

## Key strategies and contents on digital skills for hybridization of jobs in the Social Care Sector

### KEY MESSAGES

Digital skills are not mentioned at all in the job description of workers in the public Social Care Sector but sometimes are indicated as a requirement in the job advertisements, particularly for private organisations.

Digitalisation is very modest. Most of the workers have no or low digital skills and beneficiaries are usually members of vulnerable groups with a low level of education and with no appropriate know-how to deal with digital technologies. However, digital skills were forced to develop due to the pandemic lockdown and the emergence of digital technologies in the workplace, following the European trend/response in the sector.

Therefore, there is a good potential for digitalisation but it should be supported by specific training for employees in the sector.

### CONTEXT

This policy paper presents the conclusions of the workshops held in the framework of the ACSOL Erasmus+ project by the Social Care Sector triple helix stakeholder working group in Romania

This is a regional proposal at sectoral level with recommendations and strategies to better approach workers to train them on digital skills that the technological changes and the COVID-19 crisis effects on jobs and labour market conditions has revealed as critical for maintaining jobs on this sector.

The paper includes the identification of opportunities, needs and risks of digital transformation as well as key digital skills and proposals for promoting training within our target group.



### DIGITAL SKILLS IN THE SECTOR

The digital skills usually required in the Social Care Sector in Romania are basic digital skills such as data literacy skills, communication and collaboration skills or digital content creation skills. A few examples as they were identified within workshops conducted with triple helix are listed below:

- Use a computer;
- Search information on Google;
- Sending and receiving emails;
- Use content creation software (Word);
- Use database tools (Excel);
- Use presentation tools (PowerPoint);
- Use social media (including WhatsApp);
- Use online communication tools (Zoom, Google Meet).

### CHALLENGES

In Romania, both public and private providers of social care services are present on the market. Public social care services are provided by local authorities through the county directorates and local offices of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC). The private providers are not-for-profit non-governmental organisations, religious denominations recognised by law, for-profit enterprises, or registered self-employed persons. Their activities are funded from their own resources, but also from the state or local budgets.

In the public Social Care Sector, the employment policies are very rigid and not guided all the time by the real needs of the sector. The average age in the sector is over 40 years old and the level of digital skills is very low. Actually, digital skills are not mentioned at

all in the job description of workers in Social Care Sector but sometimes are indicated in the job advertisements, particularly in the case of private employers.

The lack of mentioning of the need of digital skills for some positions in Social Care Sector strongly affect the quality of services that social workers provide. As a result, at the moment there is a strongly imbalanced distribution of digital skills among the social care workers at the national level. Digital skills were forced developed during the Covid-19 pandemic but not through training programs. Sometimes the colleagues who already owned digital skills provided learning support for those who were forced to use digital technologies. Even though the work with the beneficiaries do not directly involve the use of digital technologies, the administrative activities consistently require the use of different tools and skills, particularly for preparing documents, reporting, sending, storing etc.

On the other hand, there is an acute need of training also for beneficiaries of social care. For example, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the beneficiaries did not have basic skills (for example to use the video-conferencing platform) because, before pandemic there was no pressure to use digital tools. In many cases, most of them did not have an appropriate infrastructure (internet connection or a computer).

The main challenge is to adapt the job description of social workers, particularly in the public sector, so that indicate the need of digital skills. In addition, the implementation of specific training programs for social care sector in the field of digital skills could help the sector to adapt to digitalisation faster.



### REGIONAL STRATEGIES

#### Improve digital skills through formal training programs

In Romania, at the beginning of pandemic, many social workers reported difficulties to convert their work to online format, "but they would like to participate in training courses, in order to have their digital skills developed".

During Covid-19 lockdown and after, the training was organized internally by each employer but in many cases, it functioned a peer-to-peer learning.

For many small employers, the participation of employees to digital training is problematic since they have to give up some tasks in order to have time to attend the courses.

Therefore, the implementation of a training programs for certain category of employees could be a solution for reducing the imbalanced distribution of digital skills among the social care workers at the national level.

#### Develop the remote monitoring and telecare services

Even though Covid-19 pandemic forced the use of some digital technologies, in many cases practices proved to be very useful.

Therefore, the possibility to use the online platform/tools in order to conduct specific evaluations (e.g., in order to assess the of disability) or provide certain information should be keep and regulated.

Some stakeholders suggested the development of a (social) e-store to facilitate the access of beneficiaries to appropriate safe products, (e.g., based on a social card).

Some policymakers highlighted the importance of new applications for home care or recovery services, (in case of disabled, elderly, chronically ill) – for these beneficiaries, "assistive technologies are more useful than a smartphone or a computer."

#### Equip providers with new technologies and acces to online tools

As most of the social services are state-owned organisations, the equipement with new technology depends on state budget allocation.

In many cases, many providers do not have an appropriate infrastructure (internet connection or a computer) essential to support the development of digitasiation of the sector.

#### Develop a unique national database

As a possible way to improve the acces of beneficiaries to diversified social care servises, the triple helix stakeholders suggested the importance of developing of a unique national database with information concerning the social care services.

The database should comprise information about all providers of social care services, both private or public (e.g, location, type of services, beneficiaries targeted, conditions to access them, etc.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING IN THE SECTOR

Social Care Sector is not among the sectors highly digitalised. At least three aspects have hampered the digitalisation of the sector by now: a low level of digital skills of employees, a lack of understanding of the importance of digital technologies and how they can be used in the sector, and lack of training offer. Therefore, the training strategy should take into account the following:

### **(1) Awareness of social care workers concerning the importance of digital skills needed in the sector and in what areas are digital skills used**

In many cases, stakeholders involved in triple helix asked why and in what areas digital skills could help social care activities. Therefore, some modules of the training should present concrete examples and cases about how digitalisation contribute to improve the social care services.

### **(2) Focus on the increasing the level of basic digital skills among employees in the sector**

Even though in the Social Care Sector, complex digital technologies such as augmented reality or virtual reality are very useful and could bring many opportunities, at the moment most of the employees lack basic digital skills. Therefore, the core of the training should target those categories of skills.

### **(3) Target the private providers of social care services**

Through ACSOL project it will be difficult to target employees from public social care sector. In the public social care sector are recognised only training programs provided by authorised providers. However, as the demand of training in digital skills is very high, it is expected that some employees from public social care sector will access the ACSOL Toolkit on their own.

## About the Acsol project

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