AN INNOVATIVE MODEL FOR DEVELOPING DIGITAL COMPETENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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Abstract. The exceptional dynamics that characterize the development of all spheres of the economy and social life and the profound changes in human and social relations in recent years resulting from the introduction of information and communication technologies put the spotlight on a new focus related to the acquisition and development of digital competencies and skills. In the digital transformation era, social work faces new challenges and opportunities conditioned by the rapid development of technologies, which naturally determines the issues related to digital competencies in the focus of research interests and the search for practically innovative solutions for their formation and development among specialists in this field. The article aims to present the concept and content of an innovative model for acquiring and developing digital competencies as a practically oriented form for improving the educational and professional training of specialists in social work.

Keywords: digital competencies; social work; digital technologies; artificial intelligence; innovative models

Introduction

Digital transformation, the creation and use of new digital technologies and tools, and the development of artificial intelligence are causing revolutionary changes in people's lives and work and naturally determine a number of new requirements for the education and work of an increasing number of professional communities, including those working in the field of social work. The intensive penetration of information technologies into the social sphere and the digitalization of work processes, and the management of social institutions determine the importance of digital competencies as a decisive factor for adapting social work to the growing modern requirements. Some of these requirements are related to the workforce's quality of human resources, the possibility of successful adaptation to dynamic

changes, and competitiveness (Krushkov, Zayakova-Krushkova 2024). Digital competencies are a key element for successfully dealing with these changes, as they facilitate social workers in adapting to new tools and approaches to providing services. This is particularly important for ensuring adequate support for vulnerable groups, often relying on high-quality social services. The digitalization of social activities not only ensures improved efficiency and accessibility of services but also provides new tools for personalizing assistance and optimizing the interaction between professionals and users.

In parallel, social workers have a severe lag in using information and communication technologies and their application in their practical activities. This requires focusing on the need for specific measures to overcome the shortage or lack of digital competencies of the workforce in the social services sector, in line with the Strategy of Bulgaria in the field of digital skills, aimed at the education and training system at all levels in order to improve the digital skills of the workforce.

The main goal of developing an innovative model for developing digital competencies is to overcome the existing deficits in the digital skills of social workers while creating sustainable mechanisms for continuous training and professional development. This model aims to improve the qualification of specialists by developing a web-based platform integrating artificial intelligence and specialized training resources for solving practical cases and exchanging good practices. In addition, the model seeks to facilitate remote work and provide tools for remote care and assistance for users of social services.

The innovative approach also implies the possibility of self-assessment and personal development by providing tools for creating individual professional portfolios, promoting good practices and innovations in the field through publicity of the results, and expanding the scope of digitalization. The creation of an innovative model for acquiring digital competencies aims to improve the efficiency, accessibility, and quality of social services while simultaneously creating opportunities for social workers' professional growth by the digital decade's requirements.

This article focuses on the conceptual approach to developing innovative solutions for developing digital competencies of social workers, which will meet society's dynamic needs and stimulate the social sphere's sustainable development. It is reflected in the project "Formation and Development of Digital Competencies and Use of Artificial Intelligence to Improve the Quality of Social Work (SocialITAI)", implemented by a scientific team from Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski", aimed at solving the defined challenges to social work in the aspect of acquiring competencies adequate to the contemporary realities of the information society.

Digital competencies and their importance for social work

Digital competencies are a fundamental element of the essential competencies in the structure of the overall professional competence of the social worker. The

issues related to examining the concept of "competence" in a general theoretical aspect, its content characteristics and various aspects of manifestation are the subject of research by several authors. This paper adopts the view generally accepted in several European and national documents that competence is "a proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal or social characteristics in work or study situations, for professional and personal development" (National Strategy for Lifelong Learning).

According to the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is "the result of acquiring information in the learning process, skills are the abilities to apply knowledge in performing tasks and solving problems," and competence is defined as "the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal or social assets in work or learning situations, in professional and personal development" (European Qualifications Framework, p.11). In the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, competence is interpreted as "the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological assets in work or learning situations and in professional and personal development" (European Qualifications Framework for ... 2009).

The European Reference Framework includes eight key competencies, among which is digital competence, seen as the confident and critical use of information society technologies for work, leisure, and communication. Digital competence is closely related to information and all actions with it (perception, search, collection, processing, transmission, analysis, synthesis, etc.), but only that which we receive in a digital environment and through modern computer programs and technologies: word processing, spreadsheets, databases, e-mail, and the Internet. In this sense, it is an integrated set of personal characteristics (knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience, social capital) of children that determine their ability to perform specific tasks and use digital technologies to implement various activities or training. In the standard European Framework of Digital Competences, the mentioned 21 competencies are structured into five components: information and information literacy; communication and collaboration; creation of digital content; problem-solving – varying degrees of awareness regarding the impact of technologies on all spheres of human life and the environment; security – awareness of the need to upgrade digital competence by the development of modern technologies constantly.

Digital competence is formed on the basis of acquiring basic skills in information and communication technologies: the use of computers for retrieving, evaluating, storing, and exchanging information, as well as for communicating and participating in Internet networks for collaboration, communication, etc. Some authors define digital literacy as the ability to understand, evaluate, and use information in multiple formats that a computer can provide (Gilster 1997) based on the understanding that thanks to it, a person acquires basic thinking skills and key competencies, without which he would not be able to navigate and solve tasks

in an interactive environment. The view of other authors is different (Calvani et al, 2008), who define digital competencies as a combination of three mutually complementary dimensions – a technological dimension (which emphasizes both the capacity to solve problems and the ability to make flexible decisions about the changing technological environment); cognitive dimension (with emphasis on "reading", selection, interpretation, evaluation and presentation of information) and moral dimension (connection and communication with others, based on responsible use of technologies).

Digital competence, its definition, and research engage several authors (Aesaert 2014, Ferrari 2012, Steyaert 2002, Van Dijk 2005). For some authors, digital competencies are competence-oriented learning (Aesaert 2014); others define digital skills as types of skills (Steyaert 2002) or a combination of information skills, communication skills, and skills for creating (Ferrari 2012). There is a definition of digital competence that describes the use of ICT to achieve goals related to work, employability, training, leisure, inclusion, and/or participation in society as key (Ferrari, Punie & Brecko, 2013). An in-depth study of the development of the concept of digital competence was also conducted by M. Mladenova (Mladenova 2019), and the issue was examined in terms of the impact of information and communication technologies on workplaces.

The entry of artificial intelligence into the economy and the social sphere requires that the definition of digital competencies also include the knowledge and skills for using artificial intelligence to fulfill professional commitments. In this regard, the principles contained in M. Todorova's study on the development and various aspects of the practical application of artificial intelligence (Todorova 2019) can be adopted.

The implementation of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in all spheres of public life, including in social systems, emphasizes the urgent need for an integrated approach and a culture of innovation in the sector (Vazov, Kanazireva, Grinko, Krupskyi 2024). The requirement to enrich the competence profile of specialists in the field of social work in accordance with the new realities of the information society and to adequately change the role of the professional – digitally prepared, capable of processing and analyzing a large volume of information, using technological and software solutions and at the same time satisfying constantly changing needs and increasing demands of users is becoming increasingly relevant. In this context, the formation and development of digital competencies is gaining decisive importance both for the education of future specialists and for the qualification and employment of those employed in the field of social work, with a direct impact on improving the quality of support and services provided to all categories of vulnerable persons. In separate regulations of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, the different levels of digital and digital competencies that concern the development of human resources are indicated as priority actions,

and on the other hand, it also determines the specifics of the measures and actions of individual institutions, in relation to the progress in their development in areas and activities. When tracking and analyzing documents related to definitions of digital and digital skills, two main categories of digital skills are distinguished – basic and deep. The Digital Europe Programme (Regulation (EU) 2021/694) provides a definition showing the set of "deep" digital skills, including knowledge and experience necessary to understand, design, develop, manage, test, deploy, use and maintain technologies, products and services. This specificity represents a high level of knowledge of digital specifics, communicators and artificial intelligence, together with the competencies for their implementation and maintenance. In terms of the development of technological sectors, this type of skill is recognizable and available, but in the public and social services sector, information is not systematized and available to be studied.

Another definition of basic digital skills is given in the Digital Decade Policy Agenda to 2030, set out by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe in Regulation (EU) 2022/2481. The Agenda defines basic digital skills as "the ability to carry out at least one activity using digital means in the following areas: information, communication and collaboration, content creation, security and personal data, and problem-solving" (Regulation (EU) 2022/2481). The general objectives of the Digital Decade 2030 Policy Agenda are related to "developing basic and advanced digital skills and competences, including through specialised and vocational training and lifelong learning, and promoting the development of high-performance digital knowledge and skills within horizontal education and training systems" (Regulation (EU) 2022/2481). The Digital Decade Agenda to 2030 and its objectives relate to the opportunities for individuals to access online participation in public and democratic life. Attention is paid to the significance and importance of accessibility in a secure online environment to public services, health, and social care services for all, particularly for disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities, as well as in rural and remote areas. The implementation of the program's strategic objectives is inevitably linked to the development of digital and digital skills of the population, on the one hand in the provision and development of the relevant services, and on the other hand in their consumption.

The challenges are significant, given information and data from the European Commission. Bulgaria lags significantly behind in developing digital skills, with only 29% of the population possessing basic digital competencies and only 11% having skills that exceed the basic level. This is far below the average for the European Union, where the share of people with basic skills reaches 57%. Bulgaria is also among the countries with the lowest percentage of people with basic digital literacy (Stefanova 2021, p. 39). These skills deficits are particularly visible in the social services sector, where the lack of qualifications and digital preparation hinders the implementation of modern technological solutions and the provision

of high-quality services. According to data provided in the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) and a ranking of Member States according to their level of digitalization, Bulgaria reports low results in terms of digital public services, ranking 25th in the EU. The country's score is 58 out of 100 for the volume of data that is pre-filled in online forms for public services, part of which are social services provided through social organizations and institutions. Regarding digital public services, our country also ranks below the EU average in terms of accessibility for citizens, with a score of 59 points, compared to businesses, which have a score of 76 points (DESI 2022, p. 18).

The development of digital competencies is not only a tool for improving professionalism but also a necessity for adapting to the changing demands of society. It creates the prerequisites for sustainable social inclusion, improves the quality of life of vulnerable groups, and stimulates equal access to services. In this context, investing in the qualification of social workers and introducing innovative training solutions are a key component of the digital transformation of the social sector. The digital challenge to education (Gyurova 2020) fully applies to training in the field of social work.

Social work is characterized by close interaction with vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and other communities in need, which requires an individual approach, flexibility, and quick access to resources and services. In this context, social workers' digital competencies are crucial. They not only facilitate the provision of services but also increase their efficiency, personalization, and accessibility, especially in the context of rapidly developing digitalization. The significance of digital competencies is increasing in the context of the increasing digitalization of social work. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for remote services and flexible forms of care while revealing serious challenges related to the limited technological skills of social workers. In the same direction are the problems related to the distance learning of future specialists, systematized in the study of A. Genchev, (Genchev 2024). Many professionals in the sector lack basic tools for work, such as laptops and tablets, and those who use technology are often not sufficiently prepared to integrate them effectively into the work process. In this regard, the project envisages a serious study of the level of digital competence of managers and specialists from various social institutions and an assessment of their technical security.

Digital technologies and artificial intelligence as an innovative approach in social work

The growing importance of innovations for solving economic and social problems determines the relevance of research searches for specific forms through which their potential can be used for the development of social work and the various aspects of their application in the activities of social workers. In this aspect, possible

solutions combining the achievements of digital technologies and the capabilities of artificial intelligence, which find practical implementation in the education and practice of social work, can be defined as social innovations. The social and economic challenges of the 21st century require a new approach to the analysis and application of innovations in general and social innovations in particular. The different perspectives on social innovation, represented in G. Mulgan's views as "innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need" (Mulgan 2006, p. 146), which are "activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are primarily developed and distributed through organizations whose primary goals are social (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, Sanders 2007) or "combine ideas, resources, tools, and examples from practice to find appropriate solutions to social problems" (Murray, Caulier-Grice, Mulgan 2010), as well as "a new solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable or more correct, better than existing solutions and that creates value primarily for society as a whole, rather than for individuals" (Phills, Deiglmeier, Miller 2008) can also be related to innovative approaches to solving problems in social work through digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

Social innovation is seen as one way to address systemic change, develop new solutions, and foster cross-sectoral collaboration, thus complementing other types of innovation. To harness, expand, and further develop their potential, the ecosystem must draw on its collective and collaborative expertise, experience, and know-how (FUSE 2020, p. 20). In this regard, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OESD 2011, p.1) sees social innovation as seeking new answers to social problems by "implementing new integration processes, new competencies, new job positions and new forms of participation in the labor market, due to the diverse elements that contribute to improving positions there". Innovation in complex social systems also allows us to take into account the interaction between different subsystems – cooperation in social networks, public-private partnerships, and social network management (Jalonen, Juntunen 2011) precisely in the context of the need to create new opportunities for social relationships and cooperation. According to another author, social innovations are defined as new ideas (products, services, and models) that simultaneously solve societal problems, satisfy social needs, and create new social connections between affected groups (Ludwinek 2020).

The European Commission's vision of social innovation as "new ideas that respond to social needs, create social relationships and form new collaborations, which can be products, services or models that address unmet needs more effectively" most closely reflects the concept of using digital technologies and artificial intelligence as an innovative approach in the field of social work.

Digital technologies can be seen as a form of implementing innovative solutions and, at the same time, have the characteristics of innovation in themselves. As not-

ed by A. Shotarov, "Digitalization often goes hand in hand with the implementation of innovative solutions" (Shotarov 2021, p.164).

In a rapidly evolving technological environment, social workers must be well prepared to use new technologies to meet the growing demands of social service users, especially in the context of a pandemic, when remote communication and care technologies have gained new importance.

The widespread penetration and increasing use of artificial intelligence requires teachers, students, social workers, and other helping professionals to have basic knowledge of collecting, using, analyzing data and other information in order to be able to interact positively, critically, and ethically with this technology and to use its full potential to provide quality social services. As S. Nunev points out, "innovations in social work are an essential factor for the development of social services" (Nunev 2013, p.50), and the training of specialists, as confirmed by another author, is related to the need for external support in training for the development of competencies and skills (Uzhikanova-Kovacheva 2024), which is the basis of implementation and innovative solutions to meet this need, including for teachers and experts.

Emerging competencies for the use of technologies, databases, and artificial intelligence among professionals should form skills and abilities for raising awareness and interacting with the community – both among the professionals themselves and among users, and the creation of the training platform can be seen as a response to these needs. A suitable example of training and competence development through the sharing of experience is the Social Innovation Match (SIM) Platform, created as a tool of the European Social Innovation Hub (ESFA 2021) to promote the development, multiplication, and upgrading of social innovation models in Europe, as well as to search for productive partnerships. The Platform presents inspiring examples and organizations with which individual institutions, organizations, and countries can work together in the future. The thematic focus is on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) investment areas, i.e., employment, education and training initiatives, and social inclusion. The Platform provides an opportunity to create partnerships that cover vital sectors such as employment, education, training, and social inclusion, presented in the following figure, through detailed information in six separate categories, united in practical networks and communities. Bulgaria is one of the 27 EU countries participating in the Platform for knowledge sharing, training, capacity building, and networking between ESF+ stakeholders through the Communities of Practice (CoP). The initiative brings together social innovation support structures and stakeholders, presenting summarized information through the Social Innovation Ecosystem Map. Bulgaria is represented by 26 organizations, implementing 7 projects aimed at access to quality employment, access to education and integration of marginalized communities. Various aspects of the relationship between digital technologies and artificial intelligence – social work are the subject of discussion

by authors such as L. Vekova (2024), M. Stoykova (Stoykova 2024), T. Vazova, V. Radev (2023) and others. Examples and models for development and social innovation in the context of social work and social services should set priority goals and tasks for institutions in support of the training of specialists.

An innovative model for using digital technologies and artificial intelligence in the training of social work professionals

The project "Formation and Development of Digital Competencies and Use of Artificial Intelligence to Improve the Quality of Social Work (SocialITAI)", implemented within the framework of the university project "Digital Sustainable Ecosystems", implemented by PU "P. Hilendarski", represents a modern innovative approach to the training and development of digital competencies of social workers. The basis of the project is the integration of information and communication technologies and artificial intelligence, which combine technological solutions and social practices to improve the quality of social work. At the heart of the project is the idea that digitalization and technologies not only transform social work itself but also provide new opportunities for improving the quality of the social services provided, which is a major priority of the social sector in Bulgaria and globally. The main goal is to respond to the contemporary challenges arising from the growing need for digitalization of the social sector by developing a web-based platform that will provide social workers with new opportunities for professional development by providing them with access to innovative training methods through which they will be able to increase their digital skills. The project also has an important role in the context of modern social challenges, such as the transition to a digital society, where more and more services are provided online. The current practice, where social workers meet physically with service users, is no longer the only option. The introduction of digital tools and platforms will allow social workers to provide better access to social services for people who have difficulties physically visiting social institutions, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, or residents of remote areas.

The "SocialITAI" project will also focus on developing digital competencies for remote care and assisting social service users in a home environment. This will be of great importance for ensuring timely and effective assistance to users, especially in situations where the physical presence of a social worker is impossible.

The project's significance also extends to the need for a change in social worker training. The existing training system fails to fully meet the new requirements for digital skills, and the project will provide new approaches to training students in the specialty of Social Work and other related disciplines. The Platform will also be used in the education of future social workers, providing them with tools for self-assessment of their digital competencies and creating a professional portfolio that will support their career development.

The web-based platform for acquiring and developing digital competencies will integrate state-of-the-art technologies, including artificial intelligence, to help social workers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to apply ICT in their professional practice effectively. By integrating artificial intelligence into the Platform, the project will provide social workers with tools that will help them process and analyze information and offer more accurate and effective solutions to support users. In addition, the project intends to create a basis for distance learning and work, which is becoming especially relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing importance of digital technologies in social work. Artificial intelligence will be used to analyze various cases and create personalized social work plans, which will increase the effectiveness and accuracy of the services provided.

This Platform provides adaptive, personalized, and interactive training, providing a wide range of functionalities that include solving practical cases, assessing digital competencies, and building professional portfolios. The development of a training platform for social workers based on representative information about their digital competence development needs will enable, on the one hand, to increase the quality of their educational preparation and professional qualifications and, on the other hand, will allow the social protection system to improve its tools for supporting and caring for people. Practical tasks based on real cases and the integration of artificial intelligence allow social workers to improve their decision-making skills and implement innovations in their daily work. This training supports the optimization of work processes and expands their abilities to provide quality social services in different and often challenging contexts. The Platform additionally provides self-assessment tools that allow participants to identify their strengths and areas for development while building professional portfolios that document the knowledge and skills achieved.

The inclusion of modules on remote care and assistance is essential for preparing social workers to provide services in remote areas or in contexts requiring social distancing. These modules cover the technical aspects of using digital tools and methodological approaches to providing services tailored to users' needs. The integration of this knowledge into practice contributes to a higher level of professionalism and adaptability in the field of social work.

Innovative projects such as "SocialITAI" aim to overcome these barriers by providing training platforms that combine the capabilities of artificial intelligence with practically oriented tasks. These tools not only develop digital skills but also provide new approaches to individualizing care, optimizing time and resources, and improving the quality of services. The integration of digitalization in social work allows for more effective management of complex cases, rapid access to information, and tools for real-time work, which is particularly useful in critical situations.

The "SocialITAI" project emphasizes the need for a transdisciplinary approach combining social and technological sciences knowledge. This approach provides com-

prehensive training, including both technological aspects and the ethical and social dimensions of working with vulnerable groups. In addition, the project creates a basis for sustainable development of the social sector through digitalization while popularizing the results through scientific publications and conferences. This supports the construction of a long-term system for professional development and social inclusion, making "SocialITAI" a strategic initiative for transforming social work in the digital age.

Web-based platform with integrated artificial intelligence
1. Intelligent Assistants and AI Integration
The platform incorporates various AI-driven tools to enhance the learning experience:

1.1. Chatbots
Chatbots provide real-time assistance to users, answering questions, offering guidance, and managing routine tasks. These bots can handle a wide range of queries, making them an essential tool for self-directed learning.

1.2. Personal Assistants
Personal assistants manage tasks, calendars, and workflows, ensuring that users remain organized and efficient. They also provide personalized recommendations based on user behavior and learning progress.

1.3. Automated Evaluation
The platform includes automated grading systems that assess users' knowledge and provide instant feedback. This feature ensures timely evaluations and reduces the workload of trainers.

2. Technical Aspects
The technical design of the platform includes the following core components and technologies, with an emphasis on intelligent distributed eLearning architectures and context-aware systems:

2.1. System Architecture
The platform follows a modular, service-oriented architecture (SOA), ensuring scalability and flexibility. The core structure draws inspiration from the Distributed eLearning Center (DeLC) architecture, which models a network of autonomous nodes providing personalized educational services (Georgiev 2016, Stoyanov et al. 2014).

2.2. Data Management
Data management is a crucial aspect of the platform's operation. The system employs an ontology-driven knowledge base to support context-aware learning, facilitating personalized content delivery.

Databases: Relational databases are used to store user profiles, course materials, and assessment results.

Knowledge Base: The knowledge base integrates with learning modules to provide real-time suggestions and contextual learning paths.

2.3. AI and Machine Learning

The platform incorporates several AI technologies to enhance user experience and streamline processes:

– Natural Language Processing (NLP): Utilized by chatbots to interpret and respond to user queries effectively.

– Recommendation Engine: Leverages AI algorithms to analyze user behavior and suggest personalized learning paths.

– Scenario Management Agents: These agents dynamically adapt the service environment based on user interactions, ensuring a seamless learning experience.

2.4. Security and Privacy

Security is a top priority in the platform's design. The following measures are implemented to protect user data:

– User Authentication: Secure login mechanisms ensure that only authorized users can access the platform.

– Data Encryption: Sensitive data is encrypted during transmission and while at rest.

– Compliance: The platform adheres to data protection regulations, such as GDPR, ensuring user privacy.

2.5. User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX)

The platform offers a responsive and intuitive user interface to enhance accessibility and engagement. Key features include:

– Personalized Dashboards: Provide users with tailored learning paths, schedules, and task lists.

– Multi-Device Compatibility: Ensures seamless access across desktops, tablets, and mobile devices (Valkanov, Stoyanov & Zedan 2012).

2.6. Non-Functional Requirements

The platform must meet several non-functional requirements to ensure its effective operation:

– Scalability: The platform should handle an increasing number of users without performance degradation.

– Availability: Ensure a high level of system uptime, aiming for 99.9% availability to minimize disruptions.

– Performance: The system must provide fast response times, with a target of sub-second latency for user interactions.

– Security: Implement robust security measures, including regular vulnerability assessments and secure coding practices.

– Maintainability: The platform should be easy to update and maintain, with clear documentation and modular code.

– Interoperability: Ensure compatibility with existing systems and standards, such as SCORM and xAPI.

– Accessibility: The platform must comply with accessibility standards to ensure usability by individuals with disabilities.

– Usability: Provide an intuitive interface that requires minimal training for users to navigate effectively.

3. Benefits for Social Work Professionals

The web-based platform provides numerous benefits for social work professionals, including:

– Personalized Learning: The platform adapts to individual learning needs and preferences.

– Continuous Improvement: The feedback loop ensures that users receive recommendations for further learning.

– Efficiency: Task automation reduces administrative burdens, allowing social workers to focus on core responsibilities.

– Real-Time Support: Intelligent assistants offer immediate assistance, improving user experience.

The individual activities of the project will provide an opportunity to monitor the impact on specialists during their participation in training and the formation of digital competencies in the actual use of the capabilities of the digital web-based platform, presented by the authors in the following Fig. 1:
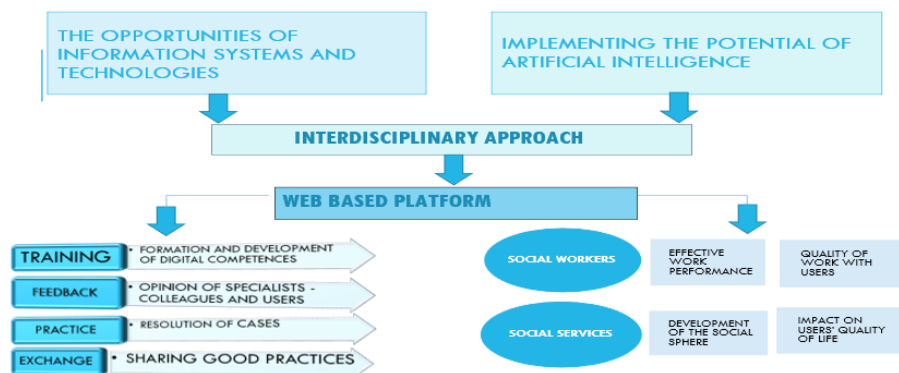

Figure 1. Web-based platform (presented by the authors)

Remote care and assistance modules as a tool for digital modernization of the social services sector

Remote work and remote care have become an integral part of modern social work, and their importance has increased significantly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In conditions of social distance and limited access to physical services, remote care has emerged as a key mechanism for providing timely support and assistance to vulnerable groups. In response to these challenges**, the specialized modules developed within the platform provide social workers with the**

necessary knowledge and skills for the effective use of modern technologies in remote care.

These modules offer detailed training resources, including working with video communication tools that allow for real-time consultations and meetings. Case management platforms are another key element that enables effective tracking and coordination of services provided to different users. The training materials also include real-time monitoring technologies that assist social workers in assessing the current state of users and allow for rapid response to changes in their needs.

The modules also focus on methods for establishing trust and maintaining quality interaction with users in a remote environment. They train social workers on how to create a virtual environment that is comfortable and supportive for users, while respecting all ethical standards of the profession. This is especially important for providing emotional support and building effective communication in conditions of physical distance.

An additional advantage of these modules is their adaptability to different situations and needs. They provide guidelines for working with vulnerable groups in remote areas, where access to social services is often limited, as well as in crisis situations requiring immediate intervention. In this context, the modules for remote care and assistance not only expand the scope of the services provided, but also increase their efficiency, accessibility and quality.

The combination of technological tools and pedagogical approaches in these modules ensures that social workers will be prepared to meet the needs of their users even in the most complex and challenging circumstances. This is an essential step towards the modernization of social work and the establishment of new standards for providing care in a dynamic and digitally oriented world.

Interdisciplinary approach

The interdisciplinary approach is at the heart of the training process, which seeks to bring together diverse disciplines and expertise to create a comprehensive and integrated framework for the development of digital competencies for social workers. This approach involves specialists from social sciences, information technology, psychology and pedagogy, who together develop adaptive strategies and training resources. Through collaboration between these fields, not only effective acquisition of technical skills is achieved, but also a deep understanding of the social, psychological and ethical dimensions of digitalization in the social sphere.

One of the main advantages of interdisciplinarity is the ability to create innovative solutions that go beyond the traditional boundaries of individual disciplines. **The integration of artificial intelligence in social work requires not only technical expertise but also knowledge of the ethical challenges associated with the use of data, as well as the way in which these technologies affect the relationships between professionals and users of social services**.

The application of an interdisciplinary approach to the training of social workers not only improves their technical preparation but also develops their ability to respond flexibly and effectively to complex challenges. Through this approach, they can cope with rapid changes in the social sphere by implementing innovations while respecting the rights, needs, and dignity of their users. This training model stimulates continuous learning and professional development by creating platforms for the exchange of experience and good practices between different disciplines. This not only strengthens the professional community but also promotes innovation and sustainability in social work. Through the transdisciplinary approach, social workers receive a wide range of knowledge and skills that not only meet modern requirements but also prepare them for the future, where the interaction between technology and the human factor will be even more important for the quality provision of social services.

Conclusion

The introduction of innovative models integrating the capabilities of digital technologies and artificial intelligence into the practice of social work represents a strategic solution that addresses the modern requirements of the information society. The development of the project "Formation and Development of Digital Competencies and Use of Artificial Intelligence to Improve the Quality of Social Work (SocialITAI)" demonstrates the potential for transforming the social sector through digitalization. This approach provides not only a platform for the training and development of professionals in the social field but also opportunities for service personalization, increased efficiency, and accessibility.

The creation of sustainable mechanisms for continuous professional development and the implementation of innovative tools is a key component in addressing the challenges of the digital era. The introduction of digital competencies and innovative methods in the education and practice of social workers is critical to enhancing the quality of provided services, especially in the context of dynamic socio-economic changes. Based on the integration of artificial intelligence, the Platform offers a unique opportunity to transform social work, steering it toward greater efficiency, innovation, and sustainability.

This article highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary approach that combines technical, social, ethical, and pedagogical aspects to provide a comprehensive solution for digitalization in the social sector. The developed approaches and tools within the project framework can serve as an example for transformation in other fields, establishing social work as a dynamic and adaptive profession prepared for the future.

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