

Social work, technologies and COVID-19: A case study in Zaragoza (Aragón-Spain) about the introduction of technological tools for interviewing and social accompaniment

Diana Carolina Mira Tamayo¹, María José Gómez-Poyato², Antonio Matías-Solanilla³,
Antonio Eito-Mateo⁴

Aceptado: 29/03/2023 // Enviado: 14/12/2022

Abstract. The work of social work professionals has continued to transform throughout its history, according to social changes, and to the new demands of care and accompaniment that emerge in society. The COVID-19 pandemic was another key moment of social change and transformation and for the professional practice of social work. This article investigates how the interview evolved, especially during the period of strictest confinement. For this purpose, a study has been carried out at the Red Cross of Zaragoza, which was selected because it is a pioneer in the use of ICT for social intervention. Out of a total of 65 users selected in the organisation itself, on the premise that they had access to a cell phone and personal computer, 30 responded to two online questionnaires that were designed for the research when they joined the programme and after a few months of intervention. The results indicate a high evaluation regarding the use of ICT, which are positively valued during the intervention process, and especially the professional accompaniment, which helps to solve doubts and become familiar with the technology. The pandemic has possibly acted as a technological accelerator but also as a disruptive element that will allow the definitive integration of technology in the professional intervention of social work.

Keywords: technologies; social work; digital interviewing; social support; COVID-19

[es] Trabajo social, tecnologías y COVID-19: Un estudio de caso en Zaragoza (Aragón-España) sobre la introducción de herramientas tecnológicas de entrevista y acompañamiento social

Resumen. La labor de las y los profesionales del trabajo social ha seguido transformándose a lo largo de su historia, en función de los cambios sociales, y de las nuevas demandas de atención y acompañamiento que surgen en la sociedad. La pandemia del COVID-19 fue otro momento clave de cambio y transformación social y para la práctica profesional del trabajo social. Este artículo investiga cómo evolucionó la entrevista, especialmente durante el periodo de mayor confinamiento. Para ello, se ha realizado un estudio en la Cruz Roja de Zaragoza, que fue seleccionada por ser pionera en el uso de las TIC para la intervención social. De un total de 65 personas usuarias seleccionadas en la propia organización, con la premisa de que tuvieran acceso a un teléfono móvil y a un ordenador personal, 30 respondieron a dos cuestionarios online que se diseñaron para la investigación cuando se incorporaron al programa y tras unos meses de intervención. Los resultados indican una alta valoración en cuanto al uso de las TIC, que son valoradas positivamente durante el proceso de intervención, y especialmente el acompañamiento profesional, que ayuda a resolver dudas y a familiarizarse con la

¹ Universidad de Zaragoza
carolinamira@unizar.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6754-1384>

² Universidad de Zaragoza
mjgomez@unizar.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6592-574X>

³ Universidad de Zaragoza
amatias@unizar.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6202-6044>

⁴ Universidad de Zaragoza
antoni@unizar.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0997-5931>

tecnología. La pandemia ha actuado posiblemente como acelerador tecnológico, pero también como elemento disruptivo que permitirá la integración definitiva de la tecnología en la intervención profesional del trabajo social.

Palabras clave: tecnologías; trabajo social; entrevista digital; acompañamiento social; COVID-19

Sumario: 1. Introduction. 2. From traditional social work to electronic social work. 3. New intervention tools with greater technological support. 4. Towards a new form of work organisation. 5. Materials and Method. 5.1. Exemplifying: digital intervention method. 5.2. The digital interview. 5.3. Selection of participants. 6. Results. 7. Conclusions. 8. References.

Como citar: Mira Tamayo, D. C.; Gómez-Poyato, M. J.; Matías-Solanilla, A.; Eito-Mateo, A. (2023). Social work, technologies and COVID-19: A case study in Zaragoza (Aragón-Spain) about the introduction of technological tools for interviewing and social accompaniment. *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*, 36(2), 353-364.

1. Introduction

The role of the social worker has continued to transform with the requirements that have been demanded of them. Social workers are currently faced with a new scenario as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the objectives of the profession are modified (Pérez, Sarasola, & Balboa, 2012) and are increasingly being linked to the use of information and communication technologies (Velez, 2003). This is even more prominent in Southern European countries, which still have a gap in the use of technologies in everything related to social work intervention (Eito, Marcuello, & Gomez, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified technological. This has affected all relational spheres, including the form of interpersonal communication. It is in this environment that there has been a realization that an unprecedented change in the forms of intervention is needed (Matias, Eito, & Gomez, 2020). Consequently, a transformation in social work must be undertaken. A revolution in the paradigm of the discipline is coming to face the new challenges. One of these challenges is immersion in the digital world. The computer and the cell phone have become new travel companions. These tools will require new ways of dealing with interpersonal communication and surfing the web. However, this does not mean the disappearance of the professional but it does mean that there will be a change in the role to be faced (Días, Diniz and Hadjileontiadis, 2014).

In fact, based on the idea that the Internet and ICT were created for social and economic purposes (Vélez, 2003), our interest is focused on the interaction between technology and social intervention, so that this process of transformation and renewal can take place. ICT not only gives us the opportunity to modify and improve diagnostic environments but also in the teaching and learning of the current intervention (Días, Diniz and Hadjileontiadis, 2014). Hence, it is important to adapt work procedures to the current context after COVID-19.

In this article we wanted to collect the practical experience carried out as a result of COVID-19 as a proposal for adapting the daily intervention procedure with users through technology. This article includes a study that was carried out at the Spanish Red Cross in Zaragoza, which is a pioneer in what has been called e-social work, as a complement to the usual social work. Before the arrival of the pandemic, this entity was already working on these issues, trying to combine intervention and technologies (Red Cross, 2017). Therefore, its experience seems very relevant to us because it will allow us to analyse what the effects that Covid-19 has had in terms of way of working.

2. From traditional social work to electronic social work

The struggle to contribute to a more just and equitable society, and to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion led to the professionalisation of social work (Byrne, 2002). These antecedents include some intervention models to develop daily work and reflect on society. Today, we face a similar situation: social work must focus on creating new forms of intervention to transform and improve society, and at the same time reflect on how to transform the profession, without forgetting its mission and objectives (Salazar, 2006).

The emergence of ICT and the Internet has led to a technological revolution, a situation that has accelerated even more with the COVID-19 pandemic. Different perspectives of how digital social work or e-social work is currently understood are already appearing (López Peláez, Marcuello-Servos and Castillo de Mesa, 2020). Everything seems to indicate that social work must continue to innovate and update itself in line with social changes, especially technological changes.

Social work is not at odds with technology or ICT; on the contrary, it should benefit from them to streamline procedures and focus on what really matters, people (Chester and Glass, 2006; Lamendola, 2010; Menon and Miller, 2002). Social work professionals are dedicated to treating, preventing and solving citizens' problems. These services are mostly provided by public administrations, although for some time now the government bodies itself has been outsourcing projects, programmes and services to a network of privately managed organisations (Gilbert, López Peláez and Sánchez-Cabezudo, 2015), as is the case of the Spanish Red Cross.

This way of working comes from the industrial societies of the nineteenth century, in which processes needed to be standardized through performance procedures. This has remained inherent within the welfare states. Currently we know that social workers spend 84% of their time managing bureaucracy instead of accompanying people, which should be their main task (Castillo de Mesa, 2017a). It is not trivial to stop and think about the amount of human and economic resources that are lost in this management. This should lead us to think about whether the criticism of the inefficiency of the social services system, which always focuses on the lack of human resources, is correct. We should also look at the fact that the failure may be a systemic failure, a failure in the model itself, which is highly bureaucratized and aimed at the management of benefits. With the passage of time, obsolete intervention models have been abandoned. Today we are perhaps faced with the same dilemma and a radical change is needed in the way in which systems of care and care for people are designed (Castillo de Mesa, 2017a).

Problems change and different solutions are needed. Management, control and data recording must be changed by an alternative approach, as proposed by Cottam (2011), and go to a relational model of social welfare based on abandoning bureaucratic practices, where the social worker spends time with people and exercises a facilitating role, and where the subject is the protagonist of problem solving. ICT can be of great help in the search for these new models. ICT should be left to take care of the more administrative functions and this technology has the potential to seek practical digital models to improve intervention.

3. New intervention tools with greater technological support

During the last 20 years, the Red Cross has been developing a new way of working. This has not been an easy change, nor a consequence of Covid-19, hence our interest in analysing this entity. In this new model, the incorporation of digital applications and their application in the social work environment was a requirement (Red Cross, 2021). In this way, two very important aspects were combined: the social experience that the entity had, together with a collaboration with the Foundation of Social Technologies (TECSOS), which opened the doors to technologies to the entity (Red Cross, 2021). Since 2013, in Zaragoza there has been the implementation of a new intervention system. This implementation is marked by the use of technologies in daily work (Red Cross, 2019).

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Red Cross launched one of the largest operations in its history in Spain in mobilization of human and economic resources. The data collected from this intervention has been overwhelming, with almost 3.6 million assisted both consolidated users and new users affected by the Expedientes de Regulación Temporal de Empleo (ERTEs). All of this has been a huge challenge and it has tested the effectiveness of the intervention system supported by technologies.

Although at the beginning there was resistance to change, little by little and with the evidence that the pandemic had come to stay, that the confinements were lengthening, and so on, (Matías, Eito and Gómez, 2020) it was observed how it was necessary to change procedures and ways of doing things. What was unthinkable some time ago, appeared as necessary and essential (e.g., video calls, messaging groups, electronic records, digital signatures etc.).

The pandemic has produced a transformation in the way of thinking, acting and communicating. Technologies were incorporated as a necessary element when working. This was even experienced within the social work that was carried out in the Red Cross, which was traditionally designed on the basis of face-to-face interaction, sharing the same physical space with the user. The new needs led to a change in that conception, introducing at that time of crisis a new comprehensive framework of care for people and new ways of acting (Red Cross, 2021). It was necessary to adapt digital processes to a methodological strategy that aimed to change the processes of intervention in the COVID-19 pandemic, where the user is the protagonist and where digital items become very important.

This strategy gathers all of the necessary processes for the management of the user, from the collection and demand to the final response for the improvement of their situation, and which consists of precise computer tools for their treatment (Red Cross, 2021) and has played an important role during the pandemic. This computer tool is part of the digitalisation of the work in the entity and it has especially affected the technicians related to social work. This application helps to streamline and improve communication with the user so that they feel accompanied by the professional without the need for them to be present. This digital plan created master lines of action in a series of projects, which meant a transformation in the way of working with the vision of an agile entity, achieving excellence in services where face-to-face care (traditional social work) is already mixed with virtual care (e-social work or digital social work) incorporating new needs and application improvements (Red Cross, 2021).

The pandemic meant that the methodology had to be adapted quickly and abruptly, giving rise to a series of issues to be resolved: the digital role of the social worker, expanding training in the areas of digital competencies, interaction with digital processes and the management of technological tools. The most important thing was to raise awareness among professionals of the importance and the benefit that the implementation of this new care strategy that was meant to generate the new model that should gradually digitally transform the organisation, positioning itself as a fundamental pillar in the structure of the Red Cross (Eito, Gómez Poyato, Matías, 2020).

The entity's priority was to put technology at the service of people, taking advantage of the technological development that it was already undergoing prior to the event and thus covering the range of the needs of the population. This new vision has had an impact on the multidisciplinary teams that were part of the different projects. It has especially affected social work professionals who had to start creating intervention protocols, mostly their own, for digital attention to users. This has required the acquisition of new digital competencies that have joined the social work training itself, the traditional skills and competencies, creating a new digital social work and a new figure with a professional role.

4. Towards a new form of work organisation

After reviewing different documentation and reading articles on technological matters, our team identified a series of concepts that were key to support the theoretical framework for the implementation of the process to be developed. The first of these was the concept of remediation, which was developed by David Bolter and Richard Grusin in 1999. This concept explained how digital media influenced traditional media. In addition, the concept also referred to the importance of applying technology in communicative environments adapted to the social context existing at the time (Bolter and Grusin, 2011), a conjunction of different social factors interacting through different technological media. In other words, creating new models that had to rely on communication styles already in use. Therefore, remediation could be applied to digital media, and became a characteristic of them. To continue advancing in the search for concepts that would support a theoretical framework for intervention with users through technologies, a concept related to the individual was needed. Authors such as Bisquerra pointed out that the individual is a being that "is and feels", and that this congruence was closely related to emotions and emotional intelligence (Gadner, 1998). With these two concepts in mind, we already had the next theoretical step to build our new way of intervening and empowering people through emotional communication.

Emotional communication is linked to the ability to understand, express and listen to one's own and others' emotions. It is closely related to emotions, on the one hand, and emotional intelligence, on the other hand. The human being is not used to communicating in an emotional way because it implies a wear and tear on the person. However, the importance of this communication can be recognised because it guarantees that both the sender and the receiver empathise, are sincere and communicate more openly, avoiding conflicts in this emotional process. Emotions are a multi-causal phenomenon. First, emotions are biological and cognitive phenomena, which make sense in social terms (Blomberg, 2011). They can be classified into positive emotions, if the situation is beneficial, or negative emotions when the situation is felt as a threat, or neutral emotions that are related to hope (Casassus, 2006). It should be taken into account that sometimes, depending on the situations to which users are exposed, all types of emotions can be manifested at the same time (Santrock, 2002). Second, they are important in achieving adaptation to the social environment because they directly influence our behaviour. Meanwhile, emotional phenomena contribute to endowing the experience with a significance that is fundamental when contextualizing information (Blomberg, 2011).

Emotions can be perceptible through the computer screen in a digital interview, predisposing individuals to an emotional response (Bisquerra, 2005). This response can be controlled if the individual has emotionally worked it within their maturity process being able to plan, make decisions and execute a response to the stimulus of that emotion (Casassus, 2006), but otherwise it is spontaneous and difficult to control. Taking into account that emotion is initially involuntary and cannot be controlled, the digital interview could provide us with information on the emotion and feeling of the individual at that moment, achieving empathy with the interviewer as if it were a face-to-face interview (Casassus, 2006).

The impact of emotional intelligence and emotions can open a new way in the way of empowering the people with whom we intervene through ICT. This new process could require the construction of a new form of intervention to improve the empowerment of users by developing a stronger identity, a knowledge to understand social interactions and the environment in which they move and that will allow the generation of resources adapted to the achievement of personal or group goals. If there is no empowerment, then there is social failure. What is sought is to increase the capacities and competencies of people so that they themselves participate in their own changes.

5. Materials and Method

5.1. Exemplifying: digital intervention method

Taking into account the theoretical concepts that are described in the previous section, we began to outline our own methodology of avantgarde intervention with a clear objective—to attend in those moments where face-to-face attendance was difficult.

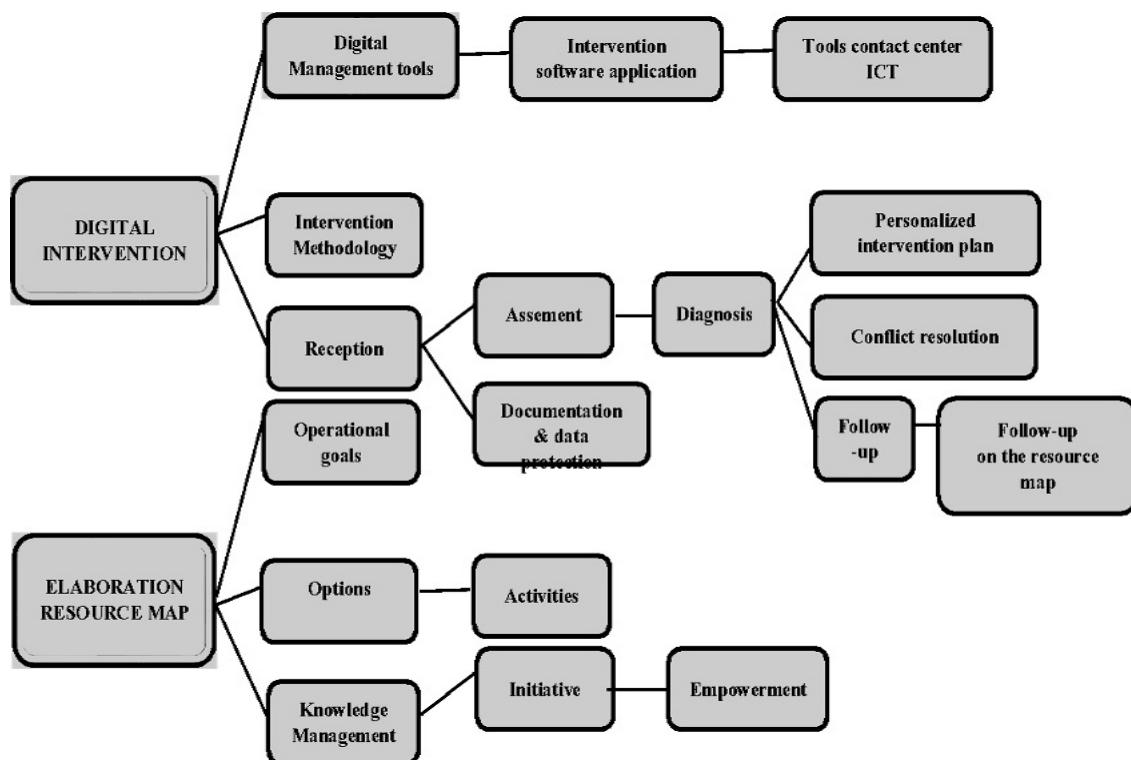
For the treatment of data, results and techniques used, the protection of the information was guaranteed by means of a randomized selection of the different users who participated. This research methodology was proposed in order to provide scientific evidence.

The first action of the team was to identify the real need, in this case the need was to streamline the care process and empower the user during the intervention and execution phase. This process took a long time. One of the main problems that we detected was the volume of users. This meant that the time between appointments had to be reduced to provide more coverage per day, which meant that the process was not streamlined. The attention times were lengthened and the users were not given a good service. It also had repercussions during the planning and execution process when developing the user’s personalised intervention plan. It was not possible to cover all of the actions marked in the person’s intervention, nor was it possible to actively follow-up on the activities.

The next action was to identify whether technologies could meet this social need. Not all needs can always be covered by technologies. In this case, we did see the possibility that technological tools could be used to speed up the process in some moments of the intervention and follow-up. One of the tools proposed was the video call (using applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet, or even the WhatsApp video call option), which would allow the professional to contact the users in a quick, simple and effective way. Communication could be maintained through digital inter-views, not only for the intervention but also for the follow-up of the users, thus saving time for both the user and the technician. We would use a traditional tool for the social worker (the interview) and transform it into a more avant-garde intervention by applying ICT. The use of these applications or software would facilitate the exchange of information between the social worker/user in the different phases of the intervention without the need to be present in person. Moreover, it would not mean a total substitution of face-to-face attendance but it would be a new form of contact to solve specific doubts, follow-up or see the status of the activities agreed between the technician and the user, and so on.

The next step was to carry out the first technical tests. Once the need had been identified, the objective had been set and the technology to be used had been identified, we proceeded to its implementation with the development of procedures, work guides, and so on for its correct use. The use of the video call was incorporated as a daily work tool, developing the method from the Contact Center in the Red Cross Assembly in Zaragoza. Years of intervention, research and observation in the field of practice resulted in the creation of a manual of good practices for the digital interview, which was applied at that time.

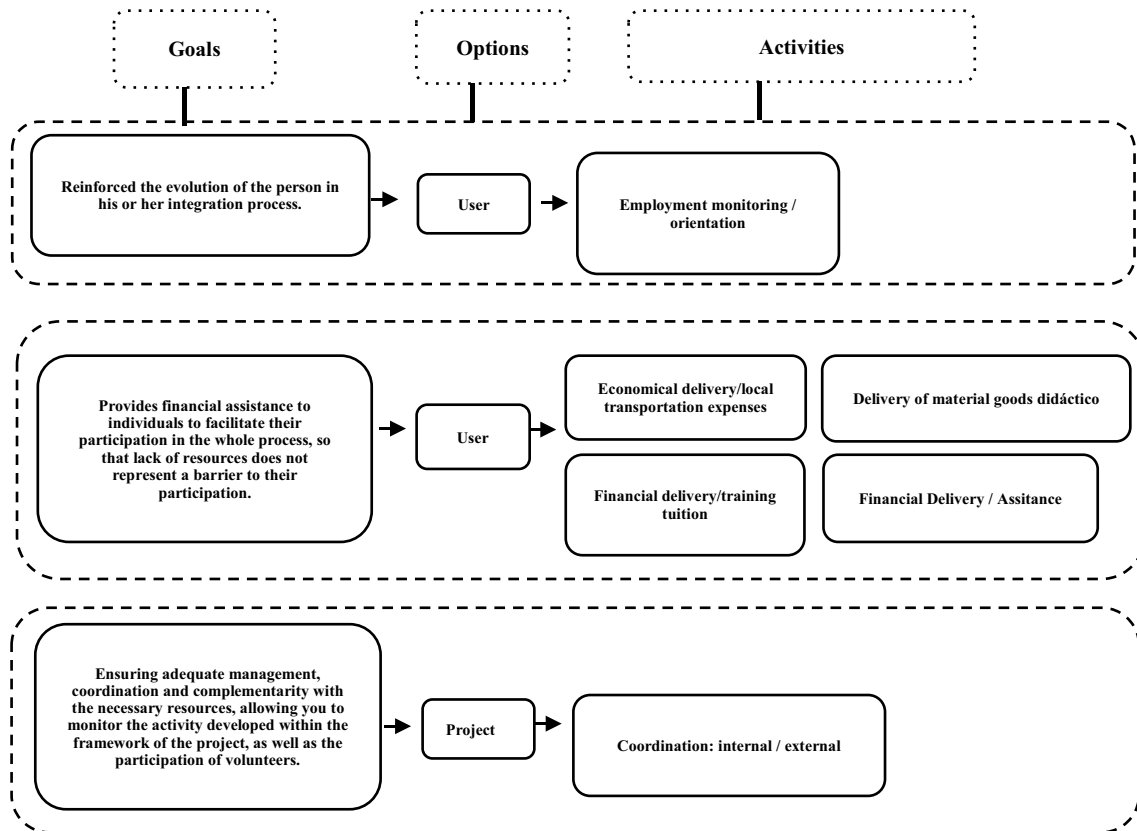
Figure 1. Digital intervention model



This digital intervention is developed on three guidelines. First, digital management tools were needed, among which would be the computer application that Red Cross makes available to its workers that would be used to collect all of the data generated, as well as the tools provided by the Contact Centre to make video calls and send messaging (e.g., email, WhatsApp, etc.).

A second point is the intervention process. This will be divided into the process itself with the Reception, where a first questionnaire will be developed through the web consultation portal where the user can express their demand or need. Once the query arrives to the social worker's email, the intervention mechanism is activated. A phone call or email is made to the applicant and a personalised interview is started. In this first contact, documents are requested to corroborate the information.

Figure 2. Digitised activity sheet



This documentation includes the data protection law for all members of the family unit. Once this information is obtained, the social worker will have previously studied the data provided by the user. The person is then contacted to make the necessary video calls and conduct digital interviews, and thus reach a proper assessment of the demand. A diagnosis is then made and a personalised intervention plan is created.

The third pillar would be the elaboration of a resource map, with objectives, options and activities that would be carried out through the digital platform and which is self-managed by the user in the achievement of the agreements that were made.

5.2. The digital interview

The purpose of this interview is twofold: first, to obtain sufficient information to carry out the intervention; and, second, to provide the necessary assistance. The questions that arose when implementing this technique through a digital environment were as follows: How do I approach the interviewee? Are the questions to be asked different from the ICT? How can I start and end an interview through ICT? How to make a digitised interview? If we apply the concept of remediation to the interview technique, then traditional media reconfigured to digital environments gave way to the digital interview. This theory gives rise to the consideration that the incorporation of new methods where there is an influence of technologies will not generate a break with traditional media or techniques but it is one of the processes of adaptation. These processes can lead to a multitude of formats that are adapted to specific and personalised areas because digital media are related to personalisation.

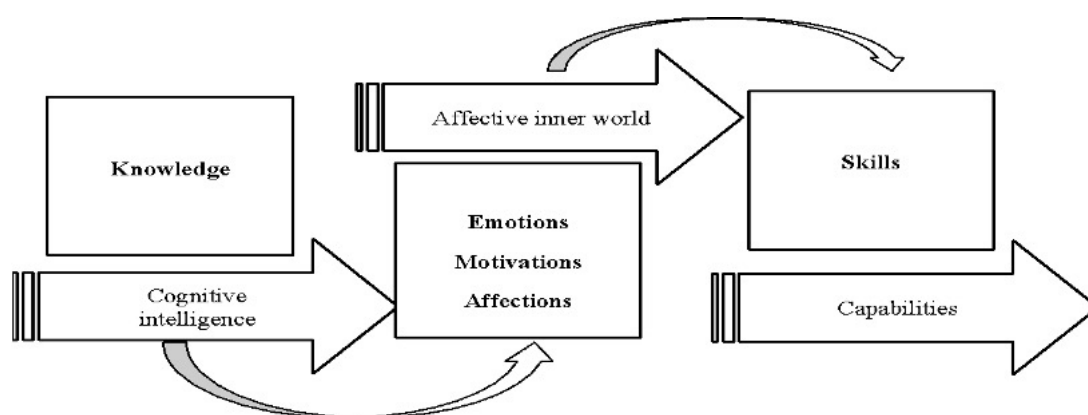
The objectives of the digital interview are the same as in a face-to-face interview—to know the topic to be discussed, to have theoretical knowledge to perform it and experience in conducting face-to-face interviews to be able to distinguish the difficulties that may appear in this type of interview. These can be more complicated when losing part of the non-verbal communication, although we will gain the opportunity of the moment because the user can conduct the interview in their own environment. This will also provide information if the

user knows how to observe and direct the questions. The clothing will give information about the user's concern to show themselves through the camera. In addition, the tone of speech, the choice of words, and so on are also important.

Digital interviews will present the same phases as a normal interview, with a reception, in which the interviewee is warmly welcomed and warned of the more or less estimated time that the interview will last (it has been proven through practice that video calls lead to a disconnection from reality and the notion of the time used is lost). An exploration is carried out during the interview, with the appropriate questions to identify the user's needs. Feedback is then given, where the questions raised are confirmed and a clarification of the agreements reached is made, which will be corroborated by the user at the end of the interview with the contribution of a document in which the agreements reached will be reflected. This document can be shared on the screen and sent via chat for the user's signature or consent.

Another aspect of concern was the communication during the digital interview. When we have a screen that avoids direct contact, then the way to empathise will be through feelings and emotions because this allows the other to get to know us and generate proximity with someone with whom you are not interacting directly. We believe that it is important to adapt emotional communication, which is closely linked to emotional intelligence, to this type of interview. Emotional communication is a balance between cognitive intelligence, the affective inner world and the capabilities of the interviewee and the interviewer.

Figure 3. The three bases of emotional communication



This is a unitary set that brings together different communication styles and skills. We will focus on things that are more important to the other person, such as their interests, motivations, personal history, and so on. Both parties must convey sincerity and expose their emotions. This is where the so-called emotional contagion factor comes into play. We must try to make the user imitate our communication style when speaking. This can be achieved through subjective expression (i.e., the use of verbs that express emotions such as believe, think, feel like, worry, dislike, feel, etc.). If the social worker talks about feelings, then the user perceives that they are talking to a serious and honest person with whom they can identify.

It is essential to draw up a confidentiality contract between the social worker/user, which allows the professional to use the information for strictly work-related purposes. This contract informs the user of the specifications for the use of this tool and the conditions that must be met. The application must be used exclusively with the means provided by the institution. This measure is established with the purpose of complying with the data protection law and to ensure that there can be no risk of data transmission to people outside work. The document also favours the "disconnection" of the professional during the non-working day, avoiding the burnout effect or professional burn-out syndrome that affects some professional sectors.

5.3. Selection of participants

The research in this article was carried out from March to December 2020. It should be remembered that during those months the most complicated moments of the COVID-19 pandemic occurred because there was strict home confinement and even limitations in the movement between populations, regions and countries. This situation conditioned the methodological choice, and we opted for a descriptive study (Corbetta, 2003) of a quantitative nature, using Google Forms technology for questionnaire generation and data collection.

Two questionnaires were designed with a double objective: to collect information at the beginning of the users' contact with the service, and to be able to contrast it some-time after the intervention.

The Red Cross in Zaragoza was selected as an entity because it has an extensive use of ICT in its social intervention processes and monitoring of people. The Program for People with Disabilities was chosen because

it makes intensive use of technology. The aim was to analyse the users' assessment of their relationship with a social entity such as the Red Cross and with the social work professionals in charge of their follow-up by means of ICT.

The arrival of the pandemic meant that we were able to ask about this period. This has brought more richness to the research because although the objective was to measure the satisfaction of the professional relationship mediated by technologies, the arrival of the pandemic and the obligatory use of ICT has only reinforced the original intention of our work. Thus, the first questionnaire was prepared to be administered to new users when they joined the program at the beginning of the year; the second questionnaire (Questionnaire-2), which was shorter than the first, was given to study participants in December 2020.

The universe of the study was 119 new users of the aforementioned Persons with Disabilities programme who joined in 2020. All of them were asked for their consent to participate in this research as they joined the programme. Of these 119 users, 65 gave their approval to participate, the rest did not answer or were not interested in participating. Of these 65, 30 were finally selected, who were given the two questionnaires of the present investigation.

The final selection of the 30 participants in the study was made on the basis of two requirements: first, ability to access and use ICT; and, second, having had to interact with social work professionals through technology. The first requirement (i) was their ability to access a smartphone and a computer and their ability to know how to use them. These were the minimum requirements that the team thought would allow access to ICT during the follow-up process from the Program for People with Disabilities. Therefore, people and families with more occasional access to ICT or without any of these devices were discarded because without them they would not be able to carry out some of the tasks that would be entrusted to them by the Red Cross. The second requirement (ii) was that they had all been attended by the assessment service during the pandemic, having had to use technological tools (cell phone and computer) in their relationship with social work professionals, either for follow-up via video-call interviews, for sending scanned documentation, for signing digital documents, and so on. For this pre-selection, we were assisted by a professional from the institution and a member of the research team working in that entity.

They were informed of the pre-selection requirements, and helped to contact the users and send the questionnaires. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained at all times and their consent to participate in the study was obtained.

The participation of the users and the collection of information took the form of their response to two online questionnaires. Questionnaire 1 consisted of 10 questions divided into four blocks or sections. The first related to general data, a second block referred to digital competencies, a third block related to technological tools and their expectations. This questionnaire was sent at the time they agreed to participate in the study, and the responses were recorded in the period March-May 2020.

The second questionnaire contained three questions asking participants to rate their satisfaction with the new intervention methodology. This questionnaire was provided to the 30 study participants in the month of December 2020, with all responses being obtained in that month.

Table 1. The questions used in both questionnaires

Questionnaire-1	Questions
Block I Sociodemographics	Age Gender
Block II Digital skills	Information area Communication area Content creation area Problem-solving area Security area
Block III Technological Tools	Use of ICT ICT training Impact of ICT before and after Covid19
Questionnaire-2	Questions
Satisfaction	Assessment of the methodology Professional support Level of personal satisfaction

Regarding the ethical issues, this research project was funded by the Red Cross, and, therefore, has the ethical approval of this entity. However, the Red Cross in Zaragoza has not been involved in the analysis and dissemination of the results.

6. Results

The results that we obtained have shown important and very rapid changes in the way in which the participants in the study have adapted to the new intervention methodology. Digitalisation is a fact that has been consolidated in the entity as a result of the pandemic. However, the adaptation of professionals, systems and structures to social intervention with technologies has been very complicated given the digital divide. The need to attend to the users has forced the implementation of technologies at all levels, which was unthinkable before the pandemic.

With regard to the first questionnaire, the most important results are the following. The sample of subjects is made up of 30 users out of the 65 who were initially assessed for participation. In total, 80% are women and 19% are men. The average age of the group ranges from 35 to 55 years (58%). The sample of subjects in this study is important because those selected at the beginning were assessed for their willingness to use technological tools, their interest in training and participating in this experience, as well as their willingness to continue using this method over time to continue with their personalised intervention plan and follow-up of the demands.

The analysis of the second block of questions on digital competencies will analyse the sections of the areas of Information, Communication, Content Creation, Security and Problem Solving. The areas were not developed with the 25 items that compose them, but a selection of the most important items was made to validate this research.

The results obtained were in relation to the Information Area, 60% of respondents have facility to navigate in digital environments and are able to select digital information from the Internet, and 40% are able to store data. The information provided by these data leads us to interpret that in the Information Area the respondents are at an apt level of digital competence. Regarding the Communication Area, three items were worked on: ability to work with digital tools; send emails, use chat and browse social networks; and the use of public digital services. In the first item of their ability to work and use digital tools, 55% of respondents feel quite capable of using digital tools. In response to the second item asking whether they know how to send emails, use chat and browse social networks, 80% of the respondents in both groups answered that they know a lot in this regard. In the third item, the results obtained to the question on the use of public digital services, the answers obtained have been more variable. The percentages range from 20% to 55%, not all respondents acknowledge having the same fluency to manage within the electronic records of the different digital services offered by the administration.

The third section analyses the questions related to the area of content creation. In this section, two items have been worked on. The first item related to this area asked about the respondents' ability to create and edit texts and images. The answers showed that 53% are able to create and edit text and images; and 80% are good at recording videos and photos, and then sending them over the Internet.

The next questions focused on the Security Area. In this section, the items were grouped into a single question where respondents were asked about knowing how to protect data and share it securely. In total, 80% were somewhat capable of performing the actions they were asked about, but acknowledged that they did not have the necessary skills and abilities to feel secure in this area.

The last section inquired about the Problem-Solving Area. In this section, as in the previous section, the items were grouped into a single question to make it easier for respondents to understand. This question referred to the ability to identify and solve technical problems. In total, 75% recognised between nothing or very little about identifying and solving problems.

Table 2. Results obtained in the main areas of digital competence (questionnaire 1, block I)

Areas of digital competence	Results of the items by area of digital competence	Responses (%)
Information Label	Ability to navigate in digital environments	
	Ability to select digital information from the Internet	60%
	Ability to store data	40%
Communication	Ability to work with digital tools	
	Ability to work and use digital Use and management of email, chat and social networking sites	55%
	Use and management of public digital services	20%-55%
Content creation	Ability to create digital content	
	Ability to create and edit texts and images	53%
	Ability to record videos, photos and send them over the Internet	80%

Areas of digital competence	Results of the items by area of digital competence	Responses (%)
Security	Ability to protect data and share information securely	
	Little knowledge or few skills and abilities to feel confident in this area	80%
Problem Solving	Ability to identify and solve technical problems	
	Knows nothing or very little about solving technical problems	75%
Information Label	Ability to navigate in digital environments	
	Ability to select digital information from the Internet	60%
	Ability to store data	40%
Communication	Ability to work with digital tools	
	Ability to work and use digital Use and management of email, chat and social networking sites	55%
	Use and management of public digital services	20%-55%
Content creation	Ability to create digital content	
	Ability to create and edit texts and images	53%
	Ability to record videos, photos and send them over the Internet	80%
Security	Ability to protect data and share information securely	
	Little knowledge or few skills and abilities to feel confident in this area	80%
Problem Solving	Ability to identify and solve technical problems	
	Knows nothing or very little about solving technical problems	75%

The third block of questions referred to technological tools and to the increased use in an 80% during the COVID-19 pandemic. This increase has been seen above all in the use of telematic means to relate with different areas such as education, health, social services, and so on. In many cases, the respondents emphasise the support provided by the professional through online consultations. It should also be noted that those surveyed have incorporated this training into their daily lives, extending it to those living with them. Some 50% of the participants said that they had incorporated some of the tools into their daily use, as in the case of the application tool related to video calls.

Finally, the use of technological tools before the pandemic was lower only in relation to telephone calls. Respondents were asked whether in the near future the incidence of technologies would decrease their use or not. In total, 45% believe that it is possible that it will decrease once all processes are normalized, while 55% believe that it will be maintained because they are forcing the citizen to do so.

Table 3. Increased use of technological tools during the pandemic (Questionnaire 1, Block II)

Questions	Responses	
	Yes	No
Do you think the use of ICT has increased during the pandemic?	80%	20%
Have you incorporated any digital tools into your daily use?	50%	50%
In the near future will the incidence of technology use increase?	55%	45%

In relation to the results obtained in the second questionnaire that was passed to users regarding satisfaction with the new method used, the answers were very clear. In total, 76% of the respondents rated the methodology used for the digital interview positively, compared to 24% who (while recognising that it was fine) still preferred the face-to-face interview and the possibility of interacting with the professional.

With regard to the question as to whether the respondents felt accompanied during the process by the professional, 80% valued the experience positively and would advise including some digitalised interview session in the intervention process, especially in case follow-up, but not so much in diagnosis and intervention planning.

The last question asked the respondents to rate their satisfaction with the method and whether it would be necessary to dispense with the prespecialty in the different services. The majority of the respondents stated that it would not be possible to dispense with prespecialty in its entirety, but that it would be possible to reduce the number of face-to-face visits to the organisation. With regard to their level of personal satisfaction with the

new method, the responses were multiple but all of them emphasised a great deal of independence and a feeling of empowerment.

Table 4. Questionnaire 2. Level of user satisfaction with the new method used

Questions	Responses	
	Yes	No
Do you feel comfortable with the new interview method used?	76%	24%
Did you feel accompanied during the process by the professional?	80%	20%
Do you feel satisfied, in general terms, with the service received?	45%	55%

7. Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the process and has forced the profession to change the way in which it works and to ask itself whether it recognises itself. Let us not forget that in the year 2020, most countries and people were living through complicated periods of isolation, separation and confinement. But social problems did not stop or become isolated. People and users had to continue to be cared for, and in the face of the limitations caused by the virus and the legal measures adopted to minimise its effects and combat it, an ally appeared—ICT. Although it was already an old acquaintance, on this occasion it went from being an aid to a central, fundamental tool that helped to continue assisting people, to weave networks, and to make them feel that they were close to professionals and that they would continue to receive help.

Our research was designed with the objective of seeing how this process of professional work through technologies was being carried out before the pandemic. The pandemic broke out at the time of implementation, which allowed us to ask about this unknown situation. The results show that the situation resulting from the pandemic has led to a more intensive use of technologies, the users clearly reflect this and express the incorporation of new applications to their daily lives (especially with regard to video calls and video chats).

Above all, we want to highlight how, without ruling out a more traditional and more face-to-face social work, users point out that, after getting to know the professionals, knowing who they are, and establishing the guidelines for the professional relationship and the objectives to be achieved, it is perfectly possible to carry out a remote follow-up supported by technologies. We believe that this hybridisation in the intervention is very interesting and a starting point to be analysed for subsequent interventions. Once a basis of trust, objectives and even personal knowledge have been established, discarding the idea that there is a robot behind a procedure, users are more relaxed and more inclined to accept online follow-up, electronic document delivery, remote interviews, and so on. And in turn, this first face-to-face access, in a traditional way, allows us to avoid creating barriers to access services, and so prevent greater vulnerability or exclusion to people who need access to social services. The digital divide and the social divide are present, and therefore (as we have done in this research) we must take into account that there are people who will have lower digital skills and for them to reduce the service or condition access to this technological knowledge can be an insurmountable obstacle. Technology is an aid, it cannot be a prerequisite or the exclusive criterion for access, or we run the risk of increasing the vulnerability of many people. We have already seen how after establishing the first personal contact, and always counting with skills and means of access, technology is less scary, does not generate rejection (even with proper accompaniment), and the degree of satisfaction is very high. Therefore, digital interviews and online follow-ups are another tool that should gain weight in the daily work of social work professionals.

But if this element is important, it is no less important to highlight that ICT can also help us to rediscover social work, or at least to return to the essence and origins of the profession. In the face of almost controlled and bureaucratized interventions, the appropriate use of technology could lead to reduce this burden for professionals and allow them to focus on their true objective, which would be the empowerment of people through accompaniment and work centred on their problems and not on their papers and justifications.

We believe that this is the time to review the way in which ICT is contemplated, to think of it as a valuable tool for intervention, which can give us back quality time to devote to people, and that (above all) our users do not see a problem in an adequate, explained and proportional use of technology in the professional relationship.

8. References

Bisquerra Alzina, R. (2005). La educación emocional en la formación del profesorado. *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado*, 19(3), 95-114. <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=27411927006>

- Blomberg, O. (2011). Concepts of cognition for cognitive engineering. *International Journal of Aviation Psychology*, 21(1), 85 – 104
- Bolter, D. J. & Grusin, R. (2011). Inmediatez, hipermediación, remediación. *CIC. Cuadernos de Información y Comunicación*, 16, 29-57. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/935/93521629003.pdf>
- Byrne, D. (2002). *Social Exclusion*. Open University Press.
- Castillo de Mesa, J. (2017). *El Trabajo Social el reto de la transformación digital*. Thomson Reuters Aranzadi.
- Chester, A. & Glass, C. (2006). Online counselling: A descriptive analysis of therapy services on the Internet. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 34, 145-160.
- Corbetta, P. (2003). *Metodologías y técnicas de investigación social*. McGraw-Hill.
- Cottam, H. (2011). Relational welfare. *Soundings*, 48(1), 134-144.
- Dias, S.B., Diniz, J.A., & Hadjileontiadis, L.J. (2014). Data Collection Strategies. In: *Towards an Intelligent Learning Management System Under Blended Learning*. *Intelligent Systems Reference Library*, vol 59. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02078-5_4
- Gadner, H. (1998). *Inteligencias múltiples. La teoría de la práctica*. Paidós.
- Casassus, J. (2006). *La educación del ser emocional*. Cuarto Propio-Indigo.
- Gilbert, N., López Peláez, A., & Segado Sánchez-Cabezudo, S. (2015). What contributions can Social Work make in the 21 century? Perspectives from the USA and Spain. *Arbor*, 191(771), a199. <https://doi.org/10.3989/arbor.2015.771n1001>
- Gómez Poyato, M. J., Eito Mateo, A. y Matias Solenilla, A. (2021). Aceleración del Trabajo Social Digital por la COVID-19: Estudio de caso. En Paula Méndez y J. Castillo de Mesa (Coords.), *Trabajo Social Digital frente a la Covid-19* (pp. 121-136). Thomson Reuters-Aranzadi.
- Lamendola, W. (2010). Social Work and social presence in an online world. *Journal of Technology in the Human Services*, 28, 108-119.
- López Peláez, A., Marcuello, Ch., & Castillo de Mesa, J. (6 de mayo 2020). *Nuestro Punto de Partida: Trabajo Social Digital /Digital Social Work/ eSocial work*. Recuperado de: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKYp-ixWbjg>
- Matías, A., Eito, A., & Gómez, M.J. (2020). Los servicios comarcales de atención primaria y la COVID-19. En tránsito hacia la nueva normalidad. *Servicios Sociales y Política Social. XXXVII (monográfico especial)*, 177-191. <https://www.serviciosocialesypoliticassocial.com/los-servicios-sociales-comarcales-de-atencion-primaria-y-la-covid-19-en-transito-hacia-la-nueva-normalidad>
- Menon, G. M., & Miller-Cribbs, J. (2002). Online Social Work practice: Issues and guidelines for the profession. *Advances in Social Work*, 3, 104-116.
- Pérez, M., Sarasola, J. L. & Balboa, M. (2012). Trabajo Social y nuevas tecnologías. *Portularia*, 12, 57-60.
- Red Cross. Cruz Roja. (2017). *Plan de implantación de Proximidad Local y Respuesta Local*. <https://www2.cruzroja.es>
- Red Cross. Cruz Roja. (2019). *Empleando digital. Innovación para la inserción laboral*. <https://www2.cruzroja.es/-/en-marcha-la-segunda-fase-del-proyecto-empleandodigital>
- Red Cross. Cruz Roja. (2021). *Cruz Roja: Cada vez más cerca de las personas*. <https://www2.cruzroja.es>
- Red Cross. Cruz Roja. (2022). *Cruz Roja: Informe de Vulnerabilidad Social*. Nº 23 <https://www2.cruzroja.es/vulnerabilidad>
- Salazar, M. C. (2006). El proceso de profesionalización del Trabajo Social. *Trabajo Social*, 8, 27-36.
- Santrock, J. (2002). *Psicología de la Educación*. McGraw-Hill.
- Velez, O. (2003). *Reconfigurando el Trabajo Social*. Espacio Editorial.