



En Europe

TAKING A STAND

**for a Digital Transition that Serves
the Most Vulnerable**

GroupeSOS
Entrepreneurs for common good

**European
position paper**

Current European Context

Digital technology is now central in our society: access to information, culture, healthcare, transport, housing, education, employment and public services all depend on it. Yet the COVID-19 crisis, by driving massive digitalisation of professional and social practices, revealed persistent inequalities in digital skills. These primarily affect people already precarious socially, professionally and/or economically, creating additional barriers to their claiming rights or completing administrative procedures online due to lack of resources or skills.

In its Digital Decade action programme, the European Union has set specific objectives and milestones to achieve by 2030, **making digital skills and digital education priorities, with a people-centred digital transition every citizen can benefit from**. The targets include ensuring 80% of Europe's population possesses basic digital skills and 100% have access to secure digital identities for storing and exchanging information online by 2030. Furthermore, the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles, signed on 15 December 2022, demonstrates the EU's determination to pursue a secure, sustainable and citizen-centred digital transformation in line with fundamental European values and rights. European digital policy must therefore guarantee equitable access to internet, digital skills and online public services.

The social and solidarity economy sector, with its expertise in supporting vulnerable groups and developing innovative tech solutions, plays a key role in meeting these challenges and ensuring our societies' digital transformation becomes a lever of inclusion for all.



3 key figures

While

87% OF EUROPEANS

aged 16-74 regularly used the internet in 2021, only 54% mastered basic digital skills.

90% OF ALL JOBS

now have a digital component¹.

1 IN 6 TEENAGERS

experiences cyberbullying (according to a large survey carried across 44 mainly European countries)².

¹Le marché unique numérique, Conseil de l'Union Européenne, 2020

²Etude cyberharcèlement chez les enfants, Organisation Mondiale de la Santé, 2024

³DREES, Quantifier le non-recours aux minima sociaux, mars 2022

As digitalization becomes unavoidable, targeted actions must focus on the most vulnerable to ensure maximum inclusivity. At Groupe SOS, we innovate to make digital technology a lever for social inclusion: by training the most vulnerable groups in digital skills, supporting the social workers who assist them, securing pathways and facilitating access to rights.

#1 IMPROVING EUROPEANS' ACCESS TO RIGHTS THROUGH DIGITAL MEANS

OUR ACTIONS

Many people fail to claim their rights because they cannot provide required documentation for digital procedures or are deterred by their complexity. Reconnect, a Groupe SOS nonprofit, has developed a Digital Safe, a free, online space that can be accessed anywhere, where vulnerable individuals (those in precarious situations, people in social/ professional integration programmes, asylum seekers, refugees, NEET youth) can securely store essential documents and share them with relevant social support services in just a few clicks.

Since late 2023, Reconnect has partnered with French nonprofit Solinum and Spanish nonprofit Isocial on the cross-border Solidigital project (co-funded by the Interreg POCTEFA European programme) to combat non-take-up of rights and facilitate social and vocational integration for the most vulnerable through knowledge-sharing between involved organisations and the networking of each country's proven digital solutions.

Access to information about local social services is thus facilitated through the Soliguide, which lists all relevant support organisations to which vulnerable people can be directed. Social workers can easily access two digital safes (Reconnect in France and Isocial in Spain) to store and share the documentation required for the claiming of rights.

Let us build a more inclusive digital society. Digitalisation affects all aspects of life and significantly impacts the people's ability to access rights, whether they struggle with legal complexity or cannot provide required documentation. A DREES study³ on non-take-up of social safety net benefits in five European countries (Germany, Belgium, Finland, the UK and Netherlands) revealed this issue is widespread, with universal credit non-take-up rates frequently exceeding 30%. Yet social benefits are crucial safeguards against poverty for society's most vulnerable.



RECOMMENDATIONS :

Support cross-border projects that aim at interoperating digital tools from European non-profits to improve information sharing and smoothen people's processes.

Promote initiatives tackling both digital and social issues to improve vulnerable groups' access to rights

Demand the implementation of a hybrid approach to social support, systematically combining digital and in-person assistance, to ensure effective access to rights for the most vulnerable.



#2 USING DIGITAL MEDIATION TO STRENGTHEN EVERYONE'S BASIC DIGITAL SKILLS

OUR ACTIONS

Because of the mass digitalisation of society accelerated by the COVID crisis, **the digital divide has widened, primarily affecting the most vulnerable**. Lacking means or training, many cannot complete essential online procedures for housing, employment or accessing rights. This digital illiteracy reinforces exclusion. According to the DESI index (related to economy and digital society), while 87% of Europeans aged 16-74 used the internet regularly in 2021, only 54% had basic digital skills⁴. This while digital knowledge is nowadays essential to access most services, as noted by the European Datalab: «online uses are becoming more complex while providing access to ever more services.» We must innovate to ensure all Europeans, especially the most disadvantaged, can acquire and master basic digital skills. Digital mediation programmes tailored to vulnerable groups are essential for creating an inclusive digital society that reduces socio-economic disparities throughout Europe.

At Groupe SOS, we believe that with proper support, digital transformation can become a powerful tool for inclusion. Reconnect has developed tailored digital training programmes based on direct feedback from beneficiaries and social workers in the field. Every workshop prioritises the autonomy and empowerment of the most vulnerable. Through proactive outreach, we engage those furthest from the digital world, co-designing actions with social services. This combination of digital training and social support effectively meets beneficiaries' long-term needs.

This same outreach approach led Reconnect to partner with Balas, a French construction company, to address the digital skills gap among its employees, most non-native speakers, while adapting to their work rhythms. Reconnect is delivering 75 workshops for the company's 200 employees, equipping them with essential digital skills, especially those needed in their workplace, such as email and payroll systems.

Recognising that rural areas face even greater digital inequalities, Reconnect and 1000 cafés have joined forces to tackle digital exclusion in remote communities. How? Digital advisors run workshops in some of the 220 towns where 1000 cafés has established multi-service hubs, covering topics like basic digital skills, data protection, social media, and parental controls.



RECOMMENDATIONS :

Expand outreach programmes targeting digitally excluded people.

Increase digital mediation initiatives in workplaces where employees face digital illiteracy.

⁴L'indice relatif à l'économie et à la société numérique (DESI). Commission Européenne, 2022

#3 SUPPORTING THE DIGITAL TRANSITION BY TRAINING SOCIAL WORKERS

While the digital divide particularly affects society's most vulnerable, it also impacts the people who support them.

The ongoing digital transition requires social workers to acquire new skills they can apply in their daily social work. We must therefore promote digital acculturation in the social sector while ensuring professionals receive appropriate training. Digital tools should serve social action by simplifying procedures, facilitating information sharing, improving access to rights and securing integration pathways.

OUR ACTIONS



RECOMMANDATIONS :

Promote cooperation between digital training providers to upskill European social professionals

Encourage digital acculturation in Europe's social sector, starting during professional training

Reconnect has partnered with Cap Ulysse (France), Orient Express (Austria) and Ljudska univerza Celje (Slovenia) to assess vulnerability to online scams and other digital risks among clients of social services. The «Don't Phish Me!» project addresses a shared observation: social workers and trainers across Europe lack knowledge about cybercrime. Many don't know how to use internet and digital devices securely or advise the people they support.

Vulnerable people are particularly exposed to cyberattacks due to language barriers, limited media literacy or unfamiliarity with the administrative systems they must navigate. We believe stronger European cooperation can upskill social professionals and adult educators regarding cybersecurity. More broadly, we advocate for universal digital literacy training. Groupe SOS has already begun awareness-raising about fake news and plans to develop dedicated digital training programmes for the social sector.

FOCUS

Social innovation and digital inclusion at Groupe SOS

Impact Tank, Groupe SOS's European think-and-do tank dedicated to the promotion and scaling of positive impact social innovations, has launched a Digital Inclusion Collective aimed at producing recommendations on key success factors, promising solutions and scaling strategies for addressing digital divides. Such an approach, replicated at European level, would enable social workers to share best practices, thus developing digital skills while improving methodologies.



#4 DEFINING A EUROPEAN DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Among the EU's digital transition priorities is the obligation of ensuring everyone enjoys fair online environments, protection from harmful or illegal content, and control over interactions with new technologies like AI. **Accelerating digitalisation requires us to define a new dimension of citizenship.** The digital sphere, being a shared space of expression, must ensure everyone can harmoniously coexist, while preventing and stopping cyberbullying, as well as providing each person with the means to manage online information. **The rise of fake news, hate, discrimination and violence make it essential to allow everyone to develop a digital critical mind.**

OUR ACTIONS

Our digital training programmes for vulnerable groups include dedicated modules on cyberbullying and fake news detection. Using practical, engaging methods, we equip participants with skills for safe, responsible online engagement. Our Respect-EMI association addresses these challenges through media literacy programmes made accessible to youth and educators. A little less than half of young French people (41% between 18 and 24, 41% between 25 and 34) believe conspiracy theories⁵. Faced with an increasing number of online sources, especially through social networks, many struggle to distinguish credible information. **Respect-EMI develops innovative media education using hands-on tools inspired by journalistic approaches.**

RECOMMENDATIONS :

Promote digital citizenship enabling safe, responsible online engagement

Facilitate European exchanges on cyberbullying solutions among digital mediation professionals



⁵ Etude de l'Ifop publiée en avril 2023

About Groupe SOS

Groupe SOS is a non-profit organisation committed to fostering social cohesion. It develops associations and social enterprises, united by their social and environmental commitments.

Its initiatives are structured around two main priorities:

- Managing non-profit facilities dedicated to youth, healthcare, vulnerable individuals, and the elderly
- Preparing for a sustainable and inclusive future through initiatives for ecological transition, regional revitalisation, responsible businesses, and access to culture.

Secular and non-partisan, it promotes a genuine social vision focused on the common good.

With 26,000 employees, 2 million beneficiaries each year, and a presence in 50 countries, Groupe SOS demonstrates that large-scale impact is both desirable and achievable in building a fairer and more inclusive future.

In Europe

Groupe SOS is committed daily to initiatives and projects that contribute to the development of the Social and Solidarity Economy in the European Union.

With over a hundred projects carried out with more than 85 European organisations from 19 countries, Groupe SOS demonstrates its ability to build strong connections across Europe. Its projects are supported by over 15 European funding programmes, including Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the New European Bauhaus, and the FAMI, ESF+, and ERDF funding programmes. Thanks to EU support, Groupe SOS and its partners lead diverse, impactful, and innovative initiatives, such as vocational training and professional integration projects, activities aimed at improving support for people with disabilities and promoting the social integration of migrants through sports.

Through its partnership network and innovative projects, Groupe SOS is resolutely committed to making the Social and Solidarity Economy a catalyst for social progress in Europe.



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*Photos taken by Groupe SOS teams within its establishments,
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