficiaries.

Document drafted by Luís Vilachá.

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