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The main aspects of forming the social work digitalisation strategy

Abstract: Today's need to improve the process of providing social services to needy segments of the population finding themselves in difficult life circumstances has intensified interest in forming a strategy for digitalising social work. The study object is strategies for digitalising social work. The subject of this study is the factors and conditions that influence the formation of strategies for digitalising social work. The purpose is to study the factors and conditions to choose digital technologies by social work specialists, in particular those that ensure the provision of social services. During the study, the author used methods of analysis, synthesis, generalisation, and comparison. The website content of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine was analysed; Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On approval of the Strategy of Digital Transformation of the Social Sphere" and Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approval of the Regulation on the Unified Information System in the Social Sphere". The scientific works of A. Hrytsenko, T. Burlai, H. Davydenko, T. Yehorova-Lutsenko, V. Malinovskyi, L. Khromushyna, in which modern approaches to various social work digitalisation strategies in Ukraine are studied; V. Togobytska and M. Khaustova, examining benefits, risks and problems for the social sphere during digital transformation; V. Prysiazhnyuk, investigating the digital transformation of the social sphere in the conditions of war. The author concludes that this process should be general, in which the key role is played by the state, involving various stakeholders, including Social Work specialists, clients and heads of Social Services, Information Technology Developers, academic institutions and non-profit organisations engaged in social work and perform socially useful functions. It confirms the need for further scientific research in social work digitalisation, contributing to improving the practice of Social Work and requires state support.

Keywords: social work, digitalisation strategy of social work, digital technologies in the process of social support, difficult life circumstances, approach to strategy evaluation.

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Основні аспекти формування стратегії цифровізації соціальної роботи

Анотація: Сьогоденні потреби в удосконаленні процесу надання соціальних послуг потребуючим верствам населення, які опинилися в складних життєвих обставинах, активізували інтерес до формування стратегії цифровізації соціальної роботи. Об'єкт дослідження є стратегії цифровізації соціальної роботи. Предметом цього дослідження є чинники та умови, які впливають на формування стратегій цифровізації соціальної роботи. Метою статті є вивчення чинників та умов вибору фахівцями соціальної роботи цифрових технологій, зокрема тих, які забезпечують надання соціальних послуг. Під час дослідження використано методи аналізу, синтезу, узагальнення та порівняння. Проаналізовано зміст сайту Міністерства цифрової трансформації України та Міністерства соціальної політики України; офіційний сайт Пенсійного фонду України; Розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України «Про схвалення Стратегії цифрової трансформації соціальної сфери» та Постанову Кабінету Міністрів України «Про затвердження Положення про Єдину інформаційну систему в соціальній сфері»; Електронний кейс-менеджмент та ЄІССС. Опрацьовано наукові роботи А. Гриценко, Т. Бурлай, Г. Давиденко, Т. Єгорової-Луценко, Л. Хромушиної, в яких досліджуються сучасні підходи до різних стратегій цифровізації соціальної роботи в Україні; В. Тогобицької та М. Хаустової, де розглядаються вигоди, ризики та проблеми для соціальної сфери під час цифрової трансформації. Автор робить висновок, що цей процес має носити спільний характер, в якому головну роль відіграє держава, залучаючи до нього різні зацікавлені сторони, включаючи фахівців з соціальної роботи, клієнтів та керівників соціальних служб, розробників інформаційних технологій, академічні установи та некомерційні організації, які займаються соціальною роботою і виконують суспільно корисні функції. Це засвідчує необхідність подальших наукових досліджень у сфері цифровізації соціальної роботи, що сприяє вдосконаленню практики соціальної роботи та потребує державної підтримки.

Ключові слова: соціальна робота, стратегія цифровізації соціальної роботи, цифрові технології в процесі надання соціальних послуг, складні життєві обставини, підхід до оцінювання стратегії.

Introduction

Modern challenges and needs facing social work specialists require optimisation of the process of providing social services. Helping vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, migrants, the homeless, the elderly, and those who have lost their jobs, requires reducing bureaucracy, responding quickly to public needs, and improving the availability of services. Therefore, the digitalisation of social work is relevant, which contributes to increasing public confidence, improves professional standards and practices of social work, and promotes the development of innovative approaches in social work, thereby ensuring more efficient use of limited financial and human resources. In the general global movement context towards the digitalisation of various life spheres, developing digital technologies in social work becomes necessary to respond to modern challenges and needs.

The study object is Strategies for Digitalization of Social Work.

The study subject is the factors and conditions influencing the formation of Strategies for Digitalization of Social Work.

The purpose is to study the factors and conditions of choice of digital technologies by social work specialists, in particular, those that ensure the provision of social services to the needy segments of the population who find themselves in difficult life circumstances.

Based on the set purpose, the following tasks were solved:

- investigate the main approaches to evaluating the Strategy of Digitalisation of Social Work in Ukraine;
- analyse various digital technologies content in the activities of social services and organisations;
- justify the impact of social services on the choice of digital technologies by specialists in social work;
- consider digital technologies in social work in the conditions of war in Ukraine.

In the study course, the author used the methods of analysis, synthesis, generalisation and comparison.

The content of the official website of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine (*Ministry of Digital Transformation…, 2023*), the official website of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine (*Ministry of Social Policy…, 2023*), the official website of the Pension Fund of Ukraine (*The Pension Fund…, 2023*), the Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (*On the Approval of the Strategy…, 2020*), the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on approval of the regulation on the unified information system in the social sphere (*On the Approval of the Regulation…, 2023*), Electronic case management and USIS (*Electronic Case Management…, 2023*). Scientific works of such researchers as A. Hrytsenko and T. Burlai (*Hrytsenko & Burlai, 2020*), G. Davydenko (*Davydenko, 2023*), T. Yehorova-Lutsenko (*Yehorova-Lutsenko, 2020*), which examines modern approaches to various strategies for digitalization of social work in Ukraine. V. Togobytska (*Togobytska, 2017*) and M. Khaustova (*Khaustova, 2023*) examine the benefits, risks and challenges for the social sphere during digital transformation. L. Khromushyna (*Khromushyna, 2023*) focused on the strategic aspects of transforming management activities in the digital economy and society of Ukraine. The author addresses the study results to managers who manage social processes and social work specialists who provide social services and assistance to needy segments of the population who find themselves in difficult life circumstances.

The results of the study

1. Main approaches to evaluating the strategy of digitalisation of social work in Ukraine

The current socio-political and military situation in Ukraine puts forward new requirements for providing social services to the population in difficult life circumstances (hereinafter – DLC). The ability of social specialists to ensure the resilience of Ukrainian citizens and their adaptation to the crisis conditions of today depends on the effectiveness of this process. Transformational processes related to legal, medical, educational, economic, psychological and rehabilitation problems require, first of all, the empowerment of the population in the context of self-provision of basic life needs.

The general trend in forming effective social work digitalisation is to focus on developing and implementing a strategy to improve the process of providing social services to the population finding themselves in DLC. For successful and effective actions in this direction, it is necessary to identify and develop a general long-term conceptual scenario, i.e., a holistically comprehensive action plan defining the course of forming social work digitalisation, which is its strategy (*Yehorova-Lutsenko, 2020*).

The role of strategy in shaping population resilience is so significant that it is worth approaching as a broadly specialised concept. After all, the growing number of people in need of social services due to ageing, the spread of chronic diseases, unemployment, and poverty requires more effective and affordable methods of providing social services.

The social work digitalising strategy is aimed at automating tasks, including the introduction of documentation, scheduling meetings, processing requests, consulting, and the like. It plays a significant role in risk assessment, forecasting customer needs and personalising services, using mobile applications to track customer progress, reminding about medication and communicating with electronic services. The advantage of digital technologies in the practice of social work is to ensure the availability of 24/7 services to internally displaced persons, people with disabilities and people who live in remote areas or in the occupied territories of the country.

There are five approaches to assessing the strategy for forming social work digitalisation in the context of providing social services to needy segments of the population finding themselves in a society.

The analytical and resource approach is aimed at identifying the needs and problems faced by these population segments, and studying how digital technologies can help solve these problems. To assess a digitalisation strategy formation in social work, a customer record-keeping system is needed, which should store information about their needs and the services provided to them. An online survey based on which the relevant indicators can be calculated. The advantage of using the analytical resource approach is the availability of information, as a rule, the ability to analyse social networks and mobile applications, determine geospatial data to determine needs and resources in certain geographical regions, collect data from websites (web scraping) (*Yehorova-Lutsenko, 2020*).

A target-based or problem-based approach aims to identify clear and measurable goals of digitalising strategy that must be aligned with the overall goals of Social Work and customer needs. The digitalisation strategy level in the context of providing social services is evaluated based on their effectiveness and effectiveness, namely, improving access, reducing costs and increasing customer satisfaction. For efficient strategy study and evaluation, only one generalising indicator (e.g., the provision of Social Services) is not enough since the strategy concerns various types of social services, including home care, social adaptation, social integration and reintegration, emergency (crisis) intervention, counselling, representation of interests, etc. In addition, you can highly evaluate the developed strategy, but its implementation will not give the expected results. Therefore, it is advisable to evaluate the strategy based on the principles of success and effectiveness of its implementation. A comprehensive assessment of forming a strategy to digitalise social work (hereinafter – the strategy) in the context of providing social services is performed on the basis of an assessment of improving the quality of life of representatives of Target groups, saving time and resources, increasing the level of independence, developing skills to overcome difficulties, and raising awareness of their own rights (*Togobytskaya, 2017*).

Quality of life assessment consists of studying indicators related to health (chronic diseases, physical activity, mental disorders, stress and anxiety), social relationships (love and respect in family relationships, mutual understanding and absence of conflicts with friends and society), economic situation (income level, access to housing, food, education and health care).

To save time and resources, it is advisable to analyse the time spent by customers waiting in queues, travelling to and from social service offices, filling out forms and collecting information. Social work specialists process paperwork, make phone calls and correspondence, and meet clients. Identify the coefficient of expenses for transportation of representatives of Target groups and specialists, office supplies, and remuneration of Social Service Employees.

Assessing the clients' independence level, provided with social services, involves studying the ability to make decisions about their lives, take responsibility for these decisions, defend their rights and interests, and take part in social life (study, work, engage in volunteering and charity).

Coping skills formation involves studying resilience level, self-control and self-support: the ability to recover from crises and failures, manage your emotions, stay calm in difficult situations, concentrate on tasks, motivate yourself, believe in yourself and care for yourself.

Perhaps the most important thing is to study the clients' awareness level, provided with social services, in their rights. It involves analysing their knowledge not only about their rights but also about how they are worth protecting knowledge presence about basic human rights; what rights are guaranteed by law; how to find information about their rights; what to do and where to apply in case of violation of rights; the ability to protect their rights independently or with the help of others (*Davidenko, 2023*).

The structural and functional approach aims to develop an action plan describing how the strategy's goals will be achieved. In addition, the action plan should include the time frame, budget, and responsibility of individuals. The advantages of this approach are to optimise the use of resources, ensure consistency of actions of different stakeholders, and avoid duplication and fragmentation of efforts. This approach allows us to explore how adaptation takes place to changes in technology and people's needs, which makes the digitalisation process more transparent. The structural and functional approach application allows us to consider social work as a system consisting of interrelated elements (services, processes, people, infrastructure). It is significant to note that the success of its implementation depends on several factors: political will, availability of resources and competence of participants (*Hrytsenko & Burlai, 2020*).

The practice-oriented approach involves the involvement of all stakeholders in the strategy development and implementation, including the needy segments of the population, social work professionals, government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The benefits of this approach are to provide a better understanding of customer needs and concerns, as well as the resources and capabilities of various stakeholders. It is more likely that all stakeholders will use the strategy, and they will be more sustainable and flexible, which allow it to adapt to changing needs in the context of providing social services to the target audience. The advantage of using this approach is the creation of a coordination council to ensure the participation of all interested parties in communication, consultations to collect opinions and suggestions, the creation of joint working groups to develop and implement specific aspects of the strategy, and the use of online tools to facilitate communication and cooperation. At the same time, it is worth noting that the involvement of all stakeholders can be a difficult task, which requires identifying all relevant partners, taking into account their needs and interests, and effectively leading a process that should be fair (*Ministry of Digital Transformation…, 2023*).

The evaluation and monitoring approach, which aims to develop an evaluation and monitoring system to track progress and make necessary changes to the strategy, includes interviewing

stakeholders using digital social services to get an opinion on their quality and availability, analysing the results obtained to track progress in social work, conducting focus groups and interviews to get feedback and suggestions on improving social services and digitalising social work. The advantage of this approach is that it allows you to compare the results of digital social services with the results of traditional social services and track the progress of customers using digital social services to improve communication and attract more people in need to use them (*On the Approval of the Strategy…, 2020*).

Thus, the formation of a strategy for digitalization of social work in the context of providing social services to the needy segments of the population who find themselves in the DLC with great uncertainty leads to the non-use of opportunities, the risk of lagging behind other countries and organizations that are already actively implementing digital technologies in social work. The absence of such a strategy can lead to chaotic and inefficient practices of social work, underestimation of risks, difficulty in cooperation and exchange of information between various social services and organizations, problems with accountability and evaluation, and generally neglect of people's needs.

It should consider the conditions for choosing strategies that provide for a set of actions that do not go beyond the legal framework and the implementation of which contributes to the formation of digitalization of social work in the context of providing social services.

2. Digital technologies in the activities of social services

The new philosophy of Ukraine's social policy is designed to help everyone overcome the crisis and difficult life circumstances and form the ability to move forward. For this purpose, the unified social information system (hereinafter – USIS) has been introduced into the practice of social work on the Diya portal, through which most traditional social services are transferred online. It simplifies the work of social services and increases the speed of providing such services for personal requests from citizens (*On the Approval of the Strategy…, 2020*).

USIS allows Ukrainians to use social services from the comfort of their homes:

- application for a subsidy;
- compensation for employment for internally displaced persons;
- advice on the adoption of a child;
- obtaining and canceling the status of unemployed;
- custody, custody of a child;
- verification of medical reports, etc.

It saves time and effort by making services more accessible to people with reduced mobility or those who live in remote localities. The advantage of USIS is that it has a voice-over function for the visually impaired, reduces administrative costs, and uses advanced data protection technologies to ensure the security of user information. Constant updating and adding new features and services make it a convenient tool for the population that found itself in the DLC and also a powerful system for developing e-democracy in Ukraine.

To simplify work and improve services for personal appeals of persons with disabilities, specialists use digitalised cooperation forms with public associations, enterprises and

organisations, including the "Electronic Cabinet of Persons with Disabilities" and the "eHelp" platform (*Ministry of Social Policy…, 2023*).

The digital technology "electronic cabinet of a person with a disability" is aimed at centralised accumulation, storage and automated information processing. It provides convenience and prompt provision of a package of documents to add auxiliary rehabilitation tools. Confirmation that this digital form is more and more effective is provided by the data of territorial branches of the Social Protection Fund in several regions of Ukraine, which indicate that at the beginning of 2024, 4,583 people with disabilities used this service.

The Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine with the support of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine and the United Nations Development Programme in Ukraine with financial support from Sweden created the eHelp platform. It helps to meet the urgent needs of citizens affected by Russian aggression, in particular, on the platform, you can learn how to get money from the state, leave a request for assistance or offer to support others by providing food, clothing, medicines, etc. The advantage of the eHelp platform is that it is available online around the clock from any device connected to Internet resources, designed to meet the needs of people with various types of disabilities, and has subtitles and accessible sign language. A person with a disability can use the step-by-step instructions to submit a request for assistance here, track the status of their applications, receive consultations, and communicate with social work specialists online.

Significantly, people with disabilities have the opportunity to receive services using the eHelp platform and also any vulnerable segments of the population with social statuses - a pensioner, a single father or mother, a large family, and a recipient of assistance to low-income families. The transparency and accountability of the assistance process that the platform provides allows users to see the services available to them, the steps needed to be taken to receive them, and how the information they provide will be used. By using this digital service form in social work, specialists reduce the time required to process applications and improve results for people who need help. This is especially true for internally displaced persons, who can receive assistance from the state and charitable foundations, volunteers and international humanitarian organisations.

The project "Pension Fund of Ukraine in a Smartphone" (*The Pension Fund…, 2023*) provides for the functioning of several online services, including "Pension Calculator" and "SMS-free information". Their implementation allows the user to apply for the appointment of a pension in "one touch" and get certificates on the amount of pension, on the payment of wages. The advantage of the services is that they provide an opportunity to create an electronic employment record and check data on a person's work activity, calculate a future Old-Age Pension; get information related to the appointment or recalculation of a pension, the person's insurance experience, and the employer's payment of insurance premiums. However, to register for these services, a person must have an electronic signature key or be registered on the foundation's web portal using a username and password. Therefore, the use of these services causes several problems among the population (especially the elderly), associated with the need to use specific technical means and the lack of desire, need and skills on the part of users to work with them and inability to generate an electronic signature and apply this key. This requires social work

specialists to develop a system of knowledge and skills for using services to optimise the process of providing social services (*Yehorova-Lutsenko, 2020*).

It is significant to note that digital technologies in Social Work allow people who are in DLC to participate in online forums (Facebook, Telegram and other social networks), support groups and chatbots to communicate with those who have experienced similar experiences and understand their problems. Digital technologies influence the processes of human decision-making regarding the receipt of social services. The online surveys and focus groups use allows social work professionals to receive digital feedback from the population about what services they need and how they can be improved (*Khaustova, 2023*).

Thus, digital technologies are changing the traditional practice of social work even though they, together with technological problems, give rise to several ethical issues regarding the relationship between specialists and clients, providing confidential information, adding them to traditional methods of work, form fundamentally new social services to create conditions for the population to leave DLC. In turn, it sets new challenges for higher education institutions in the context of training future specialists in social work.

3. Digital technologies in social work in the context of the war in Ukraine

The need for digitalising services in social work has become more relevant in modern conditions of military conflict because millions of people have found themselves in the category of Internally Displaced Persons (hereinafter – IDPs) who need social support and assistance from the state. It is achieved thanks to the introduction of the first stage of the unified information system of the social sphere (*On the Approval of the Regulation…, 2023*).

To date, the project "automation of IDP payments in USIS" has been implemented in this system, which won the European Social Service Award in the Digital Transformation category. The IDP living allowance implementation (under this project) begins with submitting an application through the "Diya" application for timely receipt of payments to victims of military aggression. It is advisable to focus on the fact that since 2023, the portal "Diya" has implemented the possibility of registration of four types of social assistance, namely: for adoption, for children with serious illnesses, persons with disabilities from childhood and for children to single mothers. Their advantages are speed, transparency, reduced bureaucracy and stress, accessibility, and targeted use of funds (*Ministry of Digital Transformation…, 2023*).

Yes, you can apply for adoption online at any time and from any place, saving you time and effort. Parents of children with serious illnesses do not need to spend energy visiting the authorities, which significantly reduces stress levels. After all, thanks to the online system, aid funds are guaranteed to be transferred to the account of specific children. In addition, single mothers have the option to receive information support regarding current assistance programs and other useful resources.

It is significant to note that during the military conflict, the monetisation project "eRehabilitation" was introduced for children who need special attention and support with health and recreation services. It allows the state to subsidise the cost of services and set some standards for their quality, rather than ensuring that children receive the necessary assistance in appropriate conditions (*"eRehabilitation" Programme…, 2023*).

Since 2023, the social education platform has been launched on the Web page of the Ministry of Social Policy, which was created with the support of the Government of Canada project "Support for Government Reforms in Ukraine (SURGe)", implemented by Alinea International Ltd. The platform allows you to ensure the formation of professional competencies not only among social service providers working in the social sphere but also among representatives of local self-government bodies (*Social Education Platform, 2022*).

The latest is that the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine plans to introduce "electronic case management – a systematic approach to case management, i.e., structured provision of services and support to meet individual needs" (*Khromushina, 2023*). Its specific feature is that all information about clients, their needs, plans and results is stored in a single electronic secure format. The project includes the creation of electronic cabinets for clients, social service providers and case managers. The main advantage of electronic case management is its effectiveness and the ability to focus on providing direct support to clients since most administrative and organisational tasks can be automated (*Electronic case management…, 2023*).

Thus, in the context of military operations, social work focuses on the formation of digital technologies, which allows specialists to modernise the process of providing social services, optimise its components and create conditions for preventing the occurrence of difficult life circumstances.

Discussion

Each of the above topics can be interpreted differently in the practice of social work, which depends on:
(1) further development of the socio-economic and martial law of the country;
(2) the specifics of providing social services to segments of the population in need who find themselves in difficult life circumstances;
(3) social work practices and their configuration directly in the social sphere.

The interdependence of these points requires additional analysis and modeling of their practical implementation, taking into account a complex of various factors and conditions.

Conclusion

Targeted actions of the state towards improving the strategy of social work digitalisation will gradually increase the ability to provide efficient social services to the population in need. In turn, it will help save time optimise the use of resources by social work specialists, and ensure consistency in the work of social services with various stakeholders. At the same time, it will increase the likelihood of better understanding the needs and concerns of individuals caught up in the DLC, using online tools to facilitate collaboration with them, assessing risks promptly and sharing information with various social institutions, and preventing problems with accountability and evaluating social work practices.

Under the conditions of digital technology introduction into social work practice, the population will have access to the necessary social services, such as payment of assistance, paperwork, counselling, etc. Their application will allow the implementation of targeted projects aimed at solving specific needs of the population, conducting research to identify the levels of their impact on the process of providing social services to the population included in the DLC.

Under such conditions, social work specialists will be interested in forming and developing digital technologies that can improve the social work practice and make it transparent, accessible and understandable.

In the conditions of war, digitalisation of services in social work through the introduction of the first stage of the unified information system of the social sphere is developing, which allows internally displaced persons in Ukraine, persons with disabilities from childhood, children of single mothers, children with serious illnesses not only to survive and adapt to the crisis but also to become stronger and show resilience.

Studies of the main aspects of the formation of a strategy for the digitalisation of social work give grounds to argue that this process should be of a general nature, in which the core role is played by the state, involving various stakeholders, including Social Work specialists, clients and heads of Social Services, Information Technology Developers, academic institutions and non-profit organisations, engaged in social work and perform socially useful functions. It confirms the need for further scientific research in digitalising social work, which contributes to improving the practice of Social Work and requires state support.

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