Innovation in technology certainly impacts the development of social services in the 21st century, and beyond. New trends and person-centred technologies can potentially support persons with disabilities and their families to be included in the community. At COFACE, we are seeking good examples of innovative solutions and services. At the same time, we have started a debate on how digitalisation can promote human rights and autonomy of persons with disabilities, whilst also creating new forms of dependency and segregation. Furthermore, we will discuss how the lack of access to products and essential high quality services impact some families’ lives by hindering people’s choices and participation in society and what the EU can do to improve the situation.

**EU context**

Beyond the 27 of its 28 Member States, the EU itself also ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010, therefore the Convention is part of the EU primary law and shall be implemented across EU laws and policies. The European Commission recently published a proposal for a European Accessibility Act (EAA), which is currently going through Council and Parliament. The EAA aims to improve the functioning of the internal market for accessible products and services by removing barriers created by divergent legislation. The Act by covering a number of products and services, including among others computers and operating systems, audiovisual media services, or telephony services has a great potential to impact the life of persons with disabilities and older people.

**Key points of discussion**

Joan Oliver from the Spanish Institute of Robotics for Dependency (IRD or Instituto de Robótica para la Dependencia) highlighted ways in which robotics and other assistive technologies can support persons with disabilities and their families (e.g. helping elderly people to operate Skype, signal if a person with disability doesn’t go to the bathroom in his/her homes for days etc.).
Robotics could increasingly become an alternative for the care system to operate with less human resources, but providing individuals with an opportunity to live an autonomous life in their own flat. A common fear in relation to the growing number of robots is that they will take away jobs from people. But in reality in a number of EU countries, there is already a lack of personnel who could provide person-centred support and assistance for people living in their home, especially considering the growing ageing population. At the same time, there is a risk of institutionalising people with support needs, unless there is investment in the development of high-quality, accessible community-based services. While the use of robots raises concerns over data protection and ethical issues, they can play a crucial role in improving quality of life of persons with support needs and better coordinating the work of care organisations.

Sara Simblett from the King's College London presented the innovative ‘RADAR-CNS’ (Remote Assessment of Disease and Relapse for Central Nervous System Disorders) project that provides digital solutions in healthcare.

The RADAR-CNS project seeks to use information collected through sensors built into smartphones and wearable technologies to track changes in mood, physical activity, sleep, stress, speech and cognition. Based on this information, personal profiles would be created to predict relapses before they happen. The collected information on health status change is shared with the user and their clinicians, so interventions can be introduced early. The project represents a significant change in the way health outcomes are assessed and a step towards more personalised and preventative healthcare interventions.

The project put a great emphasis on user involvement in developing and adopting supportive remote technology to assist with measuring symptoms of three chronic health conditions: epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, and major depressive disorder. Their research result shows that 96% of the 1000 user respondent think that such an application would help improving their quality of life by ensuring independence and control over their health condition (e.g. they can go to a safe place when a seizure is coming).
Frank Sioen from the European Network for Independent Living (ENIL) described the great potential of the proposed European Accessibility Act (EAA) in supporting people to live in the community. Independent living is a human right that requires that people have choice and control over their lives, including the type of services, or assistive devices they wish to use. Mr Sioen emphasised that the use of robots should not replace the ‘human touch’ in social services and maintaining personal assistance systems is still important. In order to avoid the misuse of private data, users should control which data are collected and be aware by who the data will be processed. Co-production helps to produce useful and useable products in the spirit of ‘Design for all’. Furthermore, keeping the cost of new technologies low is key to ensure their widespread use by persons with disabilities and older people, who belong to the most deprived segments of society.

**Future**

COFACE Families Europe continues to advocate for the development of accessible, high-quality community-based social and health services that put the individual in the heart of design and development. European Funding mechanism, such as the European Regional Development Fund can support community-based social, health and housing Infrastructure in line with deinstitutionalisation principles. Persons with chronic health conditions, or various support needs should be provided with person-centred solutions that help them to live with their families, be autonomous and participate fully in society. The role of technology in supporting people with support needs in their everyday lives is a growing and positive trend, however some of the concerns around data protection, ethical issues and big data still need to be addressed. First and foremost, we hope that the proposed European Accessibility Act will soon be adopted, as part of the implementation of the UN CRPD by the EU and becomes a strong instrument to put in place common accessibility requirements for certain key products and services.

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