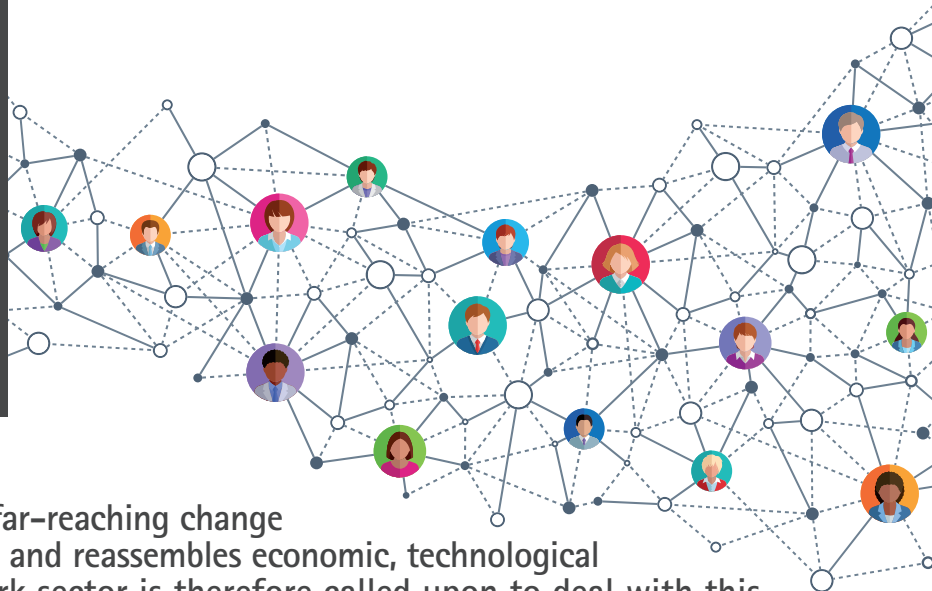


Position Paper:

# SOCIAL WORK AND DIGITALISATION



Digitalisation is associated with a far-reaching change of social systems which reconnects and reassembles economic, technological and social matters. The social work sector is therefore called upon to deal with this topic in all its complexity. Digitalisation underlines the open-mindedness regarding the development of social processes which does not allow for a rigid and definitive position but requires open and flexible structures. Since digitalisation permeates the lives of the clients and social workers – and since already existing social questions regarding power relations, social justice and participation are raised anew – the topic is relevant in all areas of social work. It is therefore not possible to abstain from adopting a position. Passivity and doing nothing do not equate to a neutral position. For this reason, this position paper is considered to be a fundamentally open discussion paper under constant development.

## 7 HYPOTHESES

### **Social work uses digitalisation to work on social issues**

1 Technological developments have not changed the core of social issues but their appearance and fault lines. However, the responsibility of social work in dealing with these social issues (such as social justice, equal opportunities, human rights) remains. The digital transformation has to be considered and used against this background. In particular, social work employs digital technologies to use the support potential of and for its clients and to make people more independent, this includes the independence from social work. When digital technologies open up new participation opportunities and design possibilities, these have to be taken.

### **Social work deals with advantages as well as with disadvantages of digitalisation**

2 The digital transformation offers opportunities and bears risks. However, political and economic interests are often hidden behind technological developments. As a consequence, social work has to critically scrutinise those developments in regards to the winners and losers as well as to the prevailing interests and power structures. Nevertheless, social work must not reduce the digital transformation to a logic of rule but should also understand and support it as a cultural practice of human media self-empowerment. It is important to make use of these advantages for the objectives of social work, to support people in their self-fulfilment and to prevent them from being restricted, endangered or excluded by digital technologies.

### **Social work handles information and data in a sensitive and conscious manner**

3 Digitalisation also refers to the accumulation and linking of personal information and data. Social work often deals with people in difficult life situations and social workers have access to sensitive information.

This is a fact that the area of social work is aware of and which it addresses in a conscious and vigilant manner, especially in the area of digital communication with its various stakeholders. What is new here is that the digital data bodies in the form of smartphones, wearables, etc. belong to the individuals as „extended bodies“. This human–media coupling, as well as the development of predictive methods and of artificial intelligence, have also become a subject of social work.

### **Due to its complex field of work, social work is predestined and obligated to deal with questions of digitalisation**

Since new technologies are closely intertwined with everyday life, digitalisation and social change cannot be separated. Due to the fact that social change is a subject dealt with in social work, it is based on complex questions and problems which it comprehensively deals with as a scientific discipline and practice in an inter- and transdisciplinary way. As a result, the topic of digitalisation is, to a large extent, compatible with the technical and theoretical discourse of social work as well as methodological discourses in various fields of action. One objective is to increasingly reflect on the digital transformation in the theoretical, empirical, professional and methodological discourses of social work in a systematic manner.

### **Social work uses and creates scientific foundations for technological change**

In order to understand the social consequences of technological change, to recognise social issues and problems and to justify one's own actions, social work – in constant exchange with the practical field – has to make scientific contributions to the study of technological change and its social implications and use the principles of related disciplines, while collaborating with them to further develop these fundamentals.

### **Social work needs a critical discourse regarding existing theories in order to examine how digital transformation can be described, explained, and evaluated on the basis of those theories**

The digital transformation is profoundly changing human interaction. New types of communication, socialisation and of the public are emerging, which has an impact on central social work theories. Therefore, it is necessary to review and, if necessary, update the theories at the core of social work.

### **Social work comprehensively deals with digitalisation in its (further) education and training courses, and develops quality standards as well as technically adequate methods in collaboration with the practical field**

Questions of digital transformation have to be an integral part of the (further) education and training programmes for social workers. In addition to imparting media-theoretical, media-technical fundamentals and know-how of the advantages and disadvantages of digitalisation, the training of social workers should create exchange opportunities between the teaching, research and practical fields to reflect upon the experiences, opportunities and challenges and to further develop methods.

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