

# Innovating EU Social Protection Systems through ICTs

## Findings from analysis of case studies in fourteen Member States

### In this issue

This issue presents results from the analysis of selected case studies on *how ICT-enabled social innovations promoting social investment can contribute to the modernisation of social protection systems in the EU*. The selected case studies are drawn from fourteen Member States and address diverse social services and policy domains. Findings from the research show that they have made a positive contribution to transforming existing social services models, with ICT-enabled social innovation playing a crucial role, either as an *enabler* or *game changer*.

The analysis illustrates examples of how ICTs can provide solutions to those global societal challenges that are adding new complexities to the delivery of social services; in particular, ICTs can help building a 'client pathway' approach, with services centred on the needs of the beneficiaries. At a more operational level, the simplification and automation of procedures increases access to services and fosters a direct relationship between service providers and users.

Innovative policies encouraging the development of ICT solutions for the management of social protection systems and the delivery of social services should thus be promoted; to this end, specific incentive schemes to guarantee development, sustainability and transferability of those initiatives that generate social value by leveraging on ICTs shall be identified and fostered across the EU. At the same time, high levels of digitalization in the services delivery system must be balanced with alternative channels, to ensure that the less technologically savvy are not excluded. For this purpose, it is crucial to involve citizens and relevant stakeholders right from the early stages of social policy programming, and the creation of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and partnerships with third sector organisations should be encouraged.

### Highlights

- ICTs contribute to address emerging societal challenges, by promoting social innovation and social investment.
- ICTs enable a more targeted and personalized approach, focused on outcome orientation and demonstrable results.
- ICTs allow greater coordination between different levels of government - essential to improving system integrity, and reducing duplication/gaps in service provision.
- ICTs support the simplification of procedures and in turn increase the take-up of services, such as the consolidation of the one-stop-shop/no-stop-shop approach.
- ICTs facilitate addressing the structural imbalance between growing social needs and the decreasing or limited financial resources.
- Technology is a necessary but not sufficient condition for social innovation and social investment to fully deliver their promises.
- ICTs development and implementation must be combined with re-engineering of organizational structures and a cultural shift in embracing social innovation.
- ICTs and social innovation play a crucial role in fostering the success of modernisation initiatives, and pursuing the objectives of the EU Social Investment Package.

## 1. Policy context & research design

The Social Investment Package (SIP), launched by the European Commission in February 2013, seeks to address the huge economic and societal challenges faced by EU Member States. It emphasises the importance of investing in *people* and designing social protection and welfare policies in a way that improves people’s current and future skills and capabilities, and supports them throughout their lives so that they can participate fully in employment and society. At the same time, the SIP aims to guide EU countries in *modernising their social protection systems* and *improving their long-term sustainability*.

To support the implementation of the SIP, the Joint Research Centre, in partnership with the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, engaged in a multi-year research project on “ICT-enabled Social Innovation to support the Implementation of the Social Investment Package” (IESI).

This issue of the ‘JRC Insights’ provides an overview of the results of the analysis of fourteen selected case studies of ICT-enabled social innovations, which promote social investment across the European Union (Misuraca et al. 2017).



Figure 1 – Geographical Coverage of the 14 Case Studies

The case studies analysed has been selected from a short-list of 50 promising cases, in turn chosen among the initiatives identified by the IESI mapping exercise and additional ad-hoc searches.

The criteria used for the selection of cases were: geographical coverage, representativeness of the different welfare systems, coverage of all Personal Social Service of General Interest (PSSGI), using a revisited typology of relevant thematic areas), representativeness of different stakeholders involved, maturity/sustainability of the initiative.

In practice, a structured, two-step selection process was devised in order to shortlist the initiatives to be identified for further analysis.

**Step 1: Multi-criteria analysis:** Taking the data collected on the 50 initiatives as input, a ranking model based on a multi-criteria methodology was applied. Each initiative was analysed according to the criteria of 'relevance' and 'complexity' in order to capture its *potential systemic impact*. This allowed us to give a numerical score to different sub-parameters for each of the 50 initiatives, as shown in Figure 2.

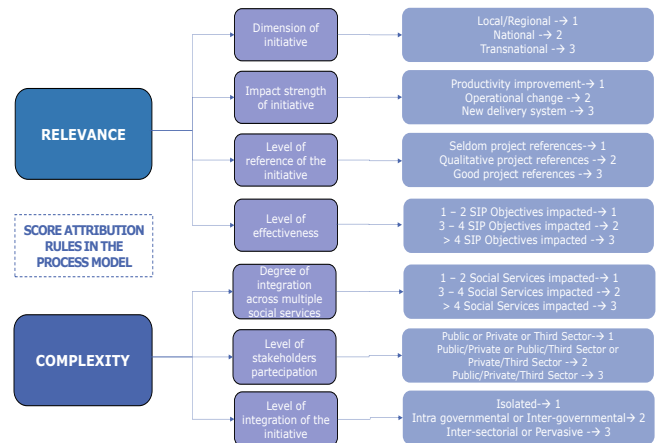


Figure 2 – Multi-criteria methodology for cases’ selection

**Step 2: Applying the IESI analytical framework:** As shown in Figure 3, the IESI analytical framework (Misuraca et al. 2015) was then used to further assess the initiatives. While the ICT-enabled innovation potential was used as a clustering factor – choosing initiatives belonging to both the ‘ICT as an enabler’ cluster and ‘ICT as a game changer’ cluster – the level of governance of service integration was used as a ranking factor (choosing initiatives with the highest level of governance of service integration).

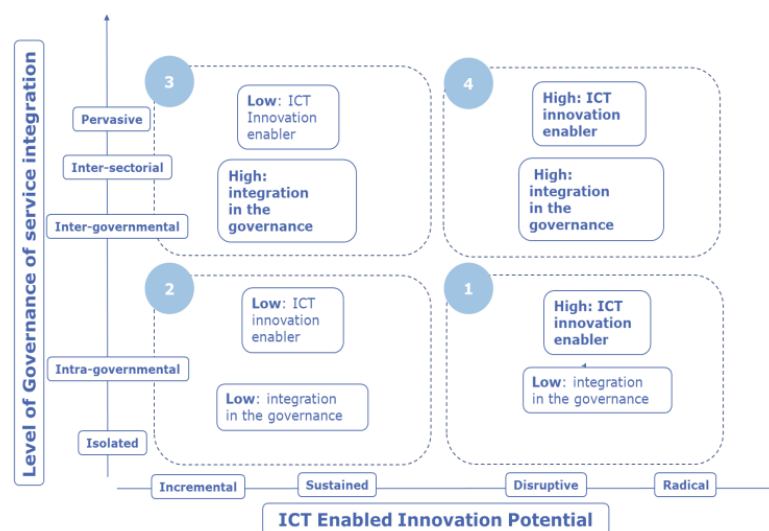


Figure 3 – Decomposing the IESI Analytical Framework

Based on the ranking of cases obtained and ensuring that all welfare systems and PSSGI were fairly represented, the sub-set of fourteen most promising cases was defined (see Table 1).

Table 1 – 14 Selected case studies

Initiative	Area of service
A Book for a Roof - <b>ABFR</b> <b>Croatia</b>	Education and training - Social inclusion / participation - Civic engagement - Social assistance - Employment
Assisting Carers using Telematics Interventions to meet Older people's Needs - <b>ACTION</b> <b>Sweden</b>	Social inclusion / participation - Independent living - Integrated health and social care - Social assistance - Education and training
Badalona Assistance Services - <b>BDA</b> <b>Spain</b>	Prevention, health promotion and rehabilitation - Integrated health and social care - Social assistance
Crossroads Bank for Social Security - <b>CBSS</b> <b>Belgium</b>	Social care - Social assistance - Employment - Civic engagement
Estonia's Point of Single Contact - <b>EESTI</b> <b>Estonia</b>	Civic engagement; Social care; Social assistance - Childcare - Education and training - Social housing - Employment - Social inclusion / participation - Independent living
South Karelia District of Social & Health Services <b>EKSOTE</b> <b>Finland</b>	Integrated health and social care - Social care
Digitalisation of services - <b>INPS</b> <b>Italy</b>	Social assistance - Social care - Social inclusion / participation - Civic engagement
Little bird - <b>LITB</b> <b>Germany</b>	Childcare
Pathway Accommodation & Support System - <b>PASS</b> <b>Ireland</b>	Social housing - Social assistance
Employee insurance implementation institution - <b>PES</b> <b>Netherlands</b>	Employment - Employability - Social assistance
Pôle Emploi 2015 – 100% Web - <b>POLEM</b> <b>France</b>	Employment - Employability
Strategy for Digital Welfare - <b>SDG</b> <b>Denmark</b>	Social assistance - Social care - Education and training - Integrated health and social care - Prevention, health promotion and rehabilitation
Telecare Development Programme - <b>TDP</b> <b>Scotland</b>	Independent living - Integrated health and social care - Social care
Express Train to Employment - <b>EXPTE</b> <b>Poland</b>	Employment - Employability

## 2. Results from the analysis of case studies

### 2.1. Findings in context: IESI Knowledge map

The analysis of case studies showed that the selected initiatives had positive impacts and made a contribution to the modernisation of the social protection systems in their respective context of implementation.

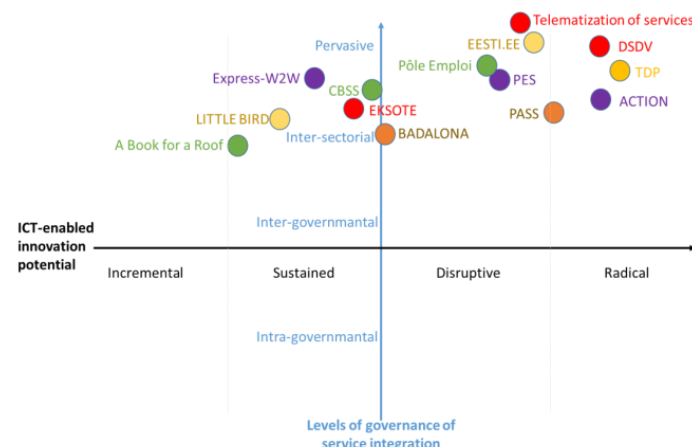


Figure 4 – The 14 initiatives in the 'IESI Knowledge Map'

Although evidence of the impact of specific ICT-enabled social innovation initiatives is not easy to distinguish from those deriving from the overall intervention without a dedicated counterfactual impact evaluation, the following key issues emerged from the results of the in-depth analysis of case studies and the cross-analysis of findings:

- ✓ **ICTs enable a 'client pathway' approach, centring services on outcomes and beneficiary's needs, along with improved strategic planning and system integrity**

ICTs enable a more targeted and personalized approach that allows clients with complex needs to receive services in a coordinated manner. In this respect, the development of a policy framework to support the reform of social service delivery mechanisms and their sustainability is key, and should be combined with defining innovative partnerships between stakeholders involved at different levels in the policy implementation.

- ✓ **The simplification and automation of procedures increases access to services, and fosters a direct relationship between service providers and end users**

The case studies clearly show that at a more operational level, the active involvement of beneficiaries and end users enhances services delivery systems, and contributes to the continuous improvement of the services offered. This implies a fundamental change in traditional services delivery design, exploiting the use of knowledge, information and experience of a different nature and from diverse sources.

## 2.2. Results from analysis of case studies

### ICT-enabled social innovation contributes achieving social investment objectives

The case studies provide useful insights into the factors that have been critical to an initiative's success, and into the role ICTs play in social innovation. They also show how these factors affect the pursuit and achievement of the objectives of the Social Investment Package.

#### **a) Modernizing social protection systems: spending more effectively and efficiently to ensure adequate and sustainable protection**

Many initiatives, by building a collaborative innovation network between public agencies or departments, reshaped the governance model to produce and deliver services, with a more effective and centralised approach (**EESTI**). In particular, the exploitation of ICTs resulted in the generation of new public value, which improved the sustainability of the social protection system, the traceability of information flows and the fight against frauds (**INPS**). The contribution ICTs give to the modernization of social protection system is often and mainly related to their ability to reduce to a minimum the administrative burden for citizens, companies and civil servants (**CBSS**).

#### **b) Implementing active inclusion strategies: investing in people's skills and capacities to improve people's opportunities to integrate in society and into the labour market**

The combination of employment information management and ICT training allows redesigning the production process of services, improving integration opportunities within society and the inclusiveness of disadvantaged people, especially into the labour market (**ABFR, EXPTE, ACTION**). The integration of services unleashed by the use of ICTs in fact empower people, especially homeless, older people and the more fragile, improving their skills and ability to remain independent at home or to find job opportunities. It also helps improving the quality of life of the beneficiaries, their relatives and their caregivers. Moreover, the equal access to social and health care services to all citizens, across the boundaries of municipalities, directly contributes to the increase of inclusiveness of social protection systems (**EKSOTE, TDP**).

#### **c) Investing in individuals throughout their life: ensuring that social protection systems respond to people's needs at critical moments during their lives**

The importance recognized to skills and active inclusion strategies through psycho-social support often translates itself into a boost of beneficiaries' motivation, responding to people's needs at critical moments in their lives (**ABFR, EXPTE, ACTION**).

The contribution offered by ICTs often comes in terms of changing the paradigm for the delivery service model which might shift towards a beneficiary-centric approach, reducing the risk of unfit and undue benefits and formulating innovative responses to people's changing needs (**INPS, BSA, CBSS**). A further contribution ICTs offer is the personalization of services, especially important in the field of employment support services, in which it promotes the improvement of the job demand and offer matching, along with the aggregation of job offers from partner sites, private platforms, associations, employers or business organizations (**POLEM, PES**).

### ICTs support the modernisation of EU social protection systems and delivery mechanisms

The case studies analysis allowed to spot some major social issues in which ICTs might offer – and indeed is already offering – an important support without structural or wider reform attempts. In fact, ICTs are enabling factors for the modernisation of social protection systems, mainly contributing to safeguard the sustainability of welfare systems.

As some of the cases analysed seem to demonstrate, ICTs contribute to solving the structural imbalance between emerging and growing social needs and the decreasing or limited financial resources available. In particular, the use of ICTs can help social services to:

- **Cope with demographic trends:** technological advances have made it possible to link information across programme areas and to identify individuals with complex needs and hence target them better.
- **Live up to beneficiaries' expectations:** new digital technologies are transforming the way individuals can interface with service providers across a range of industries, including the social services and more generally the welfare area.
- **Reduce unemployment:** a new wave of welfare-to-work schemes based on ICTs has been adopted by governments to improve the matching of labour supply and demand.
- **Handle budget constraints:** contributing to service integration and optimisation, the use of ICTs is becoming an increasingly attractive option for governments looking for higher cost effectiveness in service delivery.
- **Improve the evidence base:** ICT tools that include predictive analytics functionalities allow leveraging on the evidence collected and better allocate resources on the basis of the specific needs of different target group.

Table 2 provides a summary of key insights resulting from the in-depth analysis of cases.



Table 2 – Key insights from in-depth analysis of the 14 case studies

Initiatives	ICTs role and results
<b>INPS PES</b>	INPS & PES have transformed employment and benefit service delivery to those underserved in an innovative, fast and cost-efficient manner (almost all the services are delivered using digital means). Their revolutionary approach allows more individuals to actively participate, interact with the government online, giving them the chance to use multiple delivery channels with more convenient timeframes.
<b>SDW CBSS</b>	Thanks to ICTs, CBSS and SDW have built a unique information management model, which allows carrying out historical and prospective analyses and therefore improving policies and regulations.
<b>EXPTE POLEM</b>	EXPTE and POLEM have developed innovative competences and job potential profiling tools, based on the use of extensive information, which allow better assessing actual needs and thus improving the matching between job seekers and employers.
<b>LITB PASS</b>	LITB and PASS use ICTs to enhance the modernisation of social services from several perspectives: amongst others, better synchronization of the public and private offer of services, greater cost-effectiveness, reduction of overbooking of services and, at the same time, reduction of the negative externalities affecting care givers due to the lack of solutions to reconcile family life, social inclusion and wellbeing.
<b>ABFR</b>	In ABFR ICT courses are used to provide homeless with a wider set of competences and to boost their self-esteem, as well as to encourage take-up of available public social services. The library created a Resource Centre in the shelter, now staffed by homeless people. The use of ICT allows focusing on the potential of homeless people and training them to become trainers for other people in need.
<b>EESTI</b>	In EESTI, ICTs support citizens by enhancing their access to and use of information and services, enabling self-help and reducing dependency from the state, giving individuals access to both broader contacts and the local services to which they are entitled.
<b>TDP EKSOTE</b>	In TDP and EKSOTE, ICTs play a crucial role for monitoring activities (automatic data detention and information about health status) and for real time interactions with beneficiaries, providing advisory services at home to prevent adverse events and unplanned hospitalizations. The disruptive transformation of the care processes allows home care treatments for both patients with chronic diseases and ageing patients in general. Formal and informal care givers can benefit from using such innovations which promote self-management and empower users, in the process of shifting the balance in terms of control and increasing the capacity to live independently at home.
<b>ACTION</b>	ACTION effectively used ICT-enabled social innovation, producing significant changes in the carers' lives by helping to reduce their work-load and their responsibilities for the older person. It has increased the monitoring and counselling provided to the family carers by professional carers. It has also increased self-management and empowered the users through specifically designed online courses and by sharing information on caring best practices in real time. These services are readily accessible by family carers from home.
<b>BSA</b>	In BSA, ICTs allowed building the electronic record that gathers all the documents containing relevant information about the status and progress of a patient during the care process. Thanks to the interoperability between information systems, it eliminated the duplication of diagnostic tests. The result is a tool for professionals which provides updated relevant information to guide them in the decision making process (it is also a useful database accessible from any location and care level), therefore promoting continuity of care and coordination between primary and specialised care.

### 3. Policy Implications for social change

The results of the cross-analysis of case studies allowed defining a set of policy implications that can support policy makers in driving social change.

First, in order to take full advantage of the potential ICT-enabled social innovation initiatives have, some contextual and complementary policy initiatives are needed.

This points to the need of addressing the needed administrative changes and the required financial support, especially in the perspective of a more systematic and systemic exploitation of ICT-enabled social innovation.

*[Technology is a necessary but not sufficient condition for social innovation and social investment to fully deliver their promises](#)*

As shown by most cases, for ICT-enabled social innovation to fully realise its potential, ICTs are crucial but not sufficient. Other enabling factors must come into play, such as for instance:

- **Workforce development:** the empowerment of workers and job seekers requires investment in their skills and competences. They must also be given new and flexible ways of participating in the labour market. Employers and public institutions must invest in multidisciplinary and/or cross-organisation working groups. They must also envisage joint training arrangements that foster knowledge transfer at all levels, and fill any skills gaps that may arise. This requires also the creation of new roles and a review of existing jobs to adapt them to the changing environment and the evolving needs of the workforce (**ACTION, INPS, POLEM**).
  - **Regulatory frameworks:** regulations on data sharing procedures need to be eased, integrated case management by government agencies and private and third sector providers should be promoted, and the development of innovative initiatives facilitated. Adequate regulatory frameworks are essential for the integration and scaling up of such practices into actual processes (see **TDP, PES, EKSOTE**).
  - **Funding and contracting:** payment-by-results mechanisms seem to be efficient in promoting coordinated interventions to address common and shared social problems in an outcome-oriented approach. Other financials schemes, such as 'personal budgets', produce effective incentives because they enable users and case managers to freely purchase the desired mix of services from authorized providers. Thus, they foster the creation of a competitive social services marketplace in which services are closer to the needs of the users. Contracting and tendering reforms shall encourage integration and collaboration among different service providers (**EXPTÉ** and **ABFR**).
- **Simplification of service procedures through an open-government approach:** the increase in information and knowledge exchange and in openness and transparency provide new opportunities for public administrations to offer user-friendly services. At the same time, they can reduce costs and the administrative burden. An 'open government' approach can encourage this transformation by opening up public data and services and enhancing collaboration for the design, production and delivery of public services. Open processes, activities and decisions enhance transparency, accountability and trust in government (**EESTI, LITB, and PES**).
  - **Use of the European Structural and Investment Funds to further finance ICT-based developments in the social sector:** National and regional authorities are in charge of defining their Strategies and Operational Programmes for enhancing territorial development and social cohesion, which form the basis for delivering EU structural funds. Local institutions can play a proactive role in both the allocation of resources and in the fundraising activities needed to meet the co-financing requirements. These resources can be used to finance initiatives that, for instance, help transfer experiences from one country to another (**EXPTÉ**) strengthening knowledge exchange across the EU.



Read more

[Misuraca, G., Pasi, G., Abadie, F., Kucsera, C., Virginillo, M., \(2017\) 'Exploring the role of ICT-Enabled Social Innovation to support the modernisation of EU Social Protection Systems: findings and insights from analysis of case studies in fourteen Member States'](#)

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