

# Youth Partnership

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



## Symposium

### **“Connecting the dots: Young people, social inclusion and digitalisation”**

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## Reflection paper

**Dr Shane McLoughlin**  
LERO (The Irish Software Research Centre)  
National University of Ireland, Maynooth,  
Shane.mcloughlin@mu.ie

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## Abstract

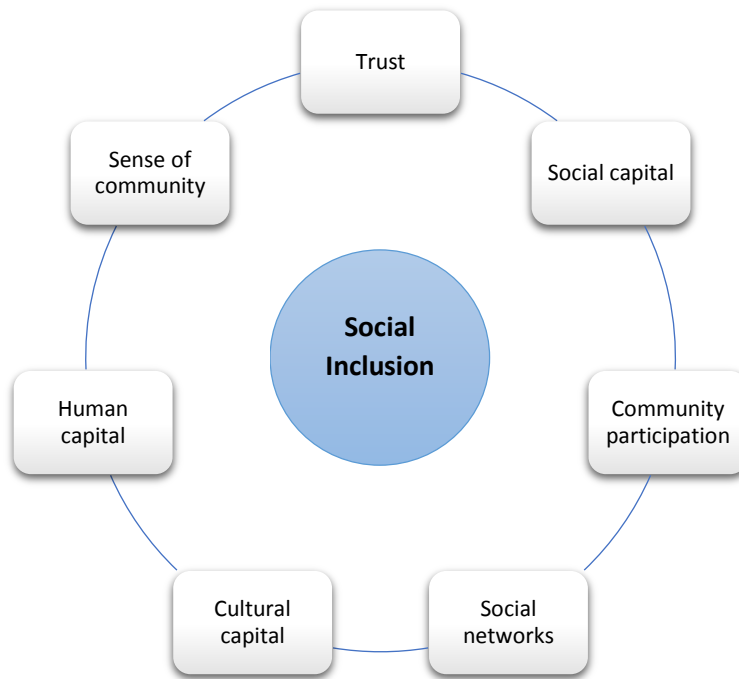
The digital transformation of society in the 21st century presents tremendous opportunities and challenges to be agreed upon and bridged by the field of youth. This reflection paper seeks to explore our understanding of social inclusion, the opportunities and challenges for the social inclusion of young people in the digital age, as well as the opportunities and challenges for youth policy, youth research and youth workers in both confronting digitalisation and applying digitalisation to realise social inclusion of young people today and in the future. The principle aim is to sensitise readers to some of the key concepts, range of issues and applied practices that draw on digitalisation in seeking to address the social inclusion of young people. Thus, this reflection paper is meant as an initial prompt for thought, discussion and debate for this year's symposium. It is hoped that the symposium will further enrich this discussion and debate by stimulating the formulation of key problems and issues, and by reaching a consensus around how to tackle some of these core issues. In this paper, we particularly focus on conditions for social inclusion, including young peoples' capacities such as the "human capital" (or competencies) needed by young people today in order to access and negotiate digital technologies. We note the salient issue of trust when thinking about social inclusion and recommend closer attention to how digitalisation can be drawn on in order to directly and indirectly engender trust by young people. The paper argues that digitalisation is both a necessary response to the current and future socio-political-economic climate of Europe, and an opportunity to increase the reach, relevance and impact of youth-focused policy, research and practice. We conclude with some recommendations for thinking about how the youth policy field is moving forward in addressing the breadth of challenges.

## Social inclusion

It is widely theorised that social inclusion contributes to citizens' quality of life, and the cohesiveness of society (AbuJarour and Krasnova, 2017). For example, social inclusion has been cited as an important element of well-being for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Buntinx and Schalock, 2010), whilst participation in social, economic, cultural, political and community life contributes to a democratic, equitable and sustainable society. In Europe, the social inclusion of young people is felt, experienced and distributed unevenly, with young offenders, migrants and refugees, single mothers, ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA) people, and economically deprived, homeless or disabled people amongst the sectors of society most at risk of social exclusion. The consequences of social exclusion are negatively felt by both those excluded, and society at large. Thus, the social exclusion of young people can have a ripple effect on those around them, and the cohesiveness of society overall, and subsequently problems can appear over time. Furthermore, there are systematic structural challenges across Europe potentially

affecting the social inclusion of each and every young person, for example, the capacity or desire of young people to access certain services, participate politically, protect their privacy and identity, exercise certain rights and freedoms, etc.

Whilst social inclusion has been adopted by the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe as a major policy concern, defining and characterising social inclusion as well as its necessary conditions has proved challenging, with numerous definitions and understandings proposed within academic literature. Social inclusion has been conceptualised in numerous ways and in relation to concepts such as social networks, the sense of community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986), social capital (Lin, 2003; Putnam, 2001), social interaction, trust, community participation (Simplican, Leader, Kosciulek, and Leahy, 2015), cultural capital and human capital (Lareau and Horvat, 1999) (See Figure 1 for the framework of key features discussed below). These interrelated concepts help to identify the features of social inclusion and provide an analytical lens through which to formulate interventions to enhance inclusion. For example, general trust in others and community participation may be seen as both conditions, characteristics, and outcomes of social inclusion. If young people do not trust members of society and feel that society does not trust them, they may be inhibited from participating in community life. If young people do not have, or indeed perceive, the opportunity for economic, social and political participation, they may feel excluded from other opportunities, including decision making processes that affect their lives. Here it should be noted that although such concepts as social capital, human capital and even “identity capital” are useful (though reductionist) in casting an economic and rational lens on how some members of society have greater opportunities and benefit more in life than others, this is not to suggest that focusing on “capital” takes away from the mission of the youth field in acknowledging and contributing to the equal and intrinsic value of all young people’s lives, their human rights, and their right to equal opportunities for a good quality of life.



**Figure 1. Features of social inclusion**

In terms of the aforementioned features of social inclusion, we can define these overlapping concepts as follows: social networks are seen as the connective string of social life, and social capital is understood as both the “glue” (in terms of shared norms, reciprocity and trust) that binds communities and contributes to the success of communities and its members (Putnam, 2001), as well as the benefits individuals accrue as a result of the characteristics of their social networks and through the relationships inherent within their social networks (Lin, 2003, McLoughlin 2016). In other words, if young people are excluded from communities, or the glue that binds communities is lacking, then young people lose out to the benefits that community membership brings. These benefits may include activities organised by the community, services or resources as well as the opportunity to cultivate beneficial social networks through being part of the community. Furthermore, if young people lack social capital they may miss out on the associated benefits of having a certain status, or knowing certain people, and miss out on directly drawing on those social relations in order to benefit their lives. This could be, for example, the opportunity to draw on a friend who can provide them with expert advice on welfare or legal matters, recommend them for a job, or provide emotional support when needed, etc.

Whilst social capital can be seen as certain benefits that individuals accrue from both community membership and the size and characteristics of their particular social network, sense of community on the other hand refers to sense of belonging to a community, sense of identity within the community and a sense that identity will be protected within the community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Thus, sense of community supports young people feeling connected, accepted and empowered, and

exclusion may imply a sense of isolation and loneliness. Thus, without a sense of community young people may feel no obligation to remain within the community, or contribute to the community and thereby benefit their lives and others within that community.

“Particularised trust” and “generalised trust” have also been related to social inclusion. Particularised trust refers to trust of other people within close social proximity, including family members, friends, neighbours, etc., whilst generalised trust entails a positive abstract attitude towards people in general, including strangers (fellow citizens, foreigners, etc.) (Freitag and Traunmüller, 2009). Without forms of trust, young people can lack solidarity with others, may be wary or even antagonistic towards others, and as a result fail to develop their forms of capital that can benefit their quality of life and that of others.

Social inclusion is evident through community participation, which can be defined as involvement in domestic life, interpersonal life, major life areas consisting of education, employment, and community, civic, and social life (Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx, and Curfs, 2009). Without having the opportunity or perceiving the opportunity for community participation, young people may fail to develop forms of capital that can benefit their lives, help them to integrate into society, and influence decision making that affects them. Furthermore, without the necessary human capital, young people may not have the capacity to participate, or participate fully, in major life areas.

Both human and cultural capital support social inclusion and other aspects such as social capital and community participation etc. whereby human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (Ployhart and Moliterno, 2011) accumulated by an individual. The ability to develop human capital and the opportunity to benefit from it are crucial for the long term well-being of young people. Cultural capital refers to the cultural knowledge and resources that one possesses (e.g. speech, language and dialect, assets, educational background, etc.) that are valued in society (Lareau and Horvat, 1999). These confer benefits such as social mobility, recognition and integration.

Whilst the above discussion sensitises us to key concepts that help us to understand what may constitute social inclusion, the EU focuses on the actions and processes that can address exclusion of sectors of society. They define social inclusion as “a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. Social inclusion also ensures that vulnerable groups and persons have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and that they can access their fundamental rights” (European Commission, 2010). In the Council of Europe, discussion on social inclusion is framed by a concern to promote social cohesion. Social cohesion is defined as “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding

polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means” (European Committee for Social Inclusion, 2004). Importantly, this strategy draws on the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163), and focuses on the need for social policy to ensure access to rights.

Finally, in order to create the conditions for social inclusion, all young people’s capacity and desire to develop forms of human, social and cultural capital should be adequately enabled and supported, and their rights, freedoms and protections ensured. Geo-spatial, temporal, infrastructural and socio-structural constraints on the social inclusion of young people should also be recognised and ameliorated. Informed and active citizenship, social connectedness, shared responsibility, including engagement with political decision-making processes that affect their quality of life and the prosperity of their communities are a desirable outcome. Society must cultivate and sustain support for the freedoms, rights and protections of young people. This will enable them to explore their identities, understand and exercise their rights, integrate into society, achieve well-being, and have agency or influence on socio-political-economic structures. Ensuring equality and accepting the diversity of ethnicities, identities, thoughts and legitimate life choices of young people is essential.

Youth researchers, youth policy makers, and youth workers continue to play a crucial role in understanding, creating and applying the conditions for social inclusion of all young people to be realised equally. Their efforts aim at addressing systematic and structural challenges for the social inclusion of all young people at the local, national and European level, including rights and freedoms, access and opportunities, protections and benefits, etc. Digital transformation plays an increasing role for social inclusion and for those enhancing it. Increasingly, digital technologies are seen to enable, support and/ or enhance the social inclusion of young people, but may also extend or augment forms of exclusion or create new forms of exclusion. The following sections discuss digitalisation in the context of social inclusion.

## Digitalisation and social inclusion

Europe has undergone tremendous changes in the past 30 years, particularly because of technological advancements in information and communication technologies (ICT). Many theorists argue that we are in the midst of a new epoch due to a profound digital transformation of life, as ICT enable an exponential increase in the generation, processing, storage, communication and delivery of value from data, information and knowledge in all aspects of society. Theories include the Information Society (Lyon, 2003), the Information Age (Castells, 2000), Knowledge Society (N Stehr and Grundmann, 2011; Nico Stehr, 2015), Network Society (Castells, 2000), Post-Industrial Society (Bell, 1976), Risk

Society (Beck, 1992), Liquid Modernity (Bauman 2001) and Surveillance Society (Lyon, 2003) etc., with each offering analytical lenses, understandings and critiques of changes taking place. Whilst such theories differ in their account of the incarcerating or emancipatory potential of life in the digital age, they correctly predict the significance of ICT, insofar as digital technologies are now tightly woven into modern society, making digital competencies and access to digital technologies a necessity in young people's lives (Broadbent and Papadopoulos, 2013) in helping them to attain equal opportunities for a good quality of life.

Digitalisation has enabled the possibility to develop new forms of communication, friendship, community, education, entertainment, political participation, employment, etc. It has led to the upheaval of more traditional modes of life, as the space of place gives way to the space of flows (Castells, 2000), where time, sociability, education, employment, recreation and overall opportunities, etc. become untangled from the primacy of geographical location. Young people now speak to their parents whilst simultaneously snapchatting with their friends from a distance, maintain friendships with those they have never met in person, shop for clothes without leaving their homes, virtually collaborate on college essays whilst commuting on a train, interview for a job using Face-time or Skype, watch a lecture on YouTube rather than travelling to class, play a computer game with a friend on the other side of the globe, petition their local representative from the comfort of their couch, order a taxi from an isolated location unknown to them, broadcast an event or occasion on social media, manage multiple identities and avatars across online communities. Information communication technologies can enhance young people's human, social and cultural capital by giving them access to increased information resources, educational and training opportunities, enabling them to connect and develop bonds, become culturally aware and exchange resources, thoughts and ideas. Furthermore ICT can lead to the self-organisation of marginalised groups for activism, peer support, knowledge exchange and community development (Verdegem, 2011).

It has been argued that digital inclusion is a necessary precursor to social inclusion. However, there are systematic inequalities in young people's opportunities, capacities and desires to reap the full benefits of digitalisation. Turning to the lens of digital inclusion, the Europe Advisory Group, defines digital inclusion as "the effective participation of individuals and communities in all dimensions of the knowledge-based society and economy through their access to ICT, made possible by the removal of access and accessibility barriers, and effectively enabled by the willingness and ability to reap social benefits from such access ... Furthermore, digital inclusion refers to the degree to which ICT contribute to equalising and promoting participation in society at all levels (i.e. social relationships, work, culture, political participation, etc.)" (European Commission, 2006). Whilst digital inclusion is now understood as essential for social inclusion and an enabler of human rights (as people at risk of exclusion can be empowered through ICT) (Verdegem, 2011), it is important to underline that digital inclusion does not necessarily imply social inclusion, whereby "inequalities continue to be reproduced



at a wider social level, which, again, leads to mechanisms of individual exclusion” (Salemink, 2015). In the next section, we explore the opportunities and challenges of digitalisation, and caution that existing social inequalities and forms of exclusion may transfer, magnify or evolve online.

## Opportunities and challenges of digitalisation

Whilst the digitalisation of society has heralded tremendous opportunities in enabling, supporting and enhancing social inclusion, it also poses new threats and challenges to social inclusion, and thus the quality of life of all young people today. In terms of opportunities, digitalisation heralds progress in the availability, accessibility and overall convenience of information, services and resources that can contribute directly and indirectly to social inclusion. The geo-spatial and temporal constraints placed on young people may be lifted by the digitalisation of information resources, and services. Young people may be empowered to maintain and develop their human, social and cultural capital, via access to free online information, educational and training resources, social networking and social media platforms. They may be empowered to seek help, support, gain a sense of belonging, and explore identity and freedoms through online information and intervention programmes, anonymous online forums and online community platforms. They may be empowered to manage their lives and reduce their costs through the ease and accessibility of online tools and services, politically engage through e-participation platforms, and inform themselves on their rights, freedoms and protections through citizen’s portals, and government e-resources, etc. Finally, they may benefit from the recreational and employment opportunities of digital technologies that help to achieve their desired lifestyle and help attain their well-being and happiness.

However, digitalisation may also extend, augment or create new forms of social exclusion due to the prohibitive cost of access; lack of adequate infrastructure; shortcomings in design, compatibility or communicative affordance of technologies; or lack of human capital in terms of the necessary digital literacies and competencies. Young people may be subjected to forms of online discrimination, abuse, harassment, misinformation or extremist viewpoints. They may be overwhelmed by information and media overload, targeted by advertising, pornography and hate speech, or suffer attention deficits which hamper sustained thought and engagement. They may be duped into polarising groups, suffer addiction to online gaming and social media which they use for escapism. They may also become victims of data hacking, leaks, computer viruses or phishing, as well as violent imagery, fake media and trolling. They may become over-reliant on mediated forms of communication to the detriment of quality in-person contact, losing not only the ability to successfully engage socially offline, but also the confidence and resilience with which to cope offline. Furthermore, evolving technological and legislative developments regularly shift the playing field for young people. For example, young people do not necessarily understand the rights and protections afforded online to their data, and the

consequences of their action (Hoofnagle, King, Li, and Turow, 2010). In sum, traditional societal challenges that young people face are often transferred, extended or amplified online. The digital realm offers fresh challenges for young people that must be successfully recognised and negotiated. This has meant that the digitalisation of life has led to both the “structural mechanisms of empowerment and of disempowerment” (Mariën and A. Prodnik, 2014).

Thus, whilst digitalisation has the potential to increase opportunities to acquire education, harness technology for social and economic advantage and improve involvement in political causes through the expression of ideas and suggestions, etc. (Samsudin and Hasan, 2017), it is important to identify the tremendous risks that are posed, and how different groups or sectors of young people may be more exposed to such risks or excluded altogether. For example, socio-economic status is an important variable in understanding how access and ability online is not equally distributed amongst young people (Hargittai, 2010), with those not in education, employment and training disadvantaged with regard to benefiting from the opportunities online (Helsper, 2016) and less able to recognise and cope with the risks presented online. For example, homeless people may not have access to the internet-enabled devices necessary to access information and services. Digitalisation can offer tools to empower certain segments of society such as those with disabilities or those from minority ethnic or racial backgrounds. However, certain individuals with intellectual or physical disabilities may be constrained with regard to the availability, access or use of digital technologies and online services. Those from minority ethnic or racial backgrounds may be culturally alienated by certain design, content and delivery choices of online media, services and resources, etc.

## Capacities for social inclusion

Based on the above discussion of opportunities and challenges, we can begin to elucidate the forms of human capital in terms of skills, attitudes and abilities which benefit young people in becoming empowered and resilient in the 21st century. Firstly, we can say that it is necessary for all young people to have equal opportunities to access the internet and to be able to afford internet access and the associated technological devices. They must also have the self-efficacy (sufficient belief in their ability), motivation and the technological and digital literacy skills in order to have opportunities to fully and equally participate in creating, consuming and contributing to the web. In other words, setting up a blog, creating and posting content to a YouTube channel, initiating a skype video call, accessing services such as banking, contributing to a news thread, etc. Furthermore, they must be able to protect themselves and their information online, and have the ability to understand the ethics and implications of their actions online and their actions with regard to others, whether in signing up to a website or posting content to a social networking site. They must have the capacity to negotiate and balance being online and offline and be capable of setting boundaries in this regard. Related to this, they must be capable of recognising, negotiating and setting boundaries concerning polarising,

discriminatory and radicalised speech and online groups. Finally, they must be able to discern the quality and credibility of sources and information online, be able to critically engage with content, and have the skills to formulate and communicate thought effectively. For example, the ability to establish whether certain information is “fake news” and expose manipulated or augmented imagery and video etc. In this regard, young people require both information fluency and related media literacy skills. Information fluency is defined as the ability to perform effectively in an information-rich and technology intensive environment. In other words, the ability to gather, evaluate, and use information in ethical and legal ways, encompassing information literacy, technology literacy, and critical thinking (UCF, 2018). With regard to media literacy, young people should have the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities to access media, have a critical understanding of the media and be able to interact with it (All Digital, n.d.). Recently the European Digital Competence Framework has sought to comprehensively cover the critical skills, literacies and competences needed in the 21st century, and defines 21 key competences needed according to five thematic areas:

1. information and data literacy, including management of content;
2. communication, collaboration, and participation in society;
3. digital content creation, including ethical principles;
4. safety;
5. problem solving (DIGCOMP, 2017).

## Supporting social inclusion

From a top-down perspective, opportunities for social inclusion of young people are influenced by the specific institutional and structural settings (Peicheva and Milenkova, 2017) encompassing the current socio-economic, cultural and political climate. Broader European legislative responses such as the General Data Protection Regulation (EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), 2018), E-Privacy legislation (European Commission, 2018b), and strategy for Connectivity for a European Gigabit Society (European Commission, 2016), as well as national responses such as the Digital Age of Consent (Equality, 2018), aim to increase protection for all citizens as well as ensure the necessary infrastructure to achieve sufficient access. Furthermore, a range of policy mechanisms at the EU, Council of Europe, OECD and United Nations level in relation to digital transformation seek to positively impact young people (for an overview of specific policy responses, see; Norqvist, 2018). The digital marketplace and various research initiatives, youth-focused campaigns and interventions draw on a range of innovative new digital technologies, prescriptive frameworks and methodologies to enable, support or enhance communication, education, employment, participation, management and effectiveness of young people, youth workers, youth centres and youth-focused initiatives. Reviewing proposals of best practice for this year’s symposium, we observed a diversity of digital tools, digital-

focused projects and research initiatives supporting a positive difference being made to young people's lives. Such practices ranged from (1) direct interventions targeted at young people; (2) interventions aiming at supporting the communication and relationship between young people and youth workers/centres/initiatives; (3) practices seeking to renew the skills, capacities, efficiencies and effectiveness of youth-focused work in addressing the challenges of social inclusion of young people.

Importantly, the practice responses showcase how digitalisation is a tool, not a goal or replacement for youth-focused work and interventions. For instance, digitalisation may increase effectiveness, capacity and flexibility for providing support; extend the reach and impact of information campaigns; help overcome language barriers in communication; provide tailored and gamified education, support and digital skills development for the workplace; support volunteer recruitment and self-organisation of youth work, etc. Digitalisation may simply be about communication with young people, whereby evidence has shown that amongst the marginalised, the most important function of ICT is communication, in other words to connect and interact with others (Choudrie, Tsatsou, and Kurnia, 2017). Thus, "Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments – or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work." (European Commission, 2018a).

Furthermore, digitalisation in youth work is not just an opportunity to apply new and better ways to achieve social inclusion, but is also a response to the digitalisation of society and the changes and challenges this brings. For example, youth workers must understand the communicative practices and preferences of young people in order to communicate effectively in a manner and language which is attractive to young people. This may mean, on the one hand, using "influencers" on Instagram or YouTube to spread a message, using visual forms of information to communicate with impact, or integrating certain cultural symbols and references to garner attention. Youth work is about giving young people real opportunity and choice about how they spend their lives. Young people may increasingly spend their time online, whether on social media or online gaming, but they may have no attractive alternative choices within the communities in which they reside. For example, an intervention may be to facilitate an online car racing event followed by a visit to a go-carting track, thus, balancing online and offline recreation and socialising. Several of the practices highlight how digital tools can be a rationale to bring young people together offline, to develop knowledge, skills and activities applicable to the offline world. Bringing young people together can serve to promote interaction and social capital formation. Offsite visits to train with experts on digital resources within their work setting can bridge the invisible divide, and develop valuable skills and relationships. Educational interactions may involve a blended learning approach, whereby learning activities offline

are complemented or enhanced by applying an online component. Digitalisation can also be a way to support young people entering the labour market, by opening up new possibilities for visibility and sharing of their CVs and related profiles (Hamburg and Bucksch, 2017).

The opportunities of digitalisation for youth work are accompanied by inherent challenges in terms of resources available to deliver digital focused interventions, the appropriate manner to deliver such interventions, and the attitudes and receptiveness of young people to certain types of interventions. For example, there is a need to offer multi-platform compatibility for digital inventions, such as an application that works in Android, Apple and Windows; to tailor language, content and presentation in an easily understandable and digestible manner; to test receptiveness and interest by young people to a proposed intervention. On this last point, practitioners and researchers should be mindful that developing and deploying digitally-orientated offerings does not necessarily guarantee adoption, use and thus a sustainable solution. Bridging the gap between an identified problem and the adoption of a digital focused solution is a challenge in all spheres, and practitioners and researchers should (1) review existing evidence; (2) examine closely success stories/practices; (3) co-create with all relevant stakeholders, where possible from the formulation of the problem through to ideation and development of a proposed solution. By co-create, we mean involving, gaining insight and feedback from stakeholders (including target groups) throughout the process using methods appropriate to the objective (McLoughlin, Maccani, Prendergast, and Donnellan, 2018).

Finally, the ways in which digitalisation can engender trust in young people should guide how youth work approaches the challenge of inclusion. Trust permeates many of the discussed features of social inclusion, yet none of the proposed practices we have seen explicitly and solely focus on engendering trust. Of course, practices in relation to political participation, the tackling of hate speech etc., implicitly address trust issues. We would encourage exploring additional ways in which digitalisation can support trust, for example focusing on such aspects as transparency and openness of youth-focused work/centres/initiatives, and examining whether such measures increase trust and cultivate community. Furthermore, efforts targeted at developing cultural understanding, empathy and building bridges between those marginalised or at risk, and those fully benefiting from the opportunities of modern society can help engender trust.

## Concluding remarks

Whilst digitalisation of youth work and policy reactions are a necessary response to the digital transformation of society, digitalisation also opens up new opportunities to tackle the social inclusion of young people. Whilst this reflection paper teases out some of the pertinent concepts and issues, it is but a starting point in understanding this topic domain, and leads to several open questions, and

hopefully prompts many more. For example, in terms of some of the questions it raises, we invite you to reflect on the following questions:

- How can digitalisation engender trust by young people in people, institutions and society?
- How can digitalisation increase the exposure and reach of the youth field to young people?
- How can digitalisation enhance trust by young people in youth work?
- What other problems or issues does digitalisation raise for social inclusion, so far not identified, discussed or resolved?
- How can the youth field enable and support resilience in young people in balancing and successfully negotiating both online and offline life?
- How can digitisation enable, support and enhance social capital formation and sociability both online and offline?
- What forms of social exclusion are created, extended, augmented or enhanced through digitalisation? And how can these be addressed?
- How can digitisation by the youth field, and policy makers more broadly, help expose and understand social exclusion and those at risk?

These are just a few of the many possible questions raised with regard to the youth field. Looking forward, policy will play a crucial role in influencing the wider institutional and structural factors which affect young people and it is important that youth-focused policies are not just reactions to the social exclusion of young people but also apply a “precautionary principle” in designing mechanisms to avoid social exclusion. Thus, policy and funding mechanisms should be long-term, preventative and not just ad hoc measures. On a practical level, youth workers should be encouraged and “willing to try new things and learn from both success and failure, and be supported to do so” – underlining that “an agile mindset is crucial” (European Commission, 2018a). Related to this point is that if youth work fails to embrace the use of new technology there is a risk of its becoming outdated and irrelevant to young people who use youth work services (Harvey, 2016). The era of rapid digital transformation means more than ever that youth work needs to maintain awareness of new developments and the current climate in which young people live, as well as be continually updated on how to respond to new developments. Of course, a critical factor in the response by practitioners concerns the resources and capabilities available to them with which to implement digital solutions. In this regard it is crucial that the focus is on linking, establishing relationships and aligning the field of youth work, to share knowledge, resources and thinking, to re-use rather than reinvent, and to benefit from freely available digital resources, apply open source where possible, and create a widely available and easily accessible register of resources and best practice. Furthermore, establishing and highlighting proven digital tools and digital-focused methodologies that maximise efficiency and effectiveness of interventions and campaigns for young people in terms of reaching social inclusion is needed. For

digitalisation presents the opportunity for the youth field to create greater reach, relevance and impact if seized in a timely matter and suitably focused. We welcome and look forward to you “connecting the dots” and celebrating the 20th anniversary of the EU-CoE youth partnership 2018 symposium.

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