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Harnessing ICT for social action - a digital volunteering programme

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Harnessing ICT for social action – a digital volunteering programme

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Synthesis Report

European Commission

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Glossary

DAE = Digital Agenda for Europe
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0245:FIN:EN:PDF

EU2020 = The Europe 2020 strategy
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF

ICT = Information and Communication Technologies

SIP = Social Investment Package
http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1044&langId=en

SROI = Social Return on Investment

Executive Summary

Current European digital inclusion policies are formulated within the *context of economic crises*, increasing *socio-economic inequalities* and a strong call for *evidence-based policy-making*. This is evidenced in the formulation of policies such as the Europe 2020 (EU2020) strategy and the Social Investment Package (SIP), which aim to tackle broader, but intrinsically related, social issues.

- Publicly available national and regional digital inclusion policies show high levels of awareness of related European policies and show digital inclusion as being central to social inclusion.
- To understand digital inclusion policies' impact and effectiveness on reaching the tangible social outcomes identified by the EU2020 and SIP, the development, implementation and evaluation of policies need to be looked at separately.
- The most important issue facing the development of digital inclusion policy is when social issues are decoupled from the specific needs of the target groups that all national and regional policies identify. Target groups for digital inclusion initiatives are typically selected on the basis of their digital deficits, rather than on the basis of the social issues that digital inclusion policies aim to tackle.
- In linking development to implementation, policies need to be more specific about what types of access, skills training, motivation and content provision are most useful for which groups, based on an identification of the specific social issues present in vulnerable or excluded groups. Policies need thus to go beyond digital access and standard skills and focus on addressing those social issues through digital resources.
- Many national and regional policies identify cross-sector, multi-stakeholder groups as the ideal mode of policy implementation. In the Peer Review, the complexities of coordinating such collaborative programmes, including among public institutions, were indicated as important barriers to implementation, and it was highlighted that governments – including the European Commission – could play a stronger coordinating role.
- Another important issue in relation to implementation is that intermediaries and partners involved in delivering digital inclusion initiatives are not chosen on the basis of the identified social target outcomes for the groups most in need of inclusion. By relying on self-selection rather than proactive approaches to collaboration with third and commercial sector organisations, policy implementation risks missing those who could benefit most and 'plucking the easy to reach, lower hanging fruit' – that is, those who are already interested and motivated to engage with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This has led to many high-quality initiatives for the elderly and disabled, but far fewer for the unemployed, lower educated or those who are otherwise discriminated against and socially excluded.
- There is a paucity of evidence for the impact of digital inclusion interventions in terms of increasing socio-economic growth and alleviating socio-cultural inequalities because of a lack of knowledge-sharing. From the intermediaries involved comes anecdotal evidence of satisfaction among those who have participated in their programmes,

but there is little sharing of best practice. 'Worst' practice among practitioners is not shared, which makes it likely that mistakes are repeated and the wheel reinvented.

- The largest issue for evaluation of digital inclusion policy impact is the lack of data from longitudinal, counterfactual design studies. These can show what the unique social return on investment is of digital inclusion initiatives. To be able to do this, the pre-defined tangible, social outcomes need to be identified and measured alongside the variety of targeted digital inclusion interventions for different groups at a regional or national level.
- Several projects are currently under way to develop a framework (along the lines of EU2020 and SIP) that allows for impact evaluation of digital inclusion initiatives and that again shows how central digital inclusion is to economic growth and social well-being. These initiatives will struggle to come to fruition if seen as separate 'digital or infrastructure only' endeavours, instead of as policies requiring cross-sectional government and multi-stakeholder approaches, or else they will risk being restricted to very specific clusters of digitally excluded groups.

A. Policy context at the European level

This synthesis report should be read alongside an earlier published discussion paper and peer country reports.[1] In the accompanying discussion paper, the historical policy context of the current debate around digital inclusion was laid out. It showed how the general thinking around digital inclusion had shifted from a focus on access, to the incorporation of skills, an awareness of the benefits and broad engagement (Helsper, 2012a). The latest policy shift has emphasised the importance of understanding the tangible social outcomes of digital inclusion. What follows is a recap of the discussion of tangible outcomes, integrating the points made by the participants in the 'Harnessing ICT for Social Action' Peer Review meeting held in Santiago de Compostela on 25 March 2014. First, though, it is useful to restate how digital inclusion was defined:

"Digital Inclusion is an individual's effective and sustainable engagement with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in ways that allow full participation in society in terms of economic, social, cultural, civic and personal well-being. A digitally inclusive Europe is, therefore, a Europe in which all individuals, independent of their socio-cultural and socio-economic background, have equal opportunities to engage with ICT." (Discussion paper, p.1)

The Europe 2020 strategy and Social Investment Package: Battling increasing inequality and an economic crisis

The discussion around digital inclusion policies takes place within a Europe still immersed in an economic crisis. Of general concern across the European Union are the increasing levels of inequality, unemployment and poverty, which the Europe 2020 (EU2020) framework aims to tackle through a variety of approaches. The most important aspects that can be linked to digital inclusion policies are: a) increasing employment, b) improving educational levels, and c) promoting social inclusion.

Participants in the Peer Review agreed that digital inclusion forms part of achieving social inclusion. Therefore, the fundamental outcomes of the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE), part of EU2020 should be a fairer Europe, comfortable in a networked and digital world, using ICT to create wealth, health and social well-being. The related Social Investment Package (SIP) had a less prominent role in the material presented by participants in this Peer Review – rather surprising, since the SIP sets out two policy objectives that are easily related to digital inclusion. The discussion paper argues that in a digital world "*Preserving access to adequate social protection benefits, services, health and long term care*" and "*Access to more personalised services*" require policy-makers to think of tackling social exclusion in innovative, digital ways (Discussion paper, p.14). This puts digital inclusion policy initiatives at the heart of social innovation in relation to tackling social exclusion. Examples are the collaboration of governments with the third and commercial sector to ensure more efficient delivery of services on digital platforms for those most likely to be socially excluded.

Many national and regional governments and organisations are suffering under the economic crisis. As a consequence, the implementation of social and digital inclusion policies relies

[1] Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&langId=en&newsId=1905&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=news

increasingly on volunteers, supported by government through the provision of training and tools. The use of volunteers for the implementation of these policies has benefits over and above cost reductions for government: the Galician delegation argued that, if done well, it can create a sense of solidarity between citizens, organisations and public administration.

Evidence-based policy-making

Across Europe there are calls for greater reliance on evidence-based policy-making. In other policy areas, knowledge banks have been established, and there have been a few attempts across Europe to create similar platforms for policies around digital inclusion. However, during this Peer Review it became clear that there is neither enough evidence about which types of policy initiatives are effective and efficient, nor enough sharing of less successful initiatives.

One of the problems in terms of evaluation and establishing policies in relation to digital inclusion is that the EU2020 and the DAE have a very broad remit. The target groups mentioned in policy documents and discussions and that feature as potential beneficiaries from increased engagement with ICT are the disabled, youth, those suffering mental health problems, women, carers, the poor, migrants, the unemployed, older people, and families in precarious conditions. Not all of these target groups are equally disadvantaged, and nor are they likely to benefit equally from increased digital inclusion in different countries. Similarly, the outcomes for the diverse target groups in different countries vary, but consist of some combination of: access to resources and services, employment and skills, and social inclusion and social capital. The discussion paper developed a six-step, evidence-based approach to aid more effective digital inclusion policy development, implementation and evaluation. The six steps can be summarised as follows: 1) Identify the main social challenges and desired outcomes; 2) Identify socially excluded target groups; 3) Identify how digital exclusion inhibits achievement of the desired outcomes for these target groups; 4) Identify organisations for interventions; 5) Provide resources; and 6) Evaluate whether increased digital engagement has led to improved well-being. It thus stresses the importance of identifying the desired outcomes of digital inclusion policies in advance: "sustainable and successful digital inclusion initiatives start and end with the tangible (offline) outcomes and use access, skills, motivations and engagement with ICT to alleviate challenges encountered in the 'real' lives of disadvantaged groups" (Discussion paper, p.2). The rest of this report will look at the evidence for this emphasis in existing national and regional policies.

The Gdansk roadmap for Digital Inclusion, developed in the context of the implementation of the DAE[2], and EU2020 framework (Discussion paper, pp.12–14) advocate a multi-stakeholder approach, using volunteers from the public, private and third sectors, because questions of digital inclusion span a range of social and other issues. Similarly, an important aspect of the six steps described above is "*the identification of the best organisations and locations to reach and help those most in need*" (step 4). A few initiatives are under way to study the evidence for the effectiveness of such intermediaries.

[2] http://innodig.eu/download/Gdansk_Roadmap_Reworked_text_7.10.11.pdf

Recent initiatives

In light of evidence-based policy-making, two recent policy-related initiatives were presented for this Peer Review. The Institute for Prospective Technological Studies of the European Commission's Joint Research (EC JRC-IPTS[3]) **MIREIA**[4] project (2011–2013), developed in collaboration with DG Connect, focused on evaluating the effectiveness of intermediaries in achieving digital inclusion and the social return on investment (SROI) from these initiatives on the target groups addressed. This project systematically mapped the different intermediary actors and developed a methodological framework for SROI analysis, through thematic analysis of different case studies. The questions that stood at the basis of this project were: What are the social outcomes these intermediaries are trying to achieve? How to measure them? And which specific groups do they reach through their interventions? The study looked at how the intermediaries identified the specific needs of the different groups (e.g. how to increase employability or dealing with social isolation among the elderly). A key issue that emerged in the evaluation was the sustainability of programmes: both volunteers and participants had difficulty in continuing their involvement in these programmes. One of the *key lessons learned* is that fragile sustainability based on intrinsic motivations for life-long learning and participation in the digital sphere is going to be a major issue in any future projects.

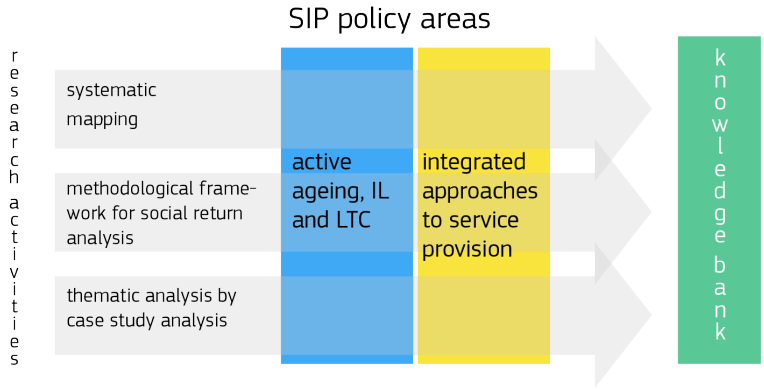
Another running EC JRC-IPTS initiative is the 'ICT enabled Social Innovation in support to the Implementation of the Social Investment Package' (**ISIS**) project (2014–2016).[5] It is to be conducted in collaboration with DG Employment. The ISIS project aims to create a knowledge bank of policy experiences and initiatives which have demonstrated social investment outcomes, through an analysis of the academic and grey literature at country and European level. (Published digital inclusion policy documents are not very up to date or clear on implementation). ISIS also aims to develop a framework for evaluation of the SROI of these policies, by looking at academic and grey literature and through specific case studies. It has a two-fold policy focus: 1) active ageing, independent living (IL) and long-term care (LTC), and 2) integrated approaches to the provision of social services. It tries to link what is done in practice in terms of service provision and targets (i.e. beneficiaries) with research (see figure 1). Some of the key questions asked for social policy are: what types of social innovations are enabled or facilitated by ICT? In which areas is the use of ICT most effective? For which groups? And how sustainable are the policy initiatives and outcomes when funding is cut after a period of time? Following wider EU2020 recommendations, this project is directed at final beneficiaries (those who currently lack social inclusion), intermediaries and public administration.

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/institutes/ipts

[4] http://is.jrc.ec.europa.eu/pages/EAP/eInclusion/MIREIA.html

[5] http://is.jrc.ec.europa.eu/pages/EAP/eInclusion.ISIS.html

Figure 1: ISIS framework



B. Host country good practice under review[6]

A review of the material presented by the host country[7] allows for the identification of five key areas of lessons learned and issues to be considered for successful policy implementation: 1) outcome targets, 2) nature of the population, 3) mode of intervention, 4) nature of the intermediaries involved, and 5) resources and locations.

The identification of outcome targets

Any digital inclusion policy and initiative needs to be adapted to the local context and understand which specific issues the regional government is facing. In Galicia, because of the ageing population, the social issues that need to be addressed revolve around health and well-being outcomes, while other aspects are introduced as 'add-ons'. *Issues identified*: It seems difficult to translate outcomes related to the wider societal challenges in EU2020 into digital inclusion interventions. This may be because the DAE has been followed, and it focuses more on digital infrastructure and skills and less on how these are related to specific social outcomes. Thus, while the Galician initiative has constructed digital skills programmes and is aware of especially the 'health' and the 'inclusive, innovative societies' streams of the Europe 2020 agenda, this has not been linked to what volunteers are doing with the participants on the ground. Similarly, while the Galician programme initiators knew of the SIP and related ideas of developing social innovations, this is difficult to relate to digital inclusion in terms of the actual format that the programmes have taken and the way in which the participants have been involved. Research and innovation was said to be particularly missing in Galicia in terms of developing ICT for inclusion and well-being.

The specific nature of the excluded population

Galicia has an ageing population: almost 40% of the population is over 50, and most of the rural population is over 60 years old. In addition, the region is very rural, while socio-economic and infrastructure development is concentrated in a few cities. The official policy mentions the following vulnerable target groups, besides the elderly: the disabled, parents, people in hospitals, women, the unemployed, young people, entrepreneurs and prisoners. Nevertheless, the focus for interventions is on providing access in rural areas to older, disabled people. A survey of non-users in the population has shown that a lack of access and the speed of the connection are not the most important reasons for disengaging. Rather, a lack of skills and interest are what people indicate as more important. This is important to keep in mind, since the programmes with volunteers rely on people self-registering for courses and internet access. *Issues identified*: Galicia focuses on the use of volunteers as a cost-effective means of achieving widespread digital inclusion. However, it is unclear whether this is a suitable approach for all groups, especially if the programmes are supposed to be sustainable. It is unclear which groups are more likely to sign up for the programmes and which are more likely to continue to be engaged. Since the elderly constitute a very large proportion of the population in Galicia, there is a wide range of different types of older people. To make policy interventions using local volunteers effective, it is important

6 http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=11615&langId=en

7 This is an addition to the points made in the evaluation in the discussion paper (pp.15–16). The key areas discussed here roughly relate to the first five steps identified in that paper (p.2).

to identify which specific groups of older people are least likely to be engaged (e.g. those with compound exclusion) and actively reach out to them; otherwise the interventions risk reaching only those who are already inclined to engage with technologies, and these types of projects will not reach those who benefit most.

The choice for the mode of intervention

Galicia has a wide database of volunteers and an existing structure for coordination, organisation and training of volunteers. It decided that using these existing resources for its digital inclusion programme would be the most cost-effective way. The volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds, from commercial companies and from non-profit organisations. For the purposes of digital inclusion policy implementation, they set up agreements with (ICT) *companies* to provide equipment for digital skills training. They motivated these companies to sign up to the agreements by emphasising that a more digitally literate population would benefit the companies, as these new users are future consumers who will buy their products. *Issues identified*: it would be beneficial to have companies volunteer on a broader basis, either in pursuit of corporate social responsibility (CSR) or because they understand that a wider skilled population will be beneficial to them in terms of both their employee base and their engagement with existing customers. Such a step would move matters beyond the ICT sector as the only likely partners for engagement and expand the possibilities for multi-stakeholder approaches.

Galicia also uses *volunteers* from non-governmental organisations (NGOs): 78 organisations have signed up to be part of the initiative, and more are expected to join by registering on a website.[8] All volunteers take a general course in relation to volunteering (32 courses are offered each year). In addition, they follow a specific ICT-related course which focuses on different types of uses or issues in ICT. *Issues identified*: this type of initiative relies heavily on an active stance from individuals within these organisations. For the implementation of digital inclusion projects that are oriented towards achieving social and economic outcomes, it might be more effective to identify the organisations that work with the most vulnerable in society and approach them proactively, explaining how digital inclusion – and especially delivery of a wider range of digital skills – might help them reach their goals. One issue with the digital skills training provided is that it is not linked to the social outcomes identified under B.1.

The specific nature of the intermediaries involved in programme delivery

The volunteers that want to participate in the programme are selected on the basis of their social skills and knowledge of ICT. They need to have the right kind of profile in terms of their social background and interest in helping people; just having knowledge of, or enthusiasm for, ICT is not enough. Nevertheless, most seem to come from the ICT sector, and the organisers consider this combination of social skills and technological drive to be desirable. It creates a feeling of solidarity and understanding in the community. *Issues identified*: Which people get involved in volunteering is very important, since that determines which people are more likely to sign up to participate in courses, and how successful those

8 https://cemit.xunta.es/es

people are at sustaining the digital skills they acquire and at maintaining their engagement. Volunteers for digital inclusion initiatives have a tendency to be technology-oriented rather than social outcome-oriented, and there is a risk of them being isolated in the absence of further support structures. The Galicia plan has not looked in this way at the background of its volunteers – neither at whether those volunteers are more successful at engaging with certain types of people, nor at whether there is a high turnover of volunteers.

The resources and specific nature of the locations allocated to the intervention

The volunteer programme has limited financial resources, and therefore existing locations (such as schools) are used to deliver the interventions. Currently volunteers deliver the courses in 98 classrooms spread across the region. Material for the courses is available online and can be accessed at home, as well as in the centres. *Issues identified*: The location at which interventions take place influences which types of participants are likely to come. Even though in this programme there are many centres that are within reasonable distance of those who are currently digitally excluded, it is likely that the school-like setting will put some people off. These types of locations tend to be more attractive to those who are the most motivated and socially included of the digitally excluded. Photos of the classrooms show rows of PCs with screens. This can be quite intimidating for those who are a) hesitant about technology, and b) have fewer (positive) experiences of formal learning situations. In general, it is better to find a way to take ICT to the people, rather than asking the people to come to the ICT.

C. Policies and experiences in peer countries and stakeholder contributions

Several countries presented the digital inclusion policies and initiatives they pursue.[9] This section offers a very brief overview of the different country characteristics (in table 1) and summarises remarks about the overall challenges and lessons learned, as presented in the written reports and during the meeting.

1. Peer country reports

Commonalities

Most countries indicated that policy-makers' concerns have gone beyond access and focus on skills and, in some instances, on awareness and motivation. Similarly, all countries indicated that policy-makers are aware of the wider implications in terms of social outcomes. Many focus on education as related to employability and (re)integration into the marketplace. Another recurring concern linked to digital inclusion was health, especially among the elderly and disabled. Nevertheless, when looking at actual policy implementations, the one common denominator is broadband speed and expansion of infrastructure and access(ibility) as the main means of delivery, accompanied by skills training that is not always clearly linked to social outcomes.

Divergent issues

In discussion, a number of issues connected with the development, implementation and evaluation of policy were raised. These were shared by a few of the peer countries, but were also specific to their individual contexts. The issues can be briefly summarised as a) focus on technology, b) motivation and awareness among target groups, c) coordination within government, d) resources for implementation, e) stakeholder involvement, f) coordination with and between stakeholders, and g) impact evaluation.

a. Focus on technology

A narrow focus on access technology and infrastructure by those formulating policy, even when the wider picture was recognised as being social inclusion, was indicated as an issue by Romania, in particular. This was summarised as "*[Romania] is great on [connection] speed but not on inclusion*." In Romania, very large socio-economic and socio-cultural differences remain between rural and urban areas, so that even if infrastructure is not an issue, lack of education and related digital literacy limit further take-up.[10] In the Czech Republic, policy implementation seems most developed around assistive technologies (i.e. tools for those with disabilities), but without taking a step further in terms of literacy training. The Swedish case emphasised that accessibility for disabled people creates easy-to-use technologies for a wider audience. The Romanian delegation emphasised that technology-focused interventions can have social outcomes: the provision of home internet access to low-income families in Romania seems to have worked as an awareness-raising and motivational strategy.

9 http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&langId=en&newsId=1905&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=news

10 http://portal.edu.ro

Table 1 Country classification

Country	Outcomes	Target population	Intervention type	Policy period	Responsible ministry	Collaboration	Funding
Poland	Health; employability	Elderly	Volunteers (digital champions)	2013	Labour and Social Policy; Cross-ministerial special council	500 out of 2,500 proposals public-government partnerships	Government funded call, €9.5m
Czech Republic	Health	Elderly; disabled	Assistive technologies	2011 new broadband plan; 2007 policy not implemented	Labour and Social Affairs; Industry and Trade; Education; Health; Interior Ministry	NGOs, libraries and schools involved independently	Unclear, 18 emergency services platforms €430,000
Romania	Education; geographic isolation	Low income families; rural communities	Broadband; access in schools; roadshows	2009-2015	Communication and Information Society; National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications; National Education	Digital alliance for Romania (private, third and NGO sector)	
Belgium	Education	Low-income families	Access centres; media literacy	2005-2010 action plan (no new plan because problems forming government)	Social Integration; Youth; Formal Education; Media	Regional or local organisations	Government calls NGO-private partnerships (prohibit only equipment provision)
Sweden	Education; employability	Disabled; those not in education, employment or training (NEET); homeless; immigrants; elderly	Literacy training; accessibility; tax deduction	2011	Information, Technology and Energy; Digitalisation Commission	Digidel - 400 organisations of different types in public and third sector	Government funding
UK	Education; employability; social isolation	Elderly; disabled; lower income	Literacy through NGOs; National Curriculum	2011 (Government Digital Service (GDS)); 2013 (National Curriculum)	Cross-departmental GDS	Cross-sector stakeholders (NGOs, public, third, commercial sector)	(aim) £875m cross-sector collaborations and investment (private and public sector, community and government)
Portugal	Poverty; employability	Unemployed; NEET	Access centres; media literacy		Science, Technology and Higher Education	Private, public and third sector (Network ICT and Society programme)	

b. (Lack of) motivation and awareness among target groups

Especially in countries like Sweden, the UK and Belgium, where infrastructure is considered to be less of an issue, there has been a problem with lack of motivation among the target groups (both socially excluded individuals and organisations working with these individuals) to participate in or see the value of (or even be aware of) the courses and digital opportunities available. Other more pressing issues have been prioritised over seeing ICT as a tool that could help in the process of social inclusion. The Polish delegation also indicated that this was a problem. There was a suggestion that this has partly been due to a top-down approach to these kinds of initiatives. The Belgian delegates indicated that it is very difficult to get a good picture of the disadvantaged people who are truly (digitally) excluded. For example, surveys do not always take into account the quality of the equipment and the type of use that is being made of it, and people might give inaccurate information in an attempt to represent themselves or their families in a better light. The Belgian delegation argued that literacy is a main driver for motivation and its initiatives have been set up around this.[11] The elderly were seen as suffering most from a lack of motivation, and as a group formed the exclusive focus for many digital inclusion policies. For example, the Polish[12] delegation emphasised this, and the issue also cropped up in stakeholder presentations (see section C.2). Specific websites for the elderly are the most common type of content across the EU, and are typically absent for other target groups.

c. Lack of coordination within government

Several countries (the Czech Republic, Romania and Belgium, in particular) mentioned that coordination across government departments was particularly difficult. Belgium argued that it was complicated for data on inclusion and interventions to be shared between different ministries. The Czech Republic indicated that there was a problem with how to fund across ministries and departments and that, in addition, communication between them on this issue is a major problem. In the Czech delegation's own words: "*The problem is not the setting of national priorities but their implementation and coordination. A Working Committee for coordination of Digital Agenda was established to contribute to better coordination of the implementation of state policies and measures related to ICT in the Czech Republic*" (Country report, p.1). Poland has adopted similar tactics, and in the UK the Government Digital Service (GDS) has been set up.[13]

d. Resources for implementation

A lack of funding was mentioned by several countries as a barrier to the implementation of existing policies. For example, the Czech Republic's 2007 policy had not yet been implemented – partly due to a lack of resources, which in times of economic crisis are reserved for emergency services. Digital inclusion might be emphasised in policy documents as important for development, but it does not get priority in terms of funding. The same suggestion was made by the Portuguese delegates, who implored the European Commission to push the importance of this issue more.

e. Stakeholder involvement

In most countries there seems to be a large number of organisations from the third sector that are involved in projects related to digital inclusion. However, often these are not connected to

11 http://www.mediaraven.be/

12 senior.gov.pl

13 https://gds.blog.gov.uk/

government initiatives and policies. In several countries, external stakeholder involvement from industry is quite difficult to secure for motivational and structural reasons. In the Czech Republic, businesses do not see digital inclusion as relevant. In other countries, commercial stakeholder involvement tends to be limited to the provision of recycled equipment, rather than being driven by social outcomes and related CSR motivations. Two countries have tried to address this issue. Belgium's funding structure now limits involvement purely in terms of the provision of equipment, and requires commercial organisations to be involved more widely. Meanwhile, in the UK, businesses sign up to a digital skills charter through the Go On UK programme. In Romania, ambiguous legislation on public–private partnerships has been one of the main barriers to securing such partnerships, and this has had a negative effect on private investments in this area.

f. Coordination with and between stakeholders

Several countries indicated that there are problems with coordination between various non-governmental stakeholders operating in the field. Portugal and the Czech Republic argued that many different initiatives preceded the construction of a digital agenda, and there is often a lack of clear connection between the former and the latter. It was suggested that central coordination is often needed to make sure that interventions are effective and efficient, and that they can be linked to policy. Sweden created an integrated platform to connect all organisations working on this topic through the Digidel initiative,[14] while in Britain the Go On UK platform serves a similar function and has strong connections with the government. In Belgium, cross-governmental platforms have been set up to improve services for end users, including NGOs working in this field,[15] and the Portuguese government has established similar arrangements.[16]

g. Impact evaluation

The one aspect that is lacking in all countries is a kind of overall evaluation of the range of digital inclusion initiatives stimulated or funded by policy, in order to assess their impact in reducing social exclusion. Poland indicated that there is anecdotal evidence and that some impact evaluation has been done; but it was not clear from the discussion what this was. In Romania, projects have been evaluated externally, but this has not been explicitly linked to policy aims. The Belgian delegation asked whether the number of people in poverty has decreased after years of digital agenda initiatives, suggesting that there is no evidence of this, and that the precise impact of digital inclusion remains, therefore, somewhat questionable at the present time. The UK delegation argued that there is clear evidence on the economic outcomes of such initiatives, but less clear evidence on the social outcomes; it called for more rigorous research on the latter. National datasets exist which show relationships between social and digital exclusion; but no data exists to provide evidence that digital inclusion policies and initiatives are leading to less social inequality at the national or regional level over time.

14 http://digidel.se/

15 http://www.mediawijs.be

16 http://portugaldigital.pt/index/

2. Stakeholder organisations

European stakeholder organisations

The elderly are one of the target groups of the EU2020 agenda and part of many digital inclusion policies. **AGE Platform Europe**[17] is a multi-stakeholder initiative working with NGOs looking at digital inclusion and the elderly across Europe. While their Telehealth centres are well attended, they have little evidence for the effectiveness of their interventions, beyond anecdotal reports of satisfaction. Adult learning does not have a 'deadline' anymore, the digital world in particular requires life-long learning, and many of the courses on offer do not focus on this type of informal learning, but rather on getting people back to work and employability. For this reason (and others to do with a lack of skill and resources in evaluation training), AGE Platform Europe lacks evidence on the impact of its initiatives regarding the long-term effect on socio-economic well-being.

National stakeholder organisations

Six stakeholder organisations from Galicia presented their initiatives in the area of digital inclusion. Their presentations focused mostly on description and implementation and, in some cases, the overall social inclusion aims. There is, , so far little evidence of any evaluation of effectiveness to link implementation to broader regional and national policy objectives. For example, while the EducaR initiative has worked closely with government in the provision of content, there has been no evaluation of the policy effectiveness of this programme and its related social outcomes. All these initiatives showed the importance of the enthusiasm, skills and characteristics of the specific volunteers involved, and there were inspiring stories about solidarity and a willingness to help (for example, Manuel Abelleira, a volunteer for the Los Tilos initiative, who has kept in touch with those involved on a short-term course). The importance of individual motivation and skill in teaching, revealed by some of the examples presented, raised questions about the sustainability of these initiatives in the absence of back-up from an overarching coordinating organisation. Similarly, the characteristics and focused targeting of specific individuals from digitally excluded or vulnerable populations emerged from some of the case studies presented (e.g. prisoners in the MELISA project,[18] the disabled in the Cogami project,[19] the elderly in the Los Tilos project[20] and the young people in EducaR[21]). A suggestion was made that it is mainly those with a basic level of enthusiasm and sociability who participate and reap the benefits from these initiatives (i.e. the 'lower hanging fruit' mentioned below).

Most initiatives have focused on the provision of access and basic skills training. For example, the MELISA project used refurbished PCs and taught prisoners in classes of 10 to use Open Source Software (they were able to take the software home afterwards). With only three volunteers, this was a relatively small-scale initiative. As with the other projects, there was no real follow-up to understand the longer-term implications of this provision of training. None of the programmes incorporated longer-term evaluation, but a proportion of them

17 www.age-platform.eu/

18 http://webmelisa.es/

19 http://www.cogami.es/

20 http://arcostilos.org/

21 http://voluntariadodixital.xunta.es/es/mecena/803/tmolezunmundo-rnet

did evaluate participation for the duration of the intervention, and did assess participants' satisfaction with the course or support offered. COGAMI's short-term evaluation showed high drop-out rates at the beginning of the course (10–31%), but high levels of satisfaction among those who stayed on. EducaR offered digital literacy/awareness training in schools, provided by volunteers from R, the IT company, using information material provided by the Ministry of Education platform (INTECO). The Cruz Roja initiative did not seem to deal with digital inclusion as such, but provided platforms to find (crowd-sourced) funding for different organisations that dealt with social issues. From the presentation, it was unclear whether this had been taken up by organisations using digital inclusion-type interventions to improve social inclusion, but it was clearly linked to the SIP through social innovation.

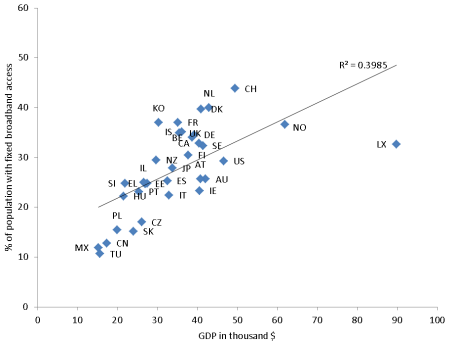
D. Main issues discussed during the meeting

In sections B and C, several issues have been identified that were seen as problematic for all countries. One was the difficulty of identifying and measuring the tangible social well-being outcomes of digital inclusion policies, and another covered the problems encountered in sustainability for projects that had proved successful on a smaller scale. In this section, additional data and inputs from the Peer Review discussion are provided in relation to three main issues that are part of the digital inclusion debate, which address why cross-departmental, cross-sector and sustainable digital inclusion policy frameworks are needed at the European and the national level: a) digital exclusion is a social as well as a technological issue, b) it is not a problem that will disappear over time without intervention, and c) policies that worked in the past might not be ideal guidelines in a new and ever-changing digital Europe.

A purely technological issue?

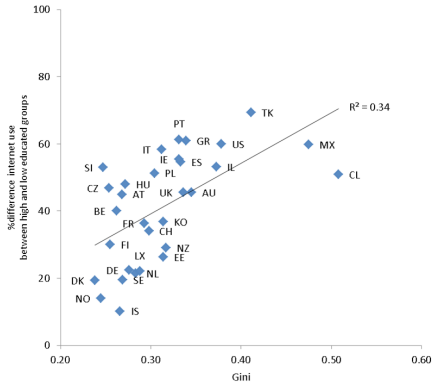
One important question that occurs frequently in discussions with those who are not actively involved or up to date in digital inclusion policy and literature is: Why is digital inclusion important for the wider European policy landscape, and why should other non-infrastructure or technology ministries or organisations be concerned with it? The answer to that question is manifold. First, there are the links between general inequality and socio-economic inequalities. Research is emerging to show that, while digital infrastructure and access in a country can be explained by overall economic indicators of wealth in that country (i.e. GDP, figure 2), within-country inequalities in the use of ICT are better explained by socio-economic and socio-demographic inequalities related to income, education and well-being (see figure 3).

Figure 2: Relationship between GDP and broadband access



Source: Adapted from OECD data (2013)

Figure 3: Gini and educational internet use inequalities



Source: Adapted from OECD data (Gini)/International Telecommunication Union (ITU) data (2011)

Note: The R^2 for GDP as an explanation of internet use inequalities was 0.23.

Research by Drabowicz (2014) shows that, while GDP levels explain the extent of home internet access among European teenagers, they do not explain young people's level of internet skills. Since the digital inclusion agenda is concerned with inequality in digital

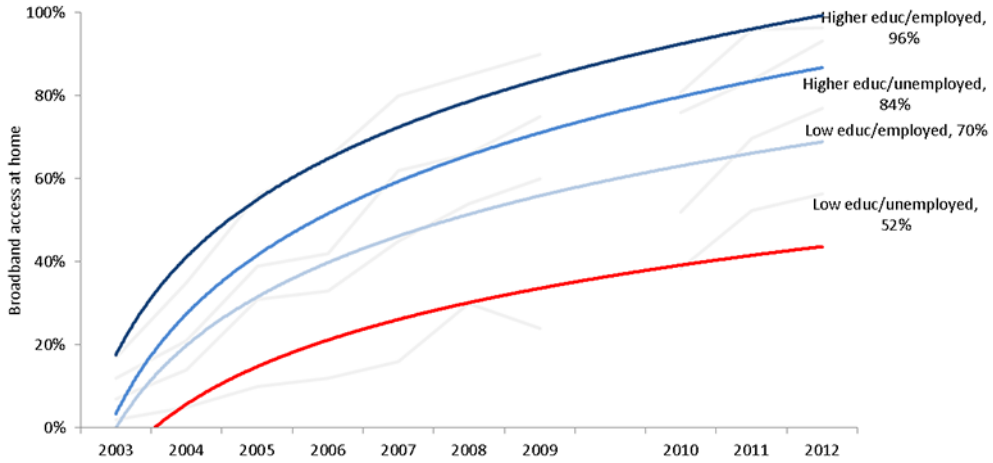
access, skills, motivation and engagement, and not (just) with diffusion, it is important to keep in mind that national gender, education and other inequalities among young people in Europe are strong predictors of inequalities in access and skills between different socio-demographic groups (Helsper, 2012b). If equal participation is the final goal of digital inclusion policies, national policies should aim at decreasing overall inequalities, rather than simply at increasing wealth.

It is clear that various sectors of society would need to get involved if digital exclusion is to be tackled, and that this is a cross-cutting issue linked to skill and participation differentials in the commercial, service and other sectors which inhibit not just the functioning of individuals for their own benefit, but also collaboration and interaction between individuals within organisations and nations who increasingly conduct their business and provide services in a digital realm. The data presented in figures 2 and 3 demonstrate that general economic growth, as well as educational, cultural and social well-being policies governed by different ministries, need to be considered in digital inclusion issues.

A temporary problem?

A further issue that recurs repeatedly in the debate is whether it is a temporary phenomenon, in other words whether the digital exclusion of particular vulnerable groups will disappear in time, as technologies become further diffused. Helsper's (2011) research shows that, without clear policy interventions that are targeted at specific vulnerable groups, a 'digital underclass' is likely to emerge, consisting of those who suffer compound levels of social exclusion. For example, research in Britain shows that those who are unemployed and lower-educated are slower to acquire high-quality access (see figure 4), are not catching up in their take-up of internet use (figure 5) and remain consistently behind in their lower levels of internet-related competence (figure 6), compared to those who are in employment and/or have a higher level of education.

Figure 4: Compound exclusion trend line data in household broadband access over time



Source: Office of National Statistics, Britain
Note: Logarithmic trend line data, the questions moved from the BHS to the Omnibus survey (only those under 65) in 2009–2010. Data for the year in which there was overlap (2009) comes from the BHS survey.

Considering the strong relationships between these compound types of disadvantage and a person's ability to participate in the digital world, it is important to pinpoint which people are most at risk of exclusion and identify the organisations that work with these groups. Many doubts about success in reaching the most digitally excluded could stem from the fact that organisations are expected to volunteer to get involved in digital inclusion initiatives, rather than there being a more proactive, policy-driven approach that would contact those organisations and businesses that could most effectively reach and engage with the groups most at risk of both digital and social exclusion.

Figure 5: Relationship between GDP and broadband access

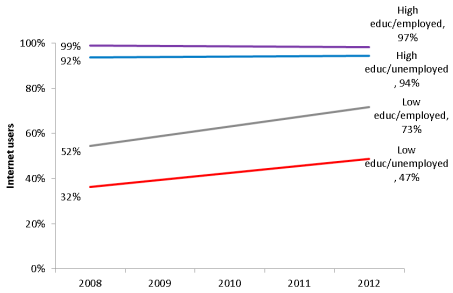
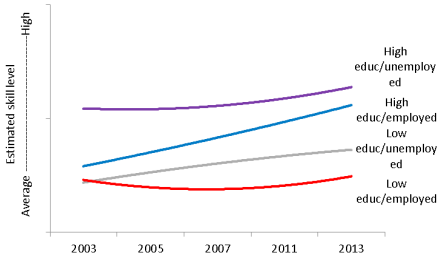


Figure 6: Gini and educational internet use inequalities



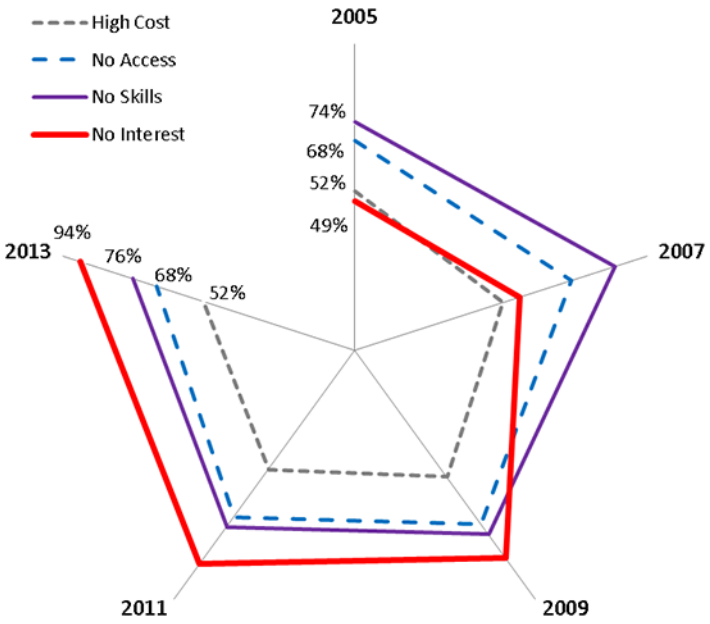
Base: Population under 65 (ONS) British Internet Users (OxIS 2003-2013)

Source: Trend data, adapted from Helsper (2011, 2013)

Changing landscape?

The third issue that was discussed as regards complications in policy interventions in relation to digital inclusion was the extent to which current policy-making can rely on replicating earlier successful interventions. Sustainability of policy interventions is often a problem, especially with groups that are marginalised, and the hope is that there will be a cost-effective, efficient best practice case that can be replicated across different national contexts, different excluded groups and over time. Country case studies and research provide evidence that recycling strategies might not always work.

Figure 7: Reasons non-users of the internet give for not being online over time



Base: British non-users of the internet (Oxford Internet Surveys 2005 to 2013)
Source: Adapted from Helsper and Reisdorf (forthcoming)

For example, research in Britain shows that the composition of those who are truly digitally excluded – that is, those who have never used the internet – has changed (Helsper and Reisdorf, forthcoming). Whereas back in 2005 a lack of skills and access were the most important reasons given for not being online, in 2013 a lack of interest trumped all others (figure 7). Not only are different reasons for exclusion gaining prominence, but the number of different barriers has also increased. That is, whereas in 2005 people gave either cost, or access or skills as a reason, almost a decade later they often mention lack of interest, as well as lack of access and skills as a barrier to engagement. This problem was encountered in practice in the work done in the UK and Belgium: organisations in both countries argued that they have already plucked 'the lower hanging fruit', and that getting the next batch of non- or narrow-users engaged with ICT will require different, more complex and multi-layered strategies for these precise reasons. Providing access and reducing costs is unlikely to be sufficient to allow people to take advantage of the opportunities available online.

E. Conclusions and lessons learned

These conclusions are organised around the lessons learned for each of the six steps to successful and sustainable implementation of digital inclusion policies (suggested in the discussion paper, p.2).

1. Identify what the *main social challenges* are and what the *desired outcomes* are in terms of social inclusion and equality.

   Policies show awareness of the socio-economic and socio-cultural issues identified in the Europe 2020 and Social Investment Package. However, many of the national policies are copied directly from the general European agenda, without concentrating on what the particular issues in a particular country are in terms of inequality, even when these are identified in other national policies. Most policies focus on increased employment as an important tangible outcome. Overcoming inequalities related to social, cultural, civic and personal well-being, also mentioned in the Europe 2020 proposal, are not often specified, even in countries where these might be an issue alongside unemployment and other economic outcomes. Perhaps as a consequence, the implementation of the interventions or programmes associated with the policies (and their wording) is still quite vague in terms of how this is to be achieved, beyond general skills training.

2. Identify which *socio-demographic and socio-cultural groups are marginalised* in terms of the economic, social, civic, cultural and personal well-being outcomes identified.

   - **Focus on social needs**
     While employability and education were identified as important social issues to be addressed in the digital inclusion policies examined for this expert Peer Review, there were not many digital inclusion policies that identified the unemployed or lower educated as specific target groups. The policies were all relatively clear on what their target groups were: they centred almost universally on the elderly and the disabled; youth and the general workforce were also discussed as being central to policy on digital literacy training, but without any indication of which youth or elements of the workforce were most at risk of exclusion. When deciding on target groups, policies take into consideration the digital and not the social 'deficits' of the different groups. This indicates a mismatch in policy development between desired outcomes (step 1) and the identification of target groups (step 2). In other words, while the desired target outcomes for digital inclusion policies are often, and should be, defined in terms of social inclusion, the target groups identified for digital inclusion policies are mostly selected on the basis of their lack of digital inclusion. The disconnect between desired outcomes and the definition of target groups makes it difficult to evaluate in which ways digital exclusion is a barrier to social inclusion (see step 3), and makes it likely that the success of digital inclusion interventions is measured in terms of digital and not social outcomes (see step 6). For example, while many elderly people are indeed not online, the social issue to be addressed by digital inclusion policy is not age, which would justify selecting the elderly as a target group. Instead, the issues that many vulnerable people (including the elderly) have to cope with are poverty, social isolation and lack of access to (quality) health care. Thus, digital inclusion policies should identify

individuals at risk of poverty or social isolation, or who lack health care – things that affect many, but by no means all, of the elderly.

- **Compound exclusion**

  If the above strategy is followed – that is, first identify the most pressing social needs in a specific society and then look at which groups of individuals suffer most from these – it follows that the broader groups included in most digital inclusion policies should be broken down. This suggests targeting individuals who suffer compound levels of exclusion within these broader groups, such as the elderly. Those most in need of external support (and thus policy intervention) are those who are poor, socially isolated *and* who have problems accessing health services – i.e. those who are socially marginalised in a myriad of ways. Digital inclusion policies should identify these groups (e.g. NEETs) and make sure that implementation through interventions does not reach only those who participate voluntarily and are therefore likely to be less socially excluded (i.e. 'lower hanging fruit', easier to reach and engage with).

3. Identify to what extent these groups' *digital exclusion in terms of access, skills, motivation and content/engagement* inhibits reaching the desired outcomes.

   Policy implementation still tends to focus on access(ibility) and take-up, even when policies identify the resolution of wider social issues as their ultimate goal. Although skills training or digital literacy training is now present in many policy directives, especially to increase employability, not enough thought is put into *what types* of skills are needed to achieve *what types* of outcomes for *which groups*. This tends to result in uniform ICT skills training that is not always relevant to the desired outcome. Specific needs in specific groups will be better served by specific interventions. Efforts are under way to address this, but in this area digital inclusion policy lags behind the research evidence (Van Deursen, Van Dijk and Helsper, 2014). For some groups with certain needs, access might be all that is needed to achieve digital inclusion, leading in turn to increased social inclusion. For others, it might be specific skills training, or else motivation and awareness; while for yet other groups it might be the provision of content currently not available (or available only in an unattractive, irrelevant format). Therefore it is important to separate what ICT offers (i.e. access) and what people actually do with it (i.e. engagement).

4. Identify *the best organisations and locations* to reach and help those most in need.

   - **Intermediaries selection**

     Many of the peer countries have a multi-stakeholder approach, working with volunteer organisations to achieve digital inclusion. Organisations working with the elderly and disabled seem to have been those most widely represented in the peer country examples presented and discussed. One can question whether volunteer programmes are the most suitable type of intervention to deal with different types of digital exclusion. It seems that they are more likely to work with certain groups (elderly, disabled) than with others who are perhaps 'less attractive' to volunteers, such as the unemployed or the homeless. Following the logic of the six steps, implementation of policy should identify the organisations that work with the most vulnerable in society and approach these proactively, instead of waiting for organisations that are already interested in the topic. Similarly, most of these programmes focus on volunteers who step forward proactively. These

volunteers, while interested in ICT, do not always have the support they might require in developing their skills to help others with their social needs. Considering, in addition, the restricted time availability and high turnover of volunteers who are not retired, sustainability of these programmes can be identified as an issue. Furthermore, it is important to take technology to the individuals identified as being most in need in steps 1 and 2, and not to ask people to come to ICT (e.g. in Community Technology Centres). For example, a formal classroom might not be the best way to engage the most excluded.

- **Multi-stakeholder coordination**

  Most countries indicated that they would ideally like to use a multi-stakeholder approach, with different organisations and ministries working together to achieve this aim. The problem of coordinating and organising this was one of the issues most commonly mentioned. At a government level, cross-party/cross-ministry working groups have been set up, because digital inclusion needs strategic, higher-level thinking and an integrated digital inclusion/social inclusion plan over time that is linked to other social issues (not a separate digital agenda). Considerable doubts were expressed in the discussion about whether digital inclusion should be located in one particular department or policy, or be part of all other social policies. Cross-sector partnerships are also prevalent, but generally among NGOs and volunteer organisations, and with less involvement by the private commercial sector. When such partnerships work well, it is when ICT is seen as a part of all the layers and aspects of the organisation, and when larger organisations have been set up to coordinate and shape efforts around access and skills training. One big issue is knowledge-sharing and cross-sector partnerships. There has been very little learning from the mistakes of others, although sometimes best practice platforms have been set up.

5. Provide *resources* to organisations and individuals in these locations to lift the barriers to digital inclusion, as identified under step 3 for the specific challenges faced by these groups.

   A major issue identified in relation to the supporting resources that governments could provide was the lack of financial, human and information resources. As well as the unsurprising request for more direct funding of digital inclusion initiatives, there was a call for management, coordination, collaboration and training resources. Government could thus play an important coordinating role. Knowledge-sharing of both best and worst case studies of initiatives through knowledge hubs would not only be a resource for designing interventions, but would also help initiatives to complement one another, instead of overlap with each other. Some countries have experimented with coordination through self-regulation in industry, with industry pledging to uphold standards of life-long learning and well-being for all employees, and corporate social responsibility to clients in terms of provision of (digital) services.

6. *Evaluate* the implementation and success of these initiatives by noting whether the groups *improved* their economic, social, civic, cultural and personal *well-being as a result of their increased digital engagement*.

   Impact evaluation is important to justify digital inclusion policy initiatives in many countries. To be able to understand the SROI and other impacts, formulation, implementation and impact need to be separated. At the moment, many programmes

evaluate implementation rather than impact. That is, they evaluate how many people attended courses or how many connections/devices were handed out, rather than whether these courses or devices have led to tangible outcomes, such as improved health, reduced social isolation or actual employment. One of the issues is that the type of data that is collected does not help in the evaluation of impact. The problem is two-fold: 1) as mentioned before, practitioners and evaluators need to know about weaknesses, not just best practices, and 2) we need to know what the specific added benefit or return on investment is from digital inclusion initiatives, as compared with other interventions, in terms of reaching the desired social inclusion outcomes specified in the EU2020 and SIP programmes. There is a desperate need for a counterfactual, longitudinal approach – a way of gathering evidence that looks at what *would have happened* over time if no intervention had taken place or if a different intervention had taken place.

F. Contribution of the Peer Review to Europe 2020 and the SIP

This Peer Review has shown that the issues lying at the heart of Europe 2020 and the Social Investment Package also lie at the heart of digital inclusion initiatives, and not just through the Digital Agenda Europe. In a world that is increasingly digital, the social issues identified under the EU2020 pillars of the *'Innovation Union'*, '*Youth on the move'*, *'An agenda for new skills and jobs'* and the '*European platform against poverty'* have to be addressed through digital inclusion policies that are integrated and run across policies in the areas of health, employment, education, socio-economic growth, social inclusion and general well-being. Similarly, the SIP aims of "*Preserving access to adequate social protection benefits, services, health and long term care*" and "*Access to more personalised services*" are elements of European life that are now moving online. For there to be a fairer, more inclusive Europe, it is essential that people have equal opportunities to access and engage in a meaningful way with the content, services and social world offered through ICT. True digital inclusion, therefore, goes hand in hand with an investment in Europe's social and human resources to promote well-being and economic growth. This places digital inclusion right at the centre of wider European policy initiatives and at the forefront of social innovation, by offering new, additional ways of combating social issues and inequalities.

Without evidence-based digital inclusion policy development, a digital underclass is likely to emerge that will amplify existing inequalities within Europe both between and within countries. This Peer Review showed that there are several issues that need to be tackled before such evidence-based policy can be fully implemented and integrated into wider European Policy, such as the EU2020 and SIP. First, there is a need for a more accurate definition of the needs of the target groups and the specific fields of action that a policy intervention works with, not in a digital, but in a social sense. Second, evidence needs to be gathered about which digital interventions work for the specific target populations that suffer from the social issues identified in the EU2020 and SIP. Third, it is currently unclear which actors can and need to be involved, and how these can be coordinated to achieve the most efficient, effective and sustainable impact on socio-economic inclusion. Evidence covering such a wide range of social policy outcomes is very difficult to obtain, but several initiatives are under way, developing methodologies to measure the SROI of these types of programmes.

Digital inclusion and social inclusion are intrinsically interwoven in today's world. If the suggestions in this report are followed through, if the necessary investments are made and if the evidence is heeded, Europe can become not only a more digitally, but also more socially inclusive society.

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Harnessing ICT for social action, a digital volunteering programme

Host country: **Spain**

Peer countries: **Belgium - Czech Republic - Poland - Portugal - Romania - Sweden - United Kingdom**

ICT is now a big part of everyday life, but not for everybody. The Peer Review on the Galician Digital Volunteering Programme (VolDIX) focused on possible ways to avoid social exclusion to go digital.

The Galician Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare hosted in Santiago de Compostela (Spain) on 25 March 2014 a Peer Review on the Galician Digital Volunteering Programme (VolDIX). The programme exploits various forms of voluntary participation to combat digital and social exclusion as part of a broader effort to build an Information Society for all.

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