# Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth

EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# Social Inclusion, Digitalisation and Young People
# Knowledge book and analytical paper

# Concept paper

**Background and context**

Social Inclusion or social integration has been defined as "the process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic and political life on the basis of equality of rights, equity and dignity".[1]

From a youth perspective, **social inclusion** is the process of individual's self-realisation within a society, acceptance and recognition of one's potential by social institutions, integration (through study, employment, volunteer work or other forms of participation) in the web of social relations in a community. While all young people experience complex transitions from dependence to autonomy under rapidly evolving circumstances, social inclusion has a particular meaning to those young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and live in precarious conditions.

These are young people who are socially excluded, or have no recognition, voice or stake in the society in which they live. These may include young women, refugees, socio-economically disadvantaged youth (including financial hardship, housing, family breakdown and educational attainment), young people in NEET situations, youth of different races, ethnicity, religion or sexuality, young people with a disability, young people suffering from substance abuse or dependency and youth who have committed or been a victim of crime-all groups of young people who are facing some kind of disadvantage or exclusion. The causes of exclusion are multiple and most of the young people that this study concerns itself with are facing multiple forms of exclusion. For them, inclusion involves breaking or overcoming various barriers before acquiring their access to social rights and being able to participate as full members of society.

**Digitalisation,** as a transformation process of integrating digital technologies into everyday life is continuously shaping our society, and it has been recognised to have a significant

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[1] Khan, Seema (2009): Topic guide on Social Exclusion, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, Birmingham.

impact on the youngest generations. As a social phenomenon, digitalisation may support, or hinder, the efforts necessary to achieve social inclusion. During the last decade, in particular, there have been various developments in terms of access to technology and Internet, with a large part of the population accessing it for various purposes - work, communication, information, entertainment and much more. Nevertheless, significant gaps can be identified in terms of skills, accessibility, equal opportunities, types of services available and/or provided, particularly at the national level.

A variety of tools of digital social inclusion are already on disposal to different sub-groups of young people, and countries of the Council of Europe area are able to benefit from the same platforms, like ERYICA or Eurodesk. In Europe, organisations are already investing in and using digital resources, particularly through projects using digital tools as opportunity to foster social inclusion or using digital platforms to foster participation. It is important to highlight that digitalisation does not refer only to access to technology, but to the use of different digital opportunities and tools towards change in society.

However, there has been limited analysis of the benefits and risks of digitalisation for the marginalised young people, or discussion of potential steps that can be taken at the policy level to take advantage of opportunities arising from this process.


**Previous work on the topic of Social Inclusion and Digitalisation**

In 2018 the EU-CoE youth partnership organised the **Symposium 'Young people, social inclusion and digitalisation'**, where over 110 participants discussed the intersection between social inclusion of young people and digitalisation. The event produced a set of conclusions indicating, among other things, the need to better understand the reality of digitalisation in young people's lives, the implications for the youth sector, the adaptations required from youth work and youth policy in order to be better prepared to face the challenges, and exploit the opportunities that current and new digital tools and trends offer.

Furthermore, the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership has produced extensive knowledge on the theme of social inclusion, in particular: the Youth Knowledge Book 'Social inclusion and young people: breaking down the barriers' (2007); the study "Mapping of Barriers to Social Inclusion of Young People in Vulnerable Situations 'Finding a place in modern Europe' (2015)", the outcomes of the conference on the role of youth work in supporting young people in vulnerable situations (2014); 'Beyond Barriers: a youth policy seminar on social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situation in South East Europe' (2015); and the T-Kit 8: Social Inclusion (2013, 2017). The knowledge stemming from the symposium on youth participation in the digitalised world (2015) also is of relevance. Finally, the symposium (Un)Equal Europe (2016) explored the increasing inequalities among young people due to social, geographic or economic reasons and the polarisation of society with respect to this accumulation of advantages and/or disadvantages.

On an institutional level, new EU Youth Strategy and its implementation tools including the new EU programme in the field of youth, Erasmus+ (2021-2027), and the EU Youth Dialogue, as well as aspects of the future Agenda 2030 of the Council of Europe foresee, in different ways the use of digital tools for reaching out to more young people, and facilitating their access to rights, especially those at risk of marginalisation and social exclusion. These

converging efforts are aiming at creating a more inclusive and participatory development and implementation of policy and practice, which can be informed by more knowledge in this area.

**Upcoming knowledge products - Research Study and Knowledge Book**

Considering the previous knowledge produced by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership on the topic, the ever-growing presence and potential of digitalisation, and the need for knowledge-informed policy development, in 2019, EU-Council of Europe youth partnership will lead the development of new knowledge products: a volume of the "Youth Knowledge Book" series dedicated to this topic and a research study on social inclusion of young people and digitalisation.

The main aim of the study is to better understand the link between social inclusion and digitalisation. In this context, the study will reflect on the barriers to inclusion, digitalisation as a phenomena, its potential, approaches and limits to tackle different aspects of social exclusion and inclusion, aspiring to prepare grounds for a knowledge-informed policy development and implementation.

Objectives of the research:

- Conduct knowledge review to define and understand the concepts of social inclusion (online and in real life) and digitalisation in the youth field. This should draw on literature from both within and outside of the youth field
- Explore the opportunities, benefits and potential for inclusion that digitalisation offers to marginalised young people
- Identify what is known about potential risks and opportunities of digitalisation for marginalised groups, based on existing literature and examples
- Produce an overview of the existing state of play regarding national and EU policies directly relevant to digitalisation, social inclusion and young people.
- Identify the implications of the above for the youth field (research, policy and practice)

In the light of the main aim and objectives, the research study aims to address the following questions, based on the research and inspiring examples from policy and practice:

- How can we conceptualise social inclusion, digitalisation and the connection between the two in a way that is relevant to the youth field?
- What are the potential opportunities of digitalisation to address social inclusion and prevent different aspects of social exclusion of marginalised groups of young people?
- How can we best use digital opportunities to enhance social inclusion in the context of young people?
- What are the main risks and challenges for marginalised groups associated with digitalisation and its use in this context?
- What are the existing strategies and policies relevant to young people on digitalisation as means of social inclusion? What opportunities are there to

encourage policies and practices, which enable social inclusion through digitalisation for young people?
- What should the youth field take into account in order to make digital tools and frameworks convincingly inclusive?
- What is the role of young people in setting up and leading the digital processes within the youth field?

**Tentative outline for the research study:**

1. Introduction
   - Context/ background to the study
   - Literature review and key concepts
   - Review of relevant policies on national and European level
2. Social inclusion, digitalisation and young people - current state of play
   - Country/regional/thematic analysis
   - European-level analysis
3. Discussion on opportunities and risks of digitalisation for social inclusions
4. Implications of digitalisation for research, policy and practice in the youth field
5. Concluding remarks

**Timeline**

The call for contributions for **research study** from EKCYP contributors, European organisations and institutions active in the field will be published by mid-May, with expected submissions of completed questionnaires by 15 July. Literature review, analysis of data and findings and their implications, will be completed by October 2019, with final analytical paper ready by the end of the year.

**Research team**

The study is conducted by EU-Council of Europe youth partnership with a team of researchers:

Dan Moxon, Director, People Dialogue and Change
Lana Pasic, Researcher and Development Consultant, Member of the Pool of European Youth Researchers
Dunja Potocnik, Institute for Social Research, Zagreb, Croatia, Member of the Pool of European Youth Researchers
Adina Șerban, Center for Sustainable Community Development, Member of the Pool of European Youth Researchers
Veronica Stefan, Founder of Digital Citizens Romania Think-Tank

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**Key concepts: Social Inclusion, Digitalisation and Young people**

**Digitalisation**
A transformative process accelerated by new technologies, with a high social and economic impact. Digitalisation is enabled by the appearance of the World Wide Web, investments in infrastructure of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and the widespread of technology devices. Current definitions include a rethinking of how individuals, governments, organisations and businesses use technology to change traditional social & economic models. Debates on digitalisation include its potential to generate economic growth while generating disruptions on the labour market, communication, privacy, security and human development.
Complementarily, digitization refers to the technical process of converting analog information/physical documents or services into digital form.

**Digital citizenship**
A person utilizing information technology in order to engage in society, politics, and government. Digital citizenship includes a continuous process of developing norms of appropriate, responsible, and empowered technology use, based on existing human rights and ongoing technological changes.

**Digital inclusion**
Ability of individuals and groups to access and use information and communication technologies. Digital inclusion encompasses not only access to the Internet, but also the availability of hardware and software; relevant content and services; and training for the digital literacy skills required for effective use of information and communication technologies.

**Social Exclusion**
Social exclusion has been defined by the Department of International Development (DFID) as "a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household".

There is agreement, however, that social exclusion is multidimensional – it encompasses social, political, cultural and economic dimensions, and operates at different social levels. It is dynamic, in that it impacts people in various ways and to differing degrees over time. And it is relational – it is the product of social interactions, which are characterised by unequal power relations, and it can produce ruptures in relationships between people and society, which result in a lack of social participation, social protection, social integration and power.

**Social Inclusion**

Social Inclusion or social integration has been defined as "the process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic and political life on the basis of equality of rights, equity and dignity".

**References and useful documents**

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