



Digital Inclusion and homelessness

FEANTSA
30 YEARS

FEANTSA's recommendations for an inclusive agenda in the next Digital Single Market strategy

WHY IS DIGITAL INCLUSION IN HOMELESS SERVICES IMPORTANT?

Europe is under rapid transformation as digitalisation in our societies is increasing. The Commission's plan for a Digital Single Market (DSM) comes as a strategy to provide with a framework where individuals and businesses can coexist and interact¹.

The digitalisation of our societies is creating digital gaps that can negatively affect people's lives. For those citizens that are already facing destitution, the digitalisation of our societies represents a significant challenge. Prejudices vary and scepticism arise when trying to advocate for digital inclusion among people facing any kind of destitution. Interestingly, the internet has been recognized by outreach workers as a tool to gain access to resources and information in their daily work.²

Social workers and practitioners are in general confronted with the challenge of adapting to new working codes based on the digitalisation of their daily work. The digitalisation and allocation of documents in different cloud systems; the use of geolocation systems when providing counselling; the use of smartphones and mobile apps designed for homeless services and beneficiaries; or the appropriate use of social media, just to name a few, represent challenges but also opportunities for those working directly in homeless services or in social services.

Social and digital inclusion should not be seen as opposing concepts, nor should they be seen as synonym concepts³. Instead, social and digital inclusion should be seen as two sides of the same coin. It is crucial to assemble both digital and social inclusion under the same umbrella, where organisations with the necessary expertise can work together to bridge the gap for digital inclusion and thus, implement a digital agenda for vulnerable groups and homeless people.

In the mid-term review of the DSM strategy, the Commission presented how smartphones are already being used to improve people's health while addressing systematic challenges in the healthcare

¹ COM(2015) 192 final

² Bure, Claire (2005) Digital Inclusion without Social Inclusion: The consumption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within homeless subculture in Scotland. *The Journal of Community Informatics*. Vol. 1, Issue 2., pp. 166-133. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc5d/7fd66300ccfb9a52f3ec9ec87011bffd4d46.pdf>

³ Ibid.

system⁴. As a matter of fact, the use of new ICT tools for digital inclusion have a significant potential for implementation in the health sector for vaccine recalls, but also for multiple purposes such as paying taxes; looking and applying for jobs; monitoring beneficiaries with addictions by practitioners; geolocating emergency shelters and social services in general; or even offering free legal and economic counselling. Still, in the last mid-term review from 2017, an agenda for digital inclusion of the most vulnerable is still not included. ⁵

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) represented a step forward for the protection of personal data at the European level⁶, especially considering the rapid transformation of our societies. The e-Privacy Directive⁷ has the objective of ensuring the consistency of the GDPR regarding the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms with respect to private life, confidentiality in communications and protection of personal data. The focus on data management and data processing and more in particular how companies, States and organisations manage private and sensitive data is an issue that is gaining focus among EU institutions as the digitalisation of our societies moves forward. Still, in the particular context of social and outreach work, even though the use of ICT tools might be handful when working with beneficiaries facing any kind of social destitution, resistance to the adoption of technology persists.⁸ Existing research shows that rejection to technology has been associated with a lack of available training, a lack of professional standards that define technological competency⁹, and above all with the debate over ethical implementation, and the concerns that technology might interfere with the relationships on which social work is based.¹⁰

The current DSM strategy and the post-2020 scenario represent an opportunity for practitioners and developers working for digital and social inclusion for vulnerable groups and homeless people. The current digitalisation of society brings challenges that can have a direct negative impact for destitute citizens. If an agenda for digital inclusion is not considered a priority, the digital gap will affect those that are already the most vulnerable and thus bridging the gap among social and digital inclusion would be far from feasible.

⁴ COM(2017) 218 final

⁵ COM(2017) 228 final

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2016/679

⁷ COM(2017) 10 final

⁸ Bure, Claire (2005) Digital Inclusion without Social Inclusion: The consumption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within homeless subculture in Scotland. *The Journal of Community Informatics*. Vol. 1, Issue 2., pp. 166-133. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dc5d/7fd66300ccfb9a52f3ec9ec87011bffd4d46.pdf>

⁹ Guagliardo, Simona (2018) The missing link in the EU's plan on digital health: citizens' empowerment and endorsement. EPC. Commentary. https://www.epc.eu/pub_details.php?cat_id=4&pub_id=8531

¹⁰ Wolf, Lea & Jones, Jamie (2016), *Late Adapters? How Social Workers Acquire Knowledge and Skills About Technology Tools*. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*. Taylor & Francis Online. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15228835.2016.1250027>

GOOD PRACTICES OF ICT TOOLS FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS AND HOMELESS PEOPLE

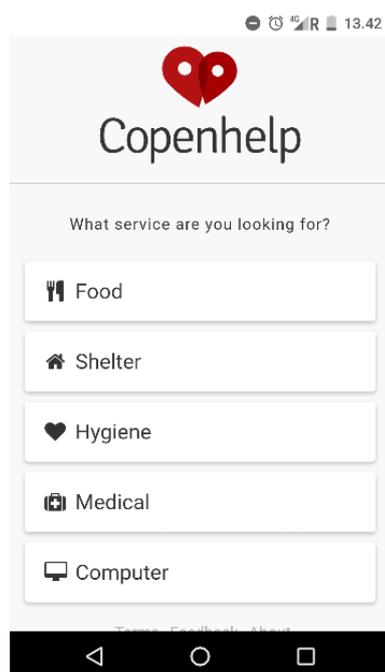
The following list represents eighteen good practices of different ICT tools collected from different organisations and developers working to bridge digital inclusion among vulnerable groups and homeless people. The list is divided into three categories: a) ICT tools addressed to beneficiaries and practitioners; b) ICT tools address only to practitioners; c) ICT tools address to beneficiaries and society in general.

ADDRESSED TO BENEFICIARIES AND PRACTITIONERS

The eight ICT tools presented below are all good practices that address both beneficiaries and practitioners. Five of the examples presented target homeless services and people experiencing homelessness. The other three examples target refugees, asylum-seekers and people facing vulnerable situations but not necessarily homelessness.

1. [Ankommen](#) (Germany): Ankommen (Arrival in English) is a German app designed in collaboration with the Goethe Institute, the Ministry for Migration and Refugees, the Federal employment agency and the Bavarian Broadcasting (BR).

The goal behind this app is to provide information in a relatively easy way on how to navigate the first days in Germany for asylum-seekers in terms of applying for asylum, finding jobs, filling applications and even learning some basic German to go through all the bureaucratic procedure. The app is available in German, English, French, Arabic and Farsi.



2. [CopenhelP](#) (Denmark): This platform is designed to help homeless and low-income residents of Copenhagen to access information about fundamental services. The platform is optimised for smartphones and focuses on services like shelter, food, medical care, technology access, and hygiene services.

The app is based on free software and can be used in different contexts. CopenhelP is based in [Link-SF](#), a project led by St. Anthony Foundation, a homeless service in San Francisco (US) and Zendesk, a cloud-based customer service created by three Danish entrepreneurs.

3. [Opvang Atlas](#) (Netherlands): This online platform is addressed for anyone that is looking for information about the assistance offered to vulnerable people in the Netherlands. The platform provides detailed information about social services, shelters, social assistance, etc. It is filtered via a search engine through postal code, gender, age and/or the city. It is not optimised for smartphones.



4. [On Barcelona](#) (Spain):

This online platform has been developed by the 'Comunitat de Sant'Egidio', a religious organisation in Catalonia. The information available in the platform can be shown both on the internet and on smartphones. It mainly shows places to eat, sleep and have a shower. It also provides information about places to get counselling regarding administrative status, social services, etc.



5. [MinVej](#) (Denmark): MinVej / MyPath is a recovery-supporting application developed for psychiatric issues. The app provides practitioners with 'live' information about the beneficiaries life and well-being. The app is currently in use in six Danish municipalities, including Copenhagen.



6. **Soliguide** (France): This online platform has for mission to empower people facing difficult situations by providing them with information about services to satisfy basic needs. The platform is optimised for smartphones but there is no app. It provides valuable information of places to eat, to sleep, or to shower. It also provides information about several other services such as employment guidance, health services for homeless people and activities free of charge. The platform gathers information from Paris, Bordeaux and soon Nantes. This platform can also be accessed from online information points (kiosks) at train stations and information points in Paris and Bordeaux.

Soliguide is a project created by [Solinum](#), a French association focusing on digital inclusion among vulnerable people

7. **Surviving in Brussels** (Belgium): Is an online platform of several entities working with vulnerable and destitute people in the city of Brussels. The platform, which is optimized for use on smartphones, provides information about shelters, places to eat, hygiene services, medical care, technology, legal aid, access to administrative support, entertainment, etc.. The project is still in development, and the developers are planning to create an app and to install fixed online information points (kiosks), in the main train stations of the city of Brussels to facilitate its use by beneficiaries.



8. **Min Rådgiver** (Denmark): Min Rådgiver (my social worker, in English), is both an app and an online platform that aims to offer support to young vulnerable people. The main idea is to create a bridge between social services and vulnerable young people.

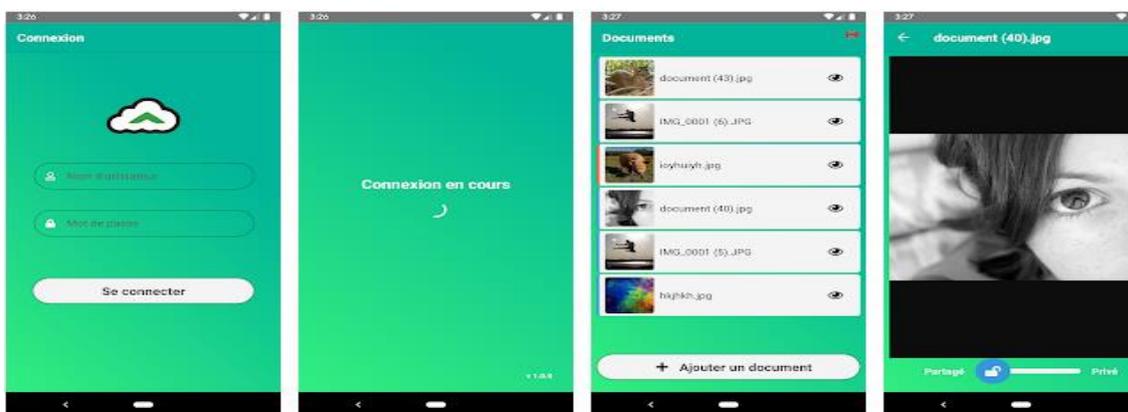
This project has been developed by Metropol Professionshøjskole (Metropolitan University College), and it is not available outside Denmark.

ADDRESSED ONLY TO PRACTITIONERS

The second category of ICT tool exclusively addresses practitioners working at homeless services.

9. [Reconnect](#) (France): This online platform provides organisations working with destitute citizens with the option of storing beneficiaries' sensitive data (IDs, Passports, driving license, etc.) in what they call the 'solidarity cloud'. The platform was developed by two French engineers with the objective of providing tools for organisations working with destitute citizens.

Cloud Solidaire is Reconnect's app, whose main goal is to facilitate the process of uploading documents into their database. The app will be launched soon.

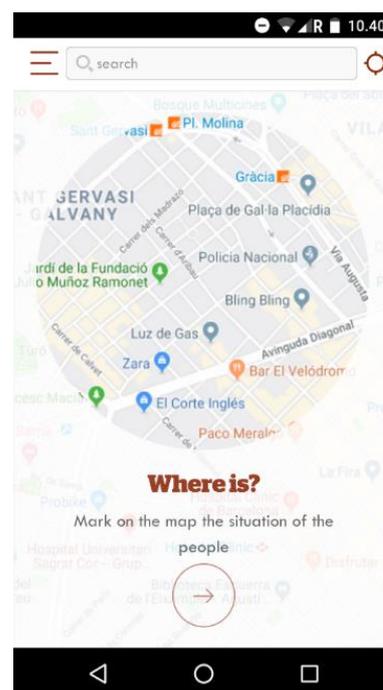


ADDRESSED TO BENEFICIARIES AND SOCIETY IN GENERAL

The third category includes eight ICT tools addressing beneficiaries but also with the goal of engaging society in the process of supporting and helping people facing vulnerable situations and homelessness. Eight of these good practices target homeless people while one targets the needs of refugees in Germany.

10. [Arrels tracker App](#) (Spain): This app allows citizens to participate in helping outreach workers from the Arrels Fundació to provide the exact location and basic information about people sleeping rough in the streets of Barcelona.

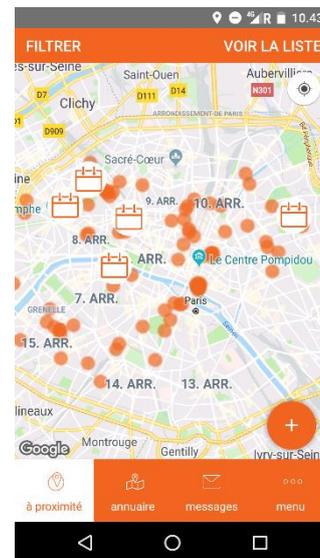
Arrels Fundació is a NGO working with homeless people in the city of Barcelona. Arrels provides advice and social assistance to homeless people. Arrels tracker App aims to raise awareness about the living conditions of people sleeping rough in Barcelona by involving society in their activities. An example of this, is their Tracker app, that provides



citizens with the possibility to report people sleeping rough so that Arrels can give support. The information collected by Arrels app, is managed directly by social workers of the organisation.

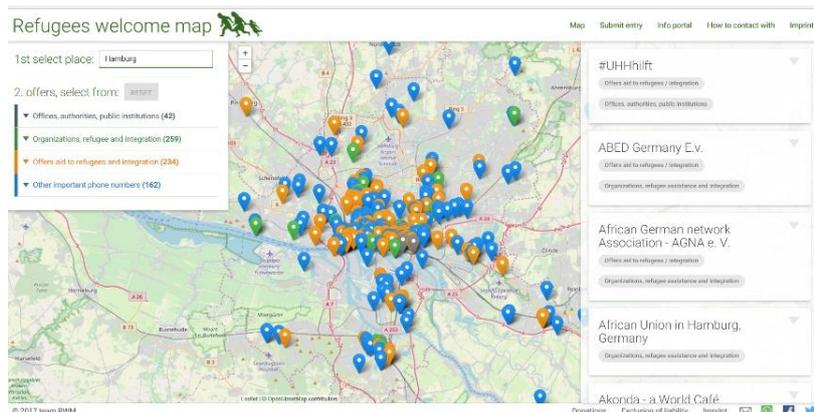
11. **Entourage** (France): The goal of Entourage is to create a 'social link' amongst neighbours, associations and people experiencing homelessness. Entourage is not a network to help nor a network to offer aid. It is a network aimed at creating a connection and uniting people who live in the same area of a certain city while fighting against existing prejudices.

The app is available in four cities in France (Paris, Lyon, Grenoble and Lille).

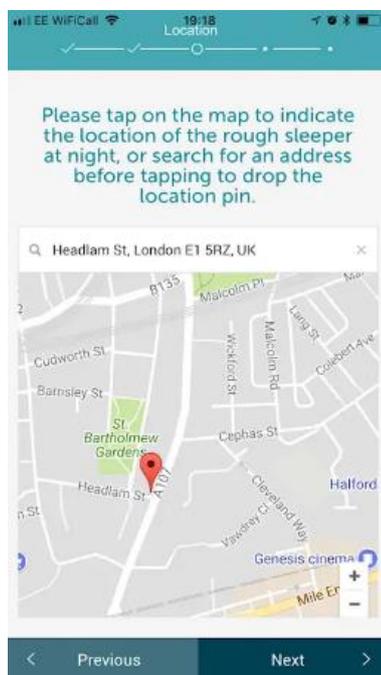
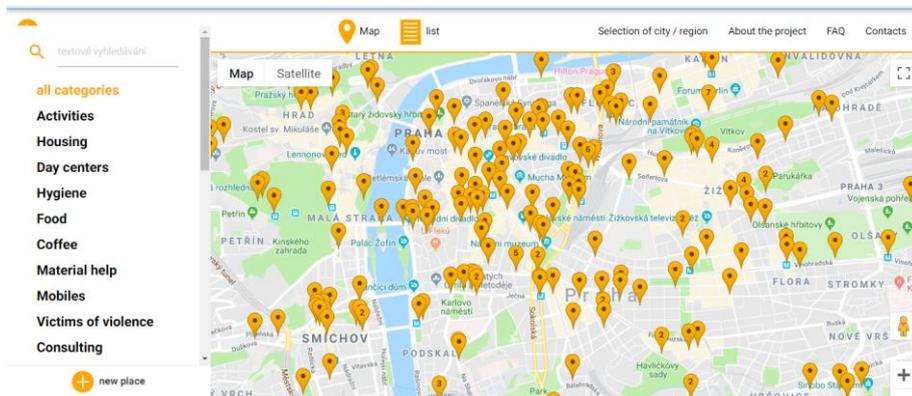


12. **Refugees welcome map** (Germany): This info portal provides crucial information for refugees in Germany. Shelter locations, refugee counselling and advice in Germany, training, intercultural activities, German courses, etc. The portal is based on an open project, so contributions to improve the information collected on the web page are encouraged.

The project has been developed by VIA Federation, a German umbrella organisation of associations and initiatives providing infrastructure and networking for migrants in Germany.

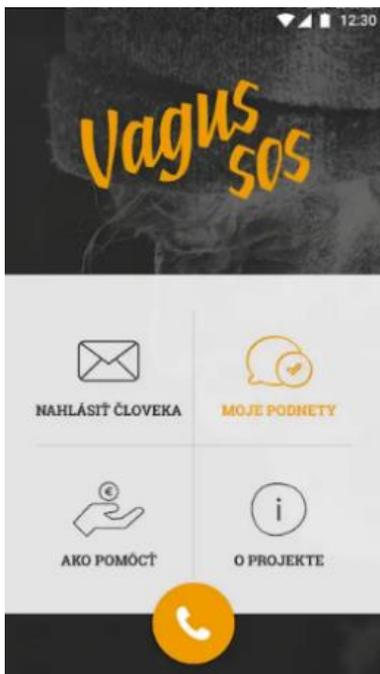
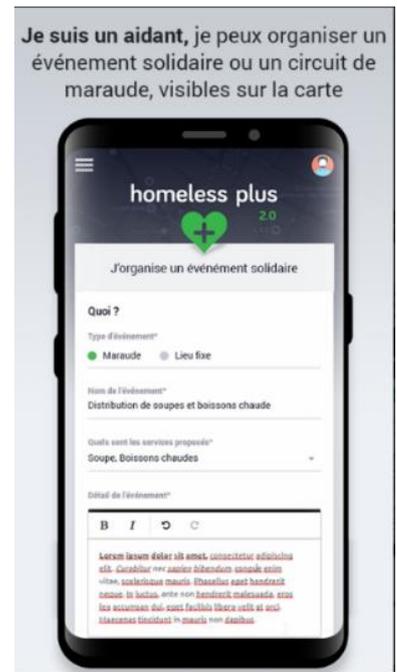


13. [Mapa bez domova – Homeless map](#) (Czech Republic / Slovakia): The Homeless map is a database of services for people in need in different cities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The authors of the project are KRISA (a group of volunteers working or interested in social issues and Jako Doma, a private organisation working with homeless women). The project invites the whole community to help in updating the map. This online platform offers an online map with facilities such as shelter, places to eat and have a shower, receive council, etc. The information about the services for homeless people are so far available in 4 towns/regions (Prague – CZ, Ostrava – CZ, Liberec region – CZ, Bratislava – SK).



14. [StreetLink](#) (United Kingdom): StreetLink is a website, mobile phone app and telephone service through which people can take positive action while raising awareness of someone sleeping rough by sending an alert that connects that person to local services for support. At the same time, it aims to involve citizens in the process of allocating and informing outreach services and local authorities about the whereabouts and conditions of people sleeping rough. The is developed in collaboration in between Homeless Link and St. Mungo's and funded by the UK Government (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), with additional funding from the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Welsh Government.

15. [Homeless Plus](#) (France): Homeless Plus is a non-profit association created in 2016 by volunteers eager to help homeless people. This ICT tool aims to identify and inform social services and Homeless Plus of the needs people experiencing homelessness may have. They have managed to create different partnerships with different associations. The picture corresponds to the second version of their app.



16. [VAGUS SOS](#) (Slovakia): This app has been developed by Vagus and APPOXIDE LAB. Vagus is an association created in 2011 by social workers. Their main goal was to create innovative services for homeless people. The app provides information about facilities such as shelters, places to eat and have a shower but also information on how citizens can help and donate. The app allows direct calls to outreach workers for specific situations. This app does not substitute emergency call numbers. This app is only available in the city of Bratislava.

17. [Le Bon Plan](#) (Belgium): Le Bon Plan is an app launched by DUNE asbl, a Belgian association focused on providing information both for practitioners and beneficiaries about drug addictions and places to receive treatment, create a network of care and help and foster their reintegration into society. The app shows location for shelters, health care attention and social support. The app is only available in Belgium.



18. [Urban Roots](#) (United Kingdom): Urban roots is a community-led environmental project in the South of Glasgow (Scotland). Besides different courses, seminars, and gardening projects they offer, they also run foodbank and community meals, coffee mornings and offer fruit and vegetables for destitute citizens in the city.

The project is co-run with the [Trussell Trust](#), an organisation that coordinates around 1200 foodbanks in the UK.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Pillar of Social Rights guarantees access to several social rights for people living in the European Union. The pillar is divided into three categories: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; Fair working conditions; and Social protection and inclusion. Chapters I & III state that all citizens shall have access to equal opportunities in education and training skills to improve their employability but also regarding social protection in the access to housing, health care and other essential services.¹¹

In the mid-term review on the implementation of the DSM strategy¹², the Commission outlined the opportunities and challenges the digitalisation of the economy and society may produce, but also the economic and social risks that digitalisation may create. In this sense, the Commission remarks that Digital Inclusion should represent an opportunity for all citizens. The New Skill Agenda for Europe¹³ strengthens this position by reaffirming that social cohesion cannot be achieved without workers possessing the right digital skills the digitalisation of society requires.

The list of ICT tools presented in this document are current examples of good practices aimed to bridge the gap for digital and social inclusion in society. The existence of unrelated similar practices in different EU member states makes it necessary to expand the findings presented in this paper. A larger sample of good practices is needed as in the current list only nine countries out of the 28 EU member states is represented¹⁴. Further research is also needed to identify and compare the effects and

¹¹ European Pillar of Social Rights, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

¹² COM(2017) 228 final

¹³ COM(2016) 381 final

¹⁴ The UK is, so far, included as an EU member state for the purpose of this document

outcomes ICT tools may have in bridging the gap for digital and social inclusion among vulnerable groups and homeless people. Finally, coordination among the organisations currently using ICT tools is becoming crucial to increase the quality of the existing good practices, which can bring opportunities for future collaboration projects and advocacy strategies amongst service providers.

Within a context where our societies are increasingly and rapidly digitalised, access to services and goods will transform, thus affecting our societies. Still, for vulnerable citizens the rapid transformation of society represents more of a challenge and a threat rather than an opportunity - a threat to be even more excluded and thus, even more invisible. This is the reason why the Digital Single Market Strategy should also include a chapter on the challenges and opportunities for digital inclusion of the most vulnerable. Digitalisation must be an opportunity for all, not just for a select few. In order to bring a better balance into the Single Digital Market Strategy by implementing a proper digital inclusion agenda for all, FEANTSA proposes the following recommendations:

- 1- Involve practitioners working directly with destitute citizens in the process of developing and implementing strategies for digital inclusion, in order to ensure that the needs of the beneficiaries are met
- 2- Provide training for practitioners to improve their digital skills so that they can benefit from ICT tools
- 3- Foster research in the area of ICT tools for destitute citizens and especially regarding the outcomes and the benefits of implementing ICT tools for vulnerable people
- 4- Create an ethical guideline strategy in collaboration with practitioners, developers and the General Directive for Data Regulation (GDPR) to set the boundaries digital inclusion should have regarding vulnerable people
- 5- Establish working groups at national level to develop guidelines that can be used by practitioners, developers and organisations working for digital inclusion of the most vulnerable

For more information, please contact information@feantsa.org

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