step for ME

Steps Forward to Meaningful Employment of young people with emotional well-being problems

# Technology-based practices for the intervention with young people with emotional welfare issues

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# Introduction

Technology has become an integral part of our daily lives, and it has transformed the way we communicate, work, learn, and interact with each other. From smartphones and social media platforms to artificial intelligence and virtual reality, technology has opened new possibilities for many fields and spheres of our lives. In recent years, technology has also emerged as a powerful tool for social intervention. Through the use of various technologies, individuals and organisations are now able to address a wide range of social issues, from education and healthcare to poverty and social inequality, and, why not, mental health issues, particularly those affecting young people (ages 16 to 30).

Mental health disorders affect millions of people worldwide, and young people are particularly vulnerable. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), half of all mental health disorders begin by the age of 14, and three quarters of them by the age of 24. Therefore, early intervention and support are critical to improving the mental health outcomes of young people.

Technology can play a vital role in social intervention with young people with mental health issues, especially considering that access to new technologies is every day more common among young adults. There are many different types of tools available, offering multiple possibilities. In fact, technology has enabled the development of innovative solutions to social problems, such as mobile health apps, online therapy platforms, virtual reality training programs and gamification. These solutions can provide accessible and affordable support for people who may not have (sufficient) access to traditional services.

Mobile apps can provide young people with tools and resources to manage their mental health, such as mood trackers, meditation exercises, and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) programs. Virtual reality therapy can simulate real-life situations in a safe and controlled environment, allowing young people to confront their fears and anxieties. Gamification involves using game-like elements such as points, rewards, and challenges to motivate young people to engage in activities that promote their mental health.

Another example is online therapy, or e-therapy, a form of therapy that is delivered via digital platforms such as video calls, chat rooms, or email. It can be an ideal intervention for young people who may be reluctant to seek face-to-face therapy or can’t afford to do so.

It is important to notice that using tech tools for the intervention with young adults with mental health issues or any type of social intervention does not mean the substitution of professionals in this field or the reduction of human contact. In fact, in the scope of the StepForME Project, the partners carried out several focus groups and one thing most participants had in common was the fact that they prefer to have face-to-face psychological assistance. Unfortunately, that is not always possible due to time constraints, lack of professionals available, high demand, lack of monetary resources, etc. When used wisely, tech tools can be a way to jump around these issues and have a more immediate response that can either solve or mitigate the issue until professional help face-to-face is available. It can be a way for professionals to reduce workload and for young adults to have a more

immediate response when crises arise as well as closer monitoring (done either by professionals or themselves).

Another advantage of technology is its ability to connect people and communities across the globe. Through social media and messaging apps, people can share their experiences, ideas, and concerns, and collaborate with others to address social issues more or less without constraints regarding time or space.

Moreover, technology has made it easier for individuals and organizations to collect and analyse data, which can be used to identify and address the needs and problems of a collective. For instance, data analytics can help in identifying patterns that are useful to assess the needs of certain groups and design better interventions that can improve the lives of individuals and communities.

Technology has the potential to play a significant role in promoting the inclusion of young people with mental health issues. Online therapy, mental health apps, educational videos, social media apps, and online support groups are just a few examples of tech tools that can be used to support young people's mental well-being. By incorporating these tools into mental health care and education, we can help young people develop the skills they need to manage their mental health and live fulfilling lives.

This handbook on technology-based innovative practices for the improvement of the community, social and labour intervention with young adults with emotional welfare issues is the result of the research carried out in the scope of the StepForME Project, which focuses on the socio-labour integration of young adults with mental health or emotional issues. It contains a selection of tech tools that can be used in the intervention with young adults with mental health issues, by professionals, educators, parents, and young adults themselves. It has become increasingly important for mental health professionals, to use tech tools to promote the inclusion of these young adults In this handbook, we will explore some good practices for using tech tools to promote the inclusion of young people with mental health issues and help them navigate their mental health challenges.

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# Methodology

The methodology to identify the good practices was structured in two different strategic axes: firstly, there was broad research made by the partners of the StepForME Project (Aunua Global (Ireland), Tenenet (Slovakia), Chance B (Austria) and the iSocial Foundation (Catalonia) with the assistance of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). The partners are from four different European countries and have different profiles, which added the practical experience of different contexts and organizations, covering more ground.

These organisations all tend to youngsters and young adults or do work related to young adults with mental health issues but from different perspectives such as social innovation, research, psychology, labour integration, etc.

Each partner selected at least five tech tools to compose an inventory of tech tools that can be used to improve the mental health of young adults, both directly (used by young adults directly) and indirectly (used by professionals to manage cases and reduce workload). From those tools, one good practice was selected by each partner and explained in a broader way. The selection of specific tools to develop into good practices was done based on the following six criteria: replicability, innovation, effectiveness, sustainability, local and community practices, and empowerment of young adults with mental health or emotional issues, which are further explained in the chapter “Criteria for the selection of good practices”.

The second axis of the methodological process was the realization of several focus groups with young adults. From the four participating organizations, they did a total of seven focus groups with young adults from their countries. The total number of participants was 54 and they were within the ages of 15 to 29. In the focus groups the participants were asked several questions related to their mental health, coping mechanisms, the Covid-19 pandemic, education, family relations, insertion and participation in the labour market, etc.

One of the question blocks discussed in the focus groups was about tech tools. The participants were asked to elaborate on their thoughts about tech tools and their use for professional intervention, about social media and how it affects their lives, what tech tools they use or have used in the past and so on. In general, the results showed that young adults preferred face-to-face contact with professionals. However, they were not against complementing face-to-face visits with some tech tools that allowed them to get more immediate responses in moments of crisis.

Furthermore, professionals working in organizations that give assistance to young adults with mental health issues were asked informally to provide which tech tools have proven useful for them in the development of their day-to-day work with young adults.

The selection of tech tools and good practices has been made following these two axes, both research and personal experience of young adults and professionals.

# Definition and contextualization of good practices

A set of definitions of the concept of good practices is referenced in this section, in order to contextualize the theoretical framework of this handbook on technology-based innovative practices for the improvement of the community, social and labour intervention with young adults with emotional welfare issues.

The concept of good practices is used in a wide variety of contexts to refer to the optimal ways of executing a process that can serve as a model for other organizations. In general, it refers to any experience that is guided by principles, objectives, and appropriate procedures (Rodrigo López, et al., 2015).

In this sense, the concept of good practices is an approach that does not reside in presenting a specific series of fixed actions and procedures to be performed, but it is a dynamic that wants to make visible those actions that have been recognized both for their excellence and for their ability to make them transferable to other contexts. In this way, its identification allows to serve as a guide when making the right decisions for the improvement of social reality (Gradaille Pernas & Caballo Villar, 2016).

At the same time, good practices contribute to increasing the quality of the work and its impact, sharing learning, avoiding the repetition of mistakes; they motivate to look for new and better alternatives to common problems and needs; also building bridges between research, policies, and social action, guiding the development of new proposals. That is, with this good practices stimulate the reflection that helps mature the theories and the practices, generating socially useful knowledge (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2003).

The initiatives that are included in this selection of good practices as well as in the inventory of tech tools are directed to strengthening the social and labour inclusion of young adults with mental health issues. The examples found are configured around the following axes: innovation in the approach, replicability, effectiveness, sustainability, community approach, and empowerment of young adults. Therefore, the handbook places special emphasis on good practices with a transversal perspective.

In relation to all the above, the eight-dimensional model of quality of life (Verdugo Alonso & Schalock, 2013) appears as a guide for the identification of good practices. Its special emphasis is focused on the empowerment of three main aspects on the part of the person: independence, social participation, and well-being. Specifically, the dimensions within these aspects are:

- emotional well-being
- interpersonal relationships
- material well-being

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- personal development
- physical well-being
- self-determination
- social inclusion
- rights

In this sense, these dimensions are intermingled with some of the essential aspects for the social and labour inclusion of young adults with mental health issues.

When it comes to good practices related to young adults with mental health issues, new technologies and tech tools are something to be taken into account, particularly with the younger generations, which have a higher usage of the Internet and mobile devices. In a study with teenagers from the Autonomous Community of Madrid, the results show that 93,1% of the participants used the Internet with an average time of use of 1 to 3 hours per day. From those, 1 of every 5 students had a very high use of the internet (more than 5 hours a day) (Sánchez-Martínez & Otero Puime, 2010). The authors recommend to "recognize and respond to this new reality and favour the responsible use of the Internet between youngsters through education programs[1]" (Sánchez-Martínez & Otero Puime, 2010, p. 84). This results and recommendations are still relevant today, since digitalization has evolved a lot in the years following this study and now it is a more integrated part of daily life for young adults.

Furthermore, the World Health Organization, in their Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030 includes tech tools in one of their goals, related to the provision of mental health and social care services in community-based settings. One of the points to reach this objective is related to the encouragement of self-assistance via the use of health technologies (World Health Organization (WHO), 2021). Of course, the WHO also makes point that this use of technologies needs to be complementary to including mental health services in hospitals of easy access, integrated and with capacity of reaction, and not a goal on its own.

Therefore, to put this in practice, it can be very helpful to have an overview on the digital innovative tools in the field of mental health, particularly those related to young adults. These tech tools can be useful to be implemented in routine practice and guide professionals in this field. In fact, "most mental health professionals do not necessarily receive formal training on the digitalisation process and digital tools feasible for clinical practice and, more importantly, about the effectiveness and clinical utility of these digital tools in young people affected with mental health disorders" (Orsolini, Appignanesi, Pompili, & Volpe, 2022, p. 810). Digital mental health interventions can be helpful in reducing gaps in mental health services and provide young adults with more innovative and attractive techniques for them. Nonetheless, the inclusion of these practices and tools into everyday practice to enhance existing solutions is still incipient and needs to be further promoted.

[1] Own translation from Spanish.

It must be noted that there is a wide variety of options when it comes to digital mental health interventions such as Virtual Reality settings, Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, apps, information online (curated by professionals), gamification, neural networks, and deep learning, etc.

There are many opportunities to explore in the digital world for the Mental Health sector, however, it must be noted that they can't be a one-fits all solution. On the contrary, it can help create multicomponent interventions. One example is moderated online social therapy (MOST) which is proposed to help maintain the patients engagement to the system. This type of intervention includes: 1) interactive psychosocial interventions; 2) peer-to-peer online social networking; 3) peer moderation and 4) expert support (Alvarez-Jimenez, et al., 2021). This system of using several components in the digital intervention with young adults with mental health issues provides a more holistic approach, making it more difficult for the young adults to lose interest in the intervention.

Other types of interventions like smartphone-based therapies through apps can be of help to professionals when it comes to the personalization of interventions with young adults. The use of data collected through the smartphone like medication tracking, social contacts monitoring, vital parameters, digital phenotypes and so on (Torous, Onnela, & Keshavan, 2017) can give professionals, as well as the user, a better understanding of their behaviour and reactions, thus giving more accurate information than regular clinical sessions can accomplish. When correctly treated, it can be a good complement to receive accurate information of the patient in their daily lives. Of course, privacy regulations and data protection would have to be in place to ensure the privacy of the patient.

When it comes to the role of professionals in the application of digital mental health interventions, the profile of professionals which are conducting these interventions is of high importance. Studies show that "early career mental health professionals who received both theoretical and practical training displayed a general positive predisposition and a better digital literacy in providing digital mental health interventions to young adults, by also showing a higher perceived efficacy, compared to traditional interventions" (Orsolini, Appignanesi, Pompili, & Volpe, 2022, p. 818). This puts emphasis on the importance for professionals and future professionals to receive training in digitalization and the use of new technologies during their formal training since it predisposes them more prone towards their uses. It is particularly important for those who will tend to youngsters and young adults, since they are highly driven towards the use of technology in their daily lives, and it can make the services more appealing to them.

Nonetheless, the use of tech tools should be done in a responsible way. There has been an increase of apps available in the market, (López-Santín & Álvaro Serón, 2018) which makes the existing research insufficient to fully support their effectiveness, especially in the long term.

To conclude, digitalisation of the youth mental health care can be one step forward to solving the problem of young adults' engagement by the traditional mental health services which, in

many cases, were designed for general adult psychiatry. In fact, “young people usually describe the lack of youth-friendly and digitally driven mental health services, not yet appropriately tailored to their needs and their inner resources” (Orsolini, Appignanesi, Pompili, & Volpe, 2022, p. 818)

This fact is highly related to one of the reasons behind the StepForME project: this discontinuity of services happening to young people, when they reach legal age and find themselves in adult mental health services which are not accommodated to their needs as young adults. By researching good practices in the field of mental health and technology and related to young adults, the project aims to find innovative ways to incorporate tech tools and digitalisation into everyday practice with young adults from a communitarian perspective.

# Four good practices

In the following section of the handbook, there are four good practices in the use of tech tools to tend to youngsters and young adults with mental health issues as well as an explanation of the criteria used for their selection. These good practices have been selected with the purpose of illustrating what examples can be used as a guide or starting point to understand and incorporate tech tools in the work with young adults with mental health or emotional well-being issues.

## Criteria for the selection of good practices

In this chapter, the criteria for the selection of good practices will be explained. For the purpose of this Handbook and given the context of the StepForME Project, six different criteria were chosen:

1. **Replicability**: The selected good practice serves as a model for developing policies, initiatives and actions in other places and contexts different from that of its initial application.

2. **Innovation**: It develops new or creative solutions to solve existing problems.

3. **Effectiveness**: It demonstrates a positive and tangible impact on improvement. Therefore, it presupposes that the chosen good practice must have been evaluated.

4. **Sustainability**: Due to its social, economic, and environmental requirements it can be maintained over time and produce lasting effects. In this sense, priority is given to those initiatives that are economically sustainable, i.e., efficient, that produce great results with few resources.

5. **Local and community practices**: Special emphasis is placed on those initiatives developed at the local level following the perspective focused on the organisations of the project. In this way, the community dimension of the project is also reinforced.

6. **Empowerment of young adults with mental health or emotional issues**: The good practice promotes the participation of teenagers and young adults with mental health or emotional issues and their agency.

These guidelines were followed in the selection process of the good practices which will be explained in the following section. However, although these criteria were taken into account when screening the good practices, not all selected examples fulfil all six criteria.

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# Online crisis helplines (Austria)

Online helpline services provide listening and emotional support to anyone in distress, in an individual, family or psycho-social crisis, who is asking for support, e.g. in situations of loneliness or isolation, grief, fear, unhappiness, when being in shock or suicidal.

Most helpline centres offer this availability by telephone and some also offer access to emotional support via email, chat or messenger apps.

The Austrian online counselling service of "Telefonseelsorge Österreich" is free of charge, subject to confidentiality and open to people of all ages who are looking for help. The online helpline service offers to those affected a bit of help, joint further thinking, and concrete discussion of topics and problems. It is no psychotherapy and cannot replace therapy.

If help is needed beyond online counselling, the person seeking help gets information about the appropriate institutions and is referred to specialised agencies.

Trained volunteers or staff provide non-judgmental, empathetic, respectful, caring support in the form of written communication, asynchronous when communicating via email, synchronous when communicating via chat.

## Background

Online helplines are a form of psychosocial counselling. The medium of the Internet makes it possible to contact online counsellors from a PC or smartphone. For young adults it is often easier to get in contact via writing, so this medium is mostly used by persons younger than 40 years old.

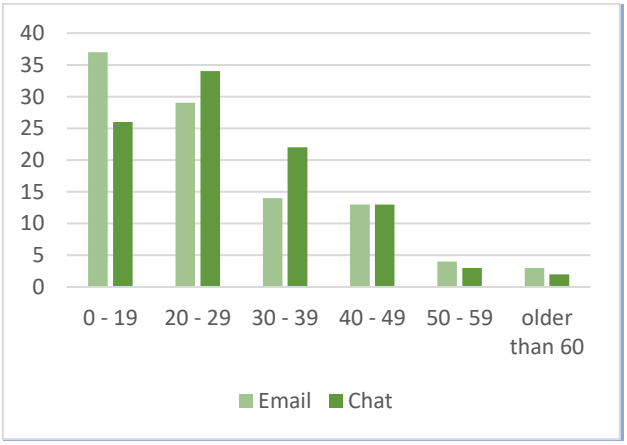


*Figure 1. Age range of users in percentages during 2022*

The online helpline service is a seismograph of society - all its shocks are reflected in the email and chat contacts and inquiries. Compared with the telephone helpline, where loneliness and isolation are the most frequent topic, mental health is first in the tanking, followed by life crises and upheavals, relationships and loneliness, and suicidal tendencies.

## Strategies and actions

Apart from the 24/7 telephone helpline, “Telefonseelsorge Österreich” offers the opportunity to communicate online in writing via e-mail or chat. This service is free of charge and offered daily between 16:00 and 23:00.

The online helpline has been in place since 2012 with the objective of reaching out to young people.

In email counselling, the counselling is time-delayed. Online counsellors try to answer the first e-mail as soon as possible, at the latest within 48 hours. The intensity of further support – if desired – is agreed upon directly with the online counsellor.

In chat counselling, the counsellor and the person seeking advice are in the chat room at the same time. The chat service is offered daily from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. Chatting makes it possible to talk to each other even though it may be noisy around or a verbal conversation would be difficult for the moment.

Messenger counselling planned in the future will allow both forms - simultaneous and delayed counselling.

Women and men from various professional groups who work voluntarily in the Telefonseelsorge Österreich make themselves available in online counselling within certain time frames. All counsellors have received qualified internal training. The counselling is anonymous and as a prerequisite for cooperation, a confidentiality agreement must be signed by the volunteers. For the further development and deepening of the counselling activities, continuing education and training events are offered to volunteers and staff on a regular basis.

## Results

The service is available for everyone and every concern is important. People who contact the online counsellors for example

- want to share everyday problems
- look for relief with regard to fears, family conflicts, illness, grief, …
- feel left alone or suffer from loneliness
- live in a stressful partnership
- suffer from mental illnesses
- find themselves in an acute crisis situation
- are suicidal

People searching emotional support online in writing can describe their problem(s) anonymously and the counsellors “listen” without prejudice. It is often very relieving for the persons contacting the helpline to simply be able to express themselves and to have someone who takes them seriously and understands them.

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Online counsellors will try to facilitate other perspectives and look for helpful first steps out of a crisis together with the "callers". They pay attention to the personal possibilities and resources of the callers and respect their personal approaches and decisions.

In the last five years, the use of the chat service has increased tenfold, in 2022 the increase was even higher, whereas the number of contacts via email is declining. Every year volunteers are trained to join the team of online counsellors to meet the increasing demand.

### Conclusions

Online counselling is a low-threshold service easier approachable for young adults than professional (psycho) therapeutical treatment in a face-to-face setting.

The best place to reach young people is in a digital environment. Since "Telefonseelsorge Österreich" has started to offer forms of online help numbers increased every year.

The statistics of the interactions show what studies confirm: since the beginning of the pandemic there is an increased psychological vulnerability of young people. Adolescents and young adults seek help via email or chat much more frequently than before. In 2022, for example, the number of chats increased from about 5300 to 7000.

Other examples specifically for young people in Austria are www.rataufdraht.at and www.kids-line.at.

## Mentegram (Slovakia)

Mentegram is an app that seeks to support mental health care. It is a software platform that allows therapists, researchers, doctors and other professionals to track mood and behaviour. The software interacts with the end user through a simple application that easily and quickly records quick surveys on a daily (or more) basis. For example, a therapist can use it to ask a simple mood mapping questions (e.g. how anxious are you feeling right now?). The data is seamlessly synced with the administrator providing the questions who can then view, analyse, and download the data from a centrally managed web- interface.

Mentegram enables the assessment of a range of conditions such as:

- anxiety
- depression
- substance abuse
- bi-polar disorder
- and others

Although it is developed in Slovakia, the app is available in many different languages and used in several different countries.

## Background

This app was developed by IT specialist Milan Steskal and psychologist and researcher Igor Holas.

As one of the inventors has experienced a mentally challenging period himself, he is aware of how psychological disorders are quite common in the current hectic times. Among others, they are related to stress, high workload as well as financial problems. With this in mind, a Slovak company has decided to create an app that makes the work of general practitioners and other professionals easier by digitizing processes and better identifying people who suffer from psychological difficulties.

## Strategies and actions

Patients enter personal data and take assessments, either through an app on their smartphones or through a web app in a web browser on a computer or tablet, either in the waiting room or at home.

Rapid calculations and scoring can provide clinicians with standardized measurements that give them an opportunity to diagnose and recommend further tests, referrals and plans of treatment.

Mentegram customers typically enter personal data and provide initial assessments in the frontend, and this input can be imported into their Electronic Health Record (EHR) system. Mentegram recently developed a video conferencing solution, with the goal of offering it as one of the front-end assessment tools for a telemedicine solution, expanding access for patients.

Clinicians access the solution through their dashboard via a web browser on their computer, tablet, or smartphone.

## Results

The inventors of this app describe a current situation where a general practitioner has no easy way to find out whether a patient is depressed / suffers from mental issues or not. General practitioners can, of course, see their patients and have a short discussion with them, but they won't get paid, and it will take a long time. However, if the patients fill in a form via the Mentegram app the results are sent to their doctor who can use them to determine the likelihood of a given mental health problem e.g., depression. The app thus makes it easier for doctors to save time and work more efficiently.

## Conclusions

This innovative application not only facilitates the work of professionals with patients but also raises awareness of the importance of mental health, thus also contributing to the destigmatisation of mental health issues. Currently, the inventors of this app also mention the scientific benefit of this app. It is being considered that statistical data outputs from the

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app could be used for scientific purposes. This tech tool was chosen according to the criteria mentioned in page 10.

More on Mentegram here: https://mentegram.com/

## ROAR (Ireland)

The concept of ROAR is one to help empower young people to discover their full potential through the 4 core principles of ROAR as the acronym implies, Recognising your greatness, Opening up your self-awareness, Acceptance in oneself and the differences in other and Reconnecting with others is the point to action.

The ROAR program offers various mental health related talks on the topics such as self-care & self-awareness, overcoming fear and anxiety, mindfulness and much more.

Online technology is on demand and can offer great support to those who need to access talks that help fit their needs on demand at a given time. ROAR is a community online hub, that provides the network and a framework for young people to connect with each other by offering inspirational talks and events hosted by Aunua's Youth Ambassadors who have already discovered their ROAR, engaging youth with the opportunity to engage in meaningful initiatives that they can participate in or could take and implement in their own homes and communities, and providing young people with ways to work within a community of change-makers that can lead with a greater sense of value and purpose.

With the ROAR program Aunua has collaborated with many different professional experts to participate in the development of these talks and workshops. Aunua created these as an online program that covers many different topics to help support the mental health, and well-being of youth and the results have always been received well with the students that participated.

### Background

ROAR is one of Aunua's first programs, which was delivered over 4-part workshops that were held in numerous secondary schools in Ireland. They were then recoded as online modules using the acronym on Recognition, Opening up self-awareness, Acceptance of self and others and Reconnection.

### Strategies and actions

Aunua focuses on helping young people discover their ROAR as a way to empower them to channel their energy into a more positive outcome.

The ROAR program offers young people free and accessible resources that can support them with their mental health and well-being and offers them a road map to deal with their life's challenges.

## Results

One of the results of ROAR is in the form of YouTube videos in their “emotional health and well-being series” that act as small pieces of advice from professionals and experts as well as young adults and that received more than 150 visits online.

## Conclusions

Having the right online tools, that support the mental health needs of youth through the engagement of a youth health care facilitator, is hugely beneficial. It can be difficult to navigate and find reliable resources that are freely available and so it's important to know where to find knowledge that can support young people to make better choices. The ROAR community hub is the back up support that can help inspire them and provide them with a network and framework and guide for finding their own solutions.

More on ROAR here: https://www.aunuaglobal.org/roar/

# Apptu@ (Catalonia)

Apptu@ is an innovative and interactive mobile app that allows for more continuous and closer contact between users, professionals and volunteers of three mental health programs from the Catalan organization Grup Atra: Actua, Actua Jove (Actua Youth) and Actua Dona (Actua Woman). This app also aims to raise public awareness about the collective suffering from mental health problems, while providing information that may be of interest to all citizens.

The three programmes included in Apptu@ are community-based, integrative and care-focused. They provide support to achieve autonomous living for people with issues resulting from mental disorders, as well as for women who also have suffered or suffer from male violence in parallel. With Apptu@, social contact between the beneficiary and voluntary persons is enhanced.

The application is divided into two parts: one public and one private. Within the public, which is destined for any individual in society – such as people from the mental health collective, health professionals and the social sector, people interested in volunteering, relatives, students, young people, collaborating administrations, etc. – you can get to know the Actua programmes, as well as the different services and resources that form Grup ATRA. It also attempts to promote inclusive volunteering and networking. But basically, the app aims to give visibility to the people of the mental health collective, as this helps to break stereotypes and alleviate stigma.

As far as the private part is concerned, Apptu@ allows professionals to work on agreements and goals individually with the users of the program, following them more directly and continuously over time and making them participants of the common project that is Actua.

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## Background

The Actua programme was created in 2014 in Vilanova i la Geltrú, a municipality in Catalonia. In 2016 it was extended to the neighbourhood of Gracia, and later to the whole city of Barcelona. It is a programme characterized by its flexibility and capacity to adapt to different contexts and moments. In 2016, Grup ATRA detected the need to have a closer contact with their users and started using WhatsApp to improve the social contact and the interrelationship.

Grup ATRA had long had the idea of creating this app, but the costs of doing so were too high and it remained an idea until a new co-worker with webpage design experience incorporated to the team It was then, at the end of 2019 that this app started taking form, the concepts designed, and contents planned.

With the outbreak of the coronavirus this app was key for the programme, as it was essential that during the months when social contact had to be reduced, Actua users could continue to communicate and interact with their professionals or reference volunteers.

## Strategies and actions

The Actua programme is a community based, care-focused, integrative service which needs to be very close to its users in order to cover their needs. Thus, when the Covid-19 pandemic arose and there were restrictions on mobility, reaching users was harder than expected. Therefore, the organization took action in creating this app, mainly to make contact with users more easily, quicklier and digital gap friendly, since it is an intuitive application. Its simple design allows professionals to be in contact with the users in a non-invasive way. Through the application users and professionals can set up goals together, making the user also participant of the process.

This app is helpful for professionals and users and can reach more potential when combined with face-to-face support, especially when it comes to keeping contact with the users between sessions and having an easy access to the programme, agreements reached, etc. Moreover, it represents a better adaptation to the programme of young profiles, used to new technologies. It also allows access to different services of medical urgencies, gender violence, security and so on.

From a gender perspective it gives visibility to women who suffer from mental health issues combined with gender violence. It helps them putting words and images to their feelings as well as sharing them with other women, strengthening their sorority.

It also gives the opportunity to train the users into new technologies, making sure the digital gap is not widened. Furthermore, with the information and notification system the person is aware of different activities available and more in touch with their environment, thus the app helps the user also to get off the screen.

## Results

The app has been available for both Android and iOS since September 2020 and has already had over a hundred downloads. From that moment on, the users of the Actua programme have been accompanied in the process of installing the app, and they are receiving a training divided into four modules related to the importance of new technologies, how to use them in a responsible way and, more concretely, how to use the app Apptu@.

The app has received a very satisfactory acceptance and the training is moving the people treated in the organization closer to the world of new technologies, making the usage of the app easier.

## Conclusions

This app is a clear example of good practice related to young adults with mental health issues and the use of tech tools to facilitate their inclusion. Grup Atra perceived a need on their users and professionals and a gap in training and, through the creation of the app, they have covered both.

The app fulfils its purpose of keeping the users connected to the professionals and the organization, informing them of activities and resources in their city, thus connecting them to their environment and, with the public part of the app, raising awareness on mental health issues to the general public.

Furthermore, the process of implementation of the app is also a good practice, since the professionals made sure that all users are comfortable with technology and taking the opportunity to give training on the responsible use of technology, something which is a hot topic, especially with youngsters and young adults.

In conclusion, the Actua programme (in its three different variants) and the inclusion of a tech tool (Apptu@) in it are a good example of how technology can be included to satisfy existing needs but also to use it as a reason to improve training and knowledge with the users and work on those soft skills that will be useful in their inclusion into the labour market and in their life in general.

More information on Apptu@ here: https://www.grupatra.org/el-programa-actua-presenta-la-innovadora-aplicacio-apptu/

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# Inventory of tech tools

The following is an inventory of tech tools that can be useful for the intervention with young adults with mental health and emotional issues. The partners of StepForME compiled different tech tools that can be used for that purpose and classified them into different sections: interaction apps, apps providing information, diagnostic tools and well-being apps.

It must be noted that this is, by no means, a way to impose tech tools into everyday practice, but a suggestion and a presentation of some options that are available and could be useful both for professionals and young adults, provided they are used responsibly.

## Interaction apps

This section contains the tech tools that allow an interaction between the user and someone or something else. This means that the user can interact with the app and will get an answer. That answer can come from another human (a professional, trained volunteers, etc) or is generated by an Artificial Intelligence (for example a chatbot which answers to the demands).

### Human contact

#### 1. Circles

This application offers online support groups to help people struggling with mental and emotional health issues. Using artificial intelligence technology, Circles asks users a series of questions that allow them to relate automatically to groups of other people who are going through similar problems: personality problems or mental health issues, the sudden loss of a relative, a situation of gender-based violence, permanent care of a dependent person, difficulties with raising children, the breakup of the couple, etc. Within these groups of eight people, a professional facilitator is assigned to help participants share their situation. The aim is to assist participants to generate a stable space for conversation and encounters between them that allows them to support each other with their experience from similar situations they have suffered. Circles is a private paid service. The first week of group therapy is free, and for the following ones, the service costs about €26 per week.

More information here: https://circlesup.com/

#### 2. IPSO

The International Psychosocial Organisation (IPSO) is a humanitarian not-for-profit organization based in Germany and Afghanistan specializing in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) and in sociocultural dialogue to promote peace and social cohesion. It offers offline and online support on the secure video platform ipso-care.com in more than 20 languages (such as Arabic, Farsi and Punjabi, among others), and which today has more than 200,000 beneficiaries, mostly people who are immigrants, refugees, or victims of armed conflicts. IPSO counsellors are other persons of the same origin

who are previously formed in Value Based Counselling, a type of short-term intervention that seeks to establish empathy with the person concerned and to support them without prejudice. In addition, the sociocultural plurality that allows this methodology makes it easier to adapt it to different contexts and to provide service to a very high and diverse number of users. It is a peer-to-peer service, which serves to empower both parties, and which at the same time seeks to prevent the hardships or traumatic situations that have been experienced from becoming chronic or leading to more serious problems while helping in social integration.

More information here: https://ipsocontext.org and https://ipso-care.com

### 3. DigiContact

DigiContact is a remote and immediate 24h care service for people with long-term care needs. For instance, disabled people, elderly people with dependency but also people with mental health problems or addictions, etc. The service allows extra respite and support to these people's non-professional carers, avoiding their saturation, and offers them support if needed. Users can enrol in the service either individually or through social entities. The service adapts to the needs of each user (for example, calling to remind him of a medication, wake him up in the morning, etc.) according to what is established at the time of contracting the service; and, depending on the needs of the person, DigiContact complements online care with face-to-face visits. DigiContact works through an app that is very easy to use: only by pressing a button, it does the call (with image) to be able to receive remote support and attention. The camera is in the middle of the screen, making it easier to have a sense of proximity and making it possible for professionals to read the verbal and nonverbal signals of the user.

Currently it is available only in the Netherlands.

More information here: https://digicontact.nl/

### 4. Crisis Text Line

Crisis Text Line is a message service available 24/7 that connects people in need of mental health support with trained volunteers and professionals that can assess their needs. The difference to other similar services is the use of Machine Learning.

Using machine learning, they prioritize the conversations that have high-risk patterns, instead of being a first come first serve service. This way, people who need immediate attention can get it in as little as of five minutes, reducing the risk of suicide. Furthermore, text messages and chatting are more common for youngsters and young adults than calling. Crisis Text Line makes them feel more at ease to share their issues without the risk of someone listening to the conversation.

More information here: https://www.crisistextline.org/

## 5. Discord servers tagged with mental health

Discord is a free text and voice chat platform that was designed to bring people together by connecting them online through social interactions. It is built to create and manage private and public communities. It gives users access to tools focused around communication services like voice and video calls, persistent chat rooms, and integrations with other gamer-focused services along with the general ability to send direct messages and create personal groups. Although Discord services may initially seem directed only towards gamers, in recent years several new updates have made it more useful for the general population.

Discord communities are organized into collections of text and voice channels called servers. Users can create topic-based servers for free, manage their public visibility, and create voice channels, text channels, and categories to organise the channels.

The servers created in such channels are equipped with moderation tools, customisable member access and different roles and rights for community members. For example: The Haven, an 18+ peer support mental health community that operates on Discord.

More information on The Haven here: https://thehaven.support/

## 6. Ready4life

Ready4life is a coaching programme for addiction prevention that was developed especially for apprentices and students in upper secondary education.

Stress, conflicts and negative feelings are part of adolescence and are often closely related to substance abuse and problematic behaviour. The ready4life programme has therefore set itself the goal of sensitising adolescents at an early stage and strengthening their resources in order to promote their health and prevent the possible development of addiction.

The aim is to promote resilience, life skills and social competences, and to strengthen resistance to risky substance use (alcohol, tobacco, cannabis) and to prevent problematic internet and smartphone use. ready4life is divided into a workshop part (“be smart”), which is held at a vocational school or training company, and a subsequent 4-month digital coaching.

Ready4life is voluntary, anonymous, and free of charge.

More information here: https://www.ready4life.at/

## 7. VOS: AI diary and mood measure

VOS is a Czech app for building daily mental balance with the help of AI, psychologists, therapists and personalized activities. The users can just take a moment for themselves each day with VOS and complete a few activities chosen especially for them, from a mood log to a breathing exercise or short meditation to a daily activation challenge or pausing over an affirmation. VOS also offers a psychological chat with a counsellor who will listen and advise whenever necessary. The user can talk to him or her face-to-face day or night, similar to an emergency contact feature.

With VOS' artificial intelligence, its mood monitor and personal analytics features, the users can get a bigger picture of their mental health and find out what can bring them down and what makes them feel better.

More information here: https://vos.health/

### Artificial Intelligence

#### 8. Woebot

This chatbot helps to manage moods, learn about oneself and cope with mental and emotional distress.

In a cognitive behavioural therapy framework, Woebot asks the user how they are feeling and what is going on in their life in a short conversation format. Woebot also talks about mental health and emotional well-being, and shares videos and other useful tools to address the user's mood and needs related to their mental and emotional well-being. Woebot is like a self-help book that adapts to each person's different needs and concerns.

Woebot uses a combination of natural language processing, psychological expertise, excellent writing and a sense of humour to create an informative and friendly conversational experience.

In a study conducted by Stanford University, Woebot users, primarily in people aged 18-28 who had spoken to Woebot on a near-daily basis, showed a significant reduction in anxiety and depression,.

More information here: https://woebothealth.com/

## Providing information

This section comprises the tech tools that are based on providing information to the users, they act as a reliable source of information displayed in an attractive way for the user to consult easily.

#### 9. SOM Salut Mental 360

This digital platform is based on co-creation between users, family members, healthcare professionals, the social sector and the educational environment, and the general public, which aims to inform, accompany, empower and raise awareness of mental health to the public, regardless of their age and whether or not they are diagnosed with a mental health issue.

The portal incorporates up-to-date content in the field of mental health and will progressively expand the diversity of formats. The aim is to create an intelligent platform that offers content adapted to the preferences of the individual and generates an optimal user experience. In

addition, users are the main prescribers of the platform, making it a reliable and secure source of information for anyone who needs accurate information in the field of mental health.

SOM Salut Mental 360 currently offers digital meetings, expert consultation sessions, statements from health professionals, users, family members, educators and associations, as well as informative and monographic articles, among others. All the information on the platform is reviewed by a multidisciplinary scientific committee to guarantee its accuracy.

The project also offers thematic portals where you can find all the information on a topic or pathology. The first three are focused on eating disorders (ED), autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and depressive disorders.

More information here: https://www.som360.org/

### 10. Nepanikař (Worldwide)

Veronika Kamenská, a 20-year-old student of biomedicine, created the Nepanikař application from her own experience when she was going through a difficult period and needed psychological help. It is available everywhere for free. The app has seven core modules: depression, anxiety/panic, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, mood tracking, eating disorders and contacts for professional help.

More information here: https://nepanikar.eu/

## Diagnostic tools

This section contains the tech tools that can be used to help diagnose patients in different ways: collectively to keep track of groups, individually because a person is feeling oddly and wants to know whether they should consult with a professional, because a professional also needs a diagnosis, etc. Each tech tool differs from the other ones showing that there are multiple possible approaches to this.

### 11. EmanTik

EmanTik is based on an application (Kanjo) that systematically records the emotional state of the pupils of the three schools that have implemented the programme. It is a system in which children and adolescents must indicate on the tablet the emotion that best reflects their mood from among calm, contentment, anger, fear, disgust, and sadness three times a day (when arriving at school, after playground time and at the end of the school day). In this way, boys and girls learn to identify their emotions, and on the other hand, the analysis of the data makes it possible to detect their emotional states as well as their evolution, to prevent situations of isolation, bullying, or other types of situations of discomfort or vulnerability.

The Kanjo system does not have access to the personal data of the boys and girls at any stage of the process, and only the schools have the capacity to link the anonymised IDs of the algorithm with the data of their pupils.

Currently it is being developed in the Basque Country, Spain.

More information here: EmanTik: programa para el abordaje precoz del malestar infantil (berrituz.eus)

### 12. StressHelp

The StressHelp application contains specified screening tests, which allow to determine the psychological state of the user from the point of view of stress, anxiety or depression. The application environment is intuitive, simple, and the results after completing the test make it clear whether you need to seek professional help.

With the help of StressHelp, it is possible to measure and diagnose the degree of severity of acute stress disorder, depression and anxiety. The application evaluates the answer, calculates a score, translates it into a result, educates, recommends first aid and contacts the medical professional (in the case of a clinically noticeable result) to the nearest psychotherapists in his district. There is a database of psychotherapists who are willing to help in the districts and have signed up to have their names and contacts appear in the aforementioned application. Psychotherapy services can be used in person, but also remotely.

More information here: https://stresshelp.psychologin.sk/

### 13. Sensa

Sensa is a mobile application designed to work as a complete guide for improving mental health. Built upon the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Sensa utilizes developed techniques to fight against a plethora of mental health issues, including anxiety, stress, depression, procrastination, ADHD, a lack of self-esteem and burnout. This list is constantly growing, however; and Sensa is always looking for new ways to help users no matter what they suffer from.

The Sensa app is a journaling app that focuses on utilizing cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help a person manage negative symptoms associated with anxiety, chronic stress, or depression. In addition to the daily exercises provided, Sensa also offers a mood and activity tracker, which can be used by the user to keep track of their mood and assess whether there are relevant changes. Users have to pay a small amount to receive the results and their plan in their email.

More information here: https://sensa.health/

## Well-being apps

This section refers to apps that are dedicated to improving the lifestyle of users without the need of professional help. Therefore it includes tracking apps, meditation apps, journaling apps, etc. These tools help the person to examine and reflect on themselves and can help

improving the quality of life as long as there are no severe mental health issues which require professional help.

### 14. Symple

Symple is a mobile app that offers different services with the primary goal to help users tracking how they feel and monitoring their health.

Its main features are: tracking symptoms (the user can choose from a list of symptoms or can create new ones to monitor them throughout the day by giving them an evaluation on a scale. This allows the user to have a record of different symptoms and to be able to make a temporal comparison), tracking factors that influence how one feels (the user can keep a daily record of different factors such as step count (including wheelchair pushes), sleep stats, heart rate, and dietary calories), daily photos (the app has a space where the user can upload timestamped photos to keep track, especially, of meds and meals every day) and journaling (the user has a daily space to write a description of the day or questions for the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist).

Symple provides two different ways to look at the data, symptom-focused graphs and factors-focused graphs. Both options can be seen by day, week, or month. It also allows the user to export the data to export data to different spreadsheet apps. Another useful feature is a calendar that facilitates the navigation between months and years.

This mobile application is useful both for users who want to control their daily lives and for those who want to have stricter tracing to show to their medical professionals.

More information here: https://www.sympleapp.com/

### 15. Daylio

Daylio is an app for people who are analytically inclined. Because with the app users can document their daily mood and get insight into their statistics. This allows to identify patterns in their behaviour and create new habits.

Filling out the diary is relatively easy: after clicking on the smiley that matches one's mood, you note down what you did today and add a note.

More information here: https://daylio.net/

### 16. Diaro

This app consists of writing a diary entry in the classic sense, select suitable keywords and add ones mood. Users can also insert pictures and locations. In the overview, users can see a preview of the entries and also sort them by photos, with keywords, one can also quickly find older entries.

More information here: https://diaroapp.com/

### 17. Breathe2Relax

Designed by the National Center for Telehealth and Technology, this app is a portable stress management tool which provides detailed information on the effects of stress on the body and instructions and practice exercises to help users learn the stress management skill called diaphragmatic breathing. Breathing exercises have been documented to decrease the body's 'fight-or-flight' (stress) response, and help with mood stabilization, anger control, and anxiety management. Breathe2Relax can be used as a stand-alone stress reduction tool or can be used in tandem with clinical care directed by a healthcare worker.

More information here: Breathe2Relax

### 18. Headspace

The Headspace application can help reduce anxiety and stress and improve well-being by providing guided meditation sessions. Headspace offers hundreds of relaxing meditations, sounds to help sleep, concentration music and more resources to help their users live a less stressful life. Furthermore, the team behind the app carries out regular research to see what impact the meditation has on their users and what aspects should be improved in order to give more resources to their users.

More information here: https://www.headspace.com/

### 19. MoodTrack Diary

MoodTrack Diary allows to track one's moods freely and rate them from 1 to 5. Moods are displayed in a timeline, which makes it easy to visualize your mood cycles. The app also allows to connect with and support others who use the app, creating a community between them.

More information here: http://www.moodtrack.com/

## Others

### 20. Einblick (Austria)

"Einblick" is a tool that supports the collection and professional evaluation of different statements and opinions. Anything is possible, from internal feedback within an institution, to municipal youth surveys, to the thematisation of the EU Youth Dialogue.

"Einblick" can be used to survey young people on various topics. The prerequisite for this is a group setting, as is common in open and associative youth work, where there are relationships or physical contacts with the individual young people. This is especially important because the results generated with "Einblick" are to be fed back to the young people involved for feedback purposes.Every 1.5 years, new topics are selected on which young people's opinions are then collected.

More information here: https://einblick.azurewebsites.net/

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