

**Publisher**<http://jssidoi.org/esc/home>**E-SOCIAL WORK AS A NEW FORM OF PROVIDING SOCIAL SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA****Zuzana Draková¹, Anna Bérešová²**¹University of Trnava, Faculty of Health and Social Work, Univerzitné námestie 1, 918 43 Trnava, Slovak Republic²St. Elizabeth's University of Health and Social Work in Bratislava, n.o., Detached workplace of Blessed Sára Salkaházi, Rožňava, Kósu - Schoppera 141/22, 048 01 Rožňava, Slovak RepublicE-mails: ¹zuzana.drakova@truni.sk; ²beresovaanka@gmail.com

Received 15 February 2026; accepted 10 June 2026; published 30 September 2026

Abstract. E-social work is a modern approach to providing social services through information and communication technologies (ICT). Digitalization and technological progress create new opportunities for more effective communication with clients, monitoring their needs and coordination between professionals and institutions. Electronic platforms not only enable faster provision of assistance but also expand the reach of services, thus opening up space for innovation in social work. The rise of e-social work was driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated the rapid adoption of digital solutions to maintain social services despite restrictions on personal contact. While international research increasingly explores the digital transformation of social work, empirical studies on this topic remain scarce in Slovakia. This study aimed to assess the status of e-social work implementation in Slovakia and explore social workers' perceptions of this new practice. A quantitative cross-sectional study was conducted targeting social workers in the social service sector with experience in e-social work. Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed through the Survio.sk platform between September and December 2023. The questionnaire included 18 items, both closed and open-ended, focusing on the advantages, disadvantages, and thematic scope of e-social work. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS ver. 24.0. The study provides insights into how e-social work is perceived and practiced in Slovakia, contributing to the broader discourse on digital transformation in social services.

Keywords: e-social work; digital transformation; social services; perception of social workers; quantitative research**Reference** to this article should be made as follows: Draková, Z., Bérešová, A. 2026. E-social work as a new form of providing social services in Slovakia. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 14(1), 10-22. <https://doi.org/10.9770/t2386727473>**JEL Classifications:** I1, I18, I14**1. Introduction**

Globalization and technological change - processes that have cyclically accelerated over the past fifteen years - have created a new global economy that is technology-driven, information-driven and knowledge-driven. Information and communication technologies (ICT), which include radio and television, as well as newer digital technologies such as computers, the Internet, mobile phones, are described as potentially powerful tools for enabling change and reform not only in education but also in the sphere of social service provision in the 21st century. Information and communication technologies (ICT) is an extended term for information technology (IT), which emphasizes the role of communication and the integration of telecommunications, computers and the necessary software, middleware, storage and audiovisual systems that allow users to access, store, transmit and manipulate information. ICT competence means having the technical and cognitive skills to appropriately access, use, develop, create and communicate information using technological tools.

Historically, the earliest mentions of the use of modern technology in social work date back to the 1980s, when online support groups were documented. In the late 1990s, social workers began using information technology, including the internet and professional websites, and connecting through online chats (Reamer, 2015).

2. Review of literature

Cwikel and Friedmann (2019) talk about four generations of the establishment of information and communication technologies in social work. The first generation, during the 1980s, is associated with the use of computer databases for statistical purposes. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the second generation introduced expert systems, computer-assessment programs, therapeutic games, and treatment programs. The third generation, in connection with the development of the Internet, uses e-therapy and e-health to provide psychological interventions, health care, and psychoeducation. At the same time, social workers communicate with clients online or use web-based treatment programs. The fourth generation is characterized by advanced technologies such as therapeutic simulation programs, games, and 3D virtual environments.

The world of the 21st century is increasingly characterized by robotization and technologization of individual professions. ICT has caused a revolution in almost every area of society. Although social work in its activities and the social services offered is not directly threatened by replacing the position of a human social worker, within the framework of the best possible availability of social services it is affected by digitalization and some social services are becoming available within the framework of e-social work (Robles & Cano, 2019; Bruni et al., 2020; Aguilar-Idañez et al., 2020; Cavlak et al., 2026).

The COVID-19 pandemic period has globally accelerated this process. Social work methods in an online environment have also begun to be applied in the field of social work (Kapur et al., 2025). In Slovakia, we are also already recording efforts of cybersocial work, mainly in online counseling. ICT has gradually penetrated the field of social work over the years, eventually becoming an indispensable part of it (Afrouz & Lucas, 2023).

In addition to software and information systems, distance counselling is also used in Slovakia to make life easier for many people in difficult situations and crises. These are not applications directly related to and used by social workers, but they can help social clients with attacks of panic, anxiety, feelings of threat, depression (e.g., Nepanikar.sk).

As Markovič (2022) states, social workers have been using e-mails, electronic case reports, online resources for professionals, online education, assistive technologies intended for the blind, social networks, various software for working with information and data for a long time in the context of digital technologies. The author further states that, as of December 2021, some digital communication channels were already in use in Slovakia, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Digital communication channels in social work in the Slovak environment

Communication channel	Link
Online consulting (phone, chat, email, Skype, forum)	https://www.linkaderi.sk/domov/
Telephone counseling	https://linkanezabudka.sk/
Video counseling	https://www.vztahoveporadenstvo.sk/copy-of-podpora-v-rodicovstve
Cybertherapy	https://notalone.sk/
Self-service web interventions	https://www.union.sk/union-dusevne-zdravie
Social networks	https://www.facebook.com/ipcko
Mobile or computer applications	StressHelp

Source: Markovič (2022, p.31)

Abroad, the situation is much better, with a wide range of applications available that are directly intended for social workers, social work students or for diverse client groups (e.g., Caretivity, The Savy Social Worker, Social Work Mentor, DMS-5 etc.) (Vašková, Lovašová 2021; Neeraj & Nirmala, 2025).

Telephone communication for people with social problems is currently being replaced by online chat, which is considered synchronous communication because it takes place in real time. Reamer (2015) states that some social workers use avatars, digitally created graphic images, in individual or group counseling services. The online space offers a number of questionnaires focused on various social problems. Based on the answers, participants receive electronic feedback generated by artificial intelligence software and, if necessary, the service of a clinical social worker (Reamer 2015).

E-social work is becoming a new specialization in a dual sense: as a specific area for professional intervention and as a cross-cutting area that affects the lives of people, groups and institutions, as well as the professional activities of social workers (through e-government, interventions using new technologies to solve traditional social problems that are redefined in the technological environment).

Within the framework of e-social work, it is about providing social services such as "distance counseling also referred to as e-therapy, cybertherapy, web counseling or cyber counseling... treatment of addictions, social support for various groups, one of which is the group of patients with chronic diseases" (Tóthová & Žiaková, 2018, p. 3).

In their paper, Almáši and Šavrnichová (2020) refer to social work conducted with clients in cyberspace via digital technologies as cybersocial work, defined as online contact between a social worker and a client. We agree with Markovič (2022), who states that e-social work is not a new, separate field of social work, but that information and communication technologies and the online environment enable the modification of social work's methods, forms, and techniques.

Berzin et al. (2015) point out that technological innovations in social work are not only about products and platforms, but also about integrating these changing products to meet social work goals. Various technologies can be used in ways not previously considered: mobile technologies, social media, robotics, and games, including gamification, offer ways to change how social workers understand and intervene in social problems in the 21st century. There are technologies yet to be discovered that could one day be integrated into social work to solve problems. On the other hand, the authors emphasize that the use of digital technologies provides a way to prepare social workers for today's clients. The integration of multiple technology platforms into the training space prepares social workers to practice with people whose relationships are ultimately completely influenced by technology (Berzin, 2015). However, the digital impersonal environment can cause insufficient perception of non-verbal communication, body language, and lack of sensory experience, which can result in overlooking hidden risks, for example when communicating with children or in cases of domestic violence. These reasons only confirm that e-social work is not suitable for all situations.

Tóthová and Žiaková (2018) also point out that the online way of communication, with its poorer and sterile form compared to personal communication, can cause loneliness, depression and weakening of social ties.

López Peláez and Marcuello-Servós (2018) identify opportunities to transform social work in the digital realm, particularly through new digital intervention strategies, as a number of new digital procedures have opened up a wider range of research, therapies, interventions, and social networks.

Giffords (2009, in Vašková & Lovašová, 2020) sees new technologies as a potential to encourage and build global communities of social workers who can share information with foreign colleagues, and can help their clients make contacts in communities with similar interests.

We agree with Markovič's (2022, p. 33) assertion that gradually, even in the non-pandemic period, a "hybrid work model, in which workers spend part of their working time in the office and part working from home.... digital technologies will also become an essential and irreversible element of social work practice, which will also need to be understood as a hybrid practice, integrating digital practices, such as video calls, chat and self-service web interactions, with face-to-face interactions. "The main benefits of online social services include their temporal, geographical and financial availability (Tóthová, Žiaková, 2018).

Berzin et al. (2015) perceive the benefits of e-social work for society as being flexible and on-demand services or personalized services with an individual pace. At the same time, they point out the possibility of assessing a social problem in real time, immediate intervention and feedback. On the other hand, two main problems are visible in implementing information and communication technologies in social work, namely the digital divide at the level of regions and individual households and digital literacy, or illiteracy. Digital literacy is a typical feature of the younger, educated, qualified, socially strong and urban part of the population. On the contrary, the economically inactive, lower qualified, socially weaker and rural part of the population (retirees, unemployed) is characterized by a higher representation of the digitally illiterate.

Other significant risks of using digital technologies in social work include that it can lead to loss of identity, loss of classic skills, loss of freedom or the emergence of risky forms of behavior such as improper lifestyle, false identity, cyberbullying (Vašková & Lovašová, 2021).

Wilkerson and O'Sullivan (2023) present areas within the framework of developing digital social work in view of the COVID-19 pandemic measures. Figure 1 presents their digital practice map, grounded in social justice as a core value of social work. Social justice is applied in this map through digital equality and the more recently developed principle of data justice. The ethical standards of digital equality and data justice represent social justice of access to technology as a human right. In addition to accessibility, digital justice encompasses digital literacy and digital citizenship.

The authors of the Digital Social Work Map Wilkerson and O'Sullivan (2023) have identified six practice areas:

- Support - associated with the rise of social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter. These online support groups operating on social media sites are a rapidly developing and expanding area of digital practice. Sometimes called “virtual communities,” they are thematically diverse but share a common focus on managing stress and uncertainty. The growth of online support is based on information and the ease of development and use of communication technologies. Online support systems, operated through a variety of inexpensive and readily available synchronous and asynchronous technologies, provide a means to specialize in topics that would be largely unavailable in an in-person setting.
- Identity - the foundation of identity-based social action is self-concept, which involves integrating our personal and social identities. Developing a sense of self can be a lengthy process and a significant struggle, especially for members of oppressed and vulnerable groups. Identity-based social action focuses on using community action to achieve social justice for individual or cross-sectional aspects of self-concept that have been threatened, challenged, or otherwise negatively impacted by the dominant community.
- Community or community action is defined as collective action by community members, drawing on the power of numbers, participatory processes, and indigenous leadership, to reduce power differentials and achieve shared goals of social change. Online community actions and initiatives are influenced by social work values that focus on macro-level change.
- Psychotherapy is on the map for social work digital practice based on the urgent need to restore behavioral practice after the pandemic lockdowns of 2020.
- Education is on the map because of its importance in training for digital practice within the e-social work methodology and strengthening the necessary digital skills.
- Psychoeducation is being developed for digital practice to apply elements of digital individual and digital group work within a social problem-solving model (Wilkerson & O'Sullivan, 2023).

If information and communication technologies within e-social work are “used carefully and effectively, they can improve various methods of social work (for example, service provision, education and research)” (Vašková & Lovašová, 2021, p. 21), however, it is necessary to pay attention to ethical principles and a code of ethics (Banks et al., 2025).

3. Methodology of Research

The boom of e-social work occurred during the COVID period, when pandemic measures limited personal contact in individual spheres of society to a minimum. It was necessary to find methods and forms for

communication and solving clients' social problems. One of the options was to use the online space to provide counseling, therapy and other social services. Abroad, more and more research is devoted to the digital transformation of individual services, including social work, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of Slovak social work, we find fewer empirical works on the described issue.

These facts were the motivation for conducting a nationwide study, the aim of which was: 1. to examine the status of the implementation of e-social work in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, 2. to determine the perception of e-social work as a new practice of social work among social workers working in social services.

Materials and methods

The research methods are based on a quantitative design. We present selected aspects of a descriptive cross-sectional study of subjective experiences and perceptions of e-social work by Slovak social workers in social services. We considered all social workers working in the network of social service providers in Slovakia as the basic set. The sample set consisted of social workers with experience in e-social work. Individual social service providers in Slovakia were approached during the selection process.

Data collection was carried out using a self-constructed questionnaire. We used a questionnaire created on the Survio.sk platform to reach as many social service providers with experience in e-social work as possible through the online space. We asked the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Bratislava, the Slovak Republic, for approval of the research and assistance in distributing the online questionnaire. We collected data in September - December 2023 via the Survio.sk platform.

The questionnaire contained 18 items, both closed- and open-ended. Some items were in the form of an ordinal scale, allowing responses on a 5-point or 4-point scale. The items aimed to identify the advantages and disadvantages of e-social work and the topics or social problems the respondents addressed through it. Since e-social work is a new form of social work, we also included open-ended questions in which respondents stated their own perceptions of e-social work compared with social work in direct contact. We thus obtained a clear picture of social workers' views on e-social work in the Slovak Republic. Given the partial nature of this study, we will not present the answers to all questionnaire items. For publication, we analyzed the obtained data using descriptive statistics in SPSS ver. 24.0.

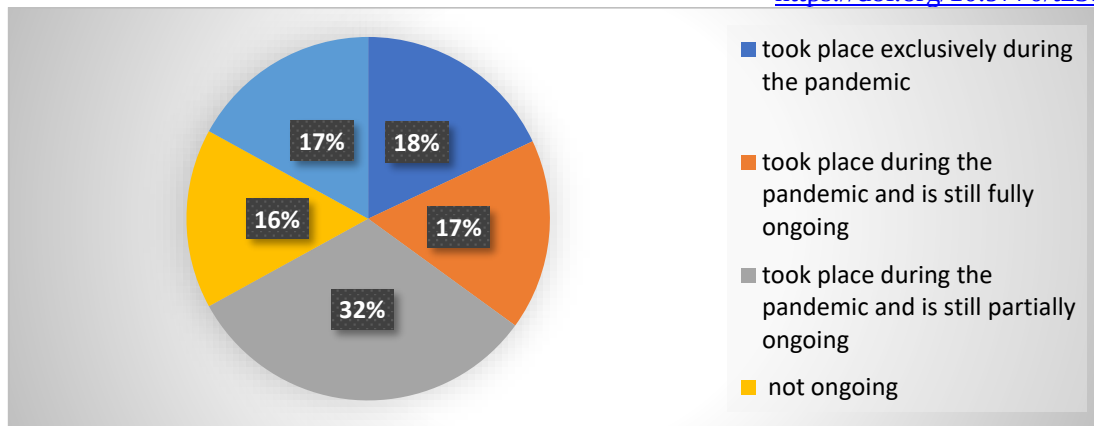
Results

A total of 252 respondents participated in the research conducted via the Survio.sk platform and completed an online questionnaire. Data collection was conducted electronically, enabling a wider range of participants and ensuring the anonymity of responses. This method of administering the questionnaire also contributed to faster processing of the obtained data.

The gender structure of the researched set was significantly dominated by women, who accounted for 225 respondents, representing 89.3% of the total. Men were represented at 27, i.e., 10.7%. Given this significant imbalance in the representation of the sexes, the comparison of the results by gender is not sufficiently relevant or statistically balanced.

The average age of the respondents was 44.3 years, with a standard deviation of 9.736, indicating a relatively variable age distribution in the research sample. The largest group was women aged 41 to 50, specifically 74 respondents. The research sample was therefore concentrated in the middle-aged category.

We investigated the status of e-social work implementation in Slovakia, focusing on its continued use in social service facilities even after pandemic measures. Graph 1 describes the analysis of responses in relative frequencies.

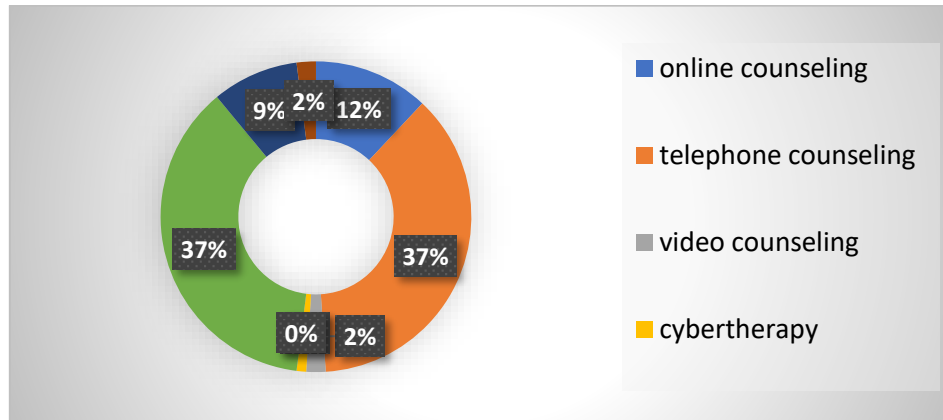


Graph 1. Implementation of e-social work in social service facilities according to respondents

Source: own processing by the authors

The findings describe that e-social work is gradually becoming known and commonly used in everyday social work. 44 respondents (18%) stated that e-social work was used in the given social facility only during the COVID-19 pandemic, when personal contact was limited, and 43 respondents (17%) indicated that e-social work was carried out during the pandemic period and continues to be fully implemented at present. 81 respondents (32%) had experience with e-social work during the pandemic, and e-social work is also currently implemented to a limited extent at their social service facility. A total of 168 (67%) noted the implementation of e-social work in the provision of social services.

In Graph 2, we describe the results of the analysis of the item that determines which information and communication channels and forms of e-social work respondents use or have experience with.



Graph 2. Forms of e-social work used by respondents

Source: own processing by the authors

Respondents could mark more than one option in the offered options. The results show that telephone counselling and e-mail form of communication dominated. Online counselling was marked by 71 respondents (12%), and text messages were used by only 56 respondents. Other forms are used by respondents only to a small extent for immediate communication with a social client.

We achieved objective 2 by analyzing the answers in open items aimed at identifying the advantages and disadvantages of e-social work from the respondents' perspective. Based on the answers, we classified the respondents into three groups: in the 1st group were respondents who have experience with e-social work, especially during the pandemic, and perceive certain advantages for selected groups of the population. In the 2nd group we included the answers of respondents who criticize e-social work and do not perceive it as a suitable form of social work since there is no personal direct contact. The 3rd group of respondents has no personal

experience with e-social work and cannot assess its advantages, disadvantages and provide suggestions for improving the conditions for e-social work.

Based on a qualitative analysis of individual responses, we created Table 2, which describes the advantages and disadvantages of e-social work. We ranked the responses by frequency. 14 respondents (6%) stated that they do not see any advantages of e-social work, and 21 respondents (8%) stated that they prefer personal contact, i.e. e-social work does not suit them.

Table 2. Advantages and disadvantages of e-social work according to respondents

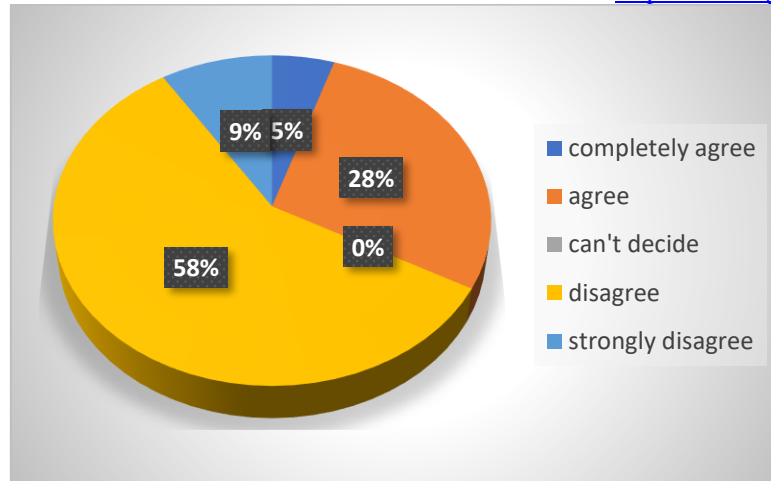
ADVANTAGES OF E-SOCIAL WORK	DISADVANTAGES OF E-SOCIAL WORK
speed of provision	absence of personal contact
time flexibility	. insufficient equipment and internet connection
accessibility (no need to go to the office)	insufficient digital skills of clients
safety (protection from illness, protection from aggressive clients)	misunderstanding, lack of understanding on the part of the client
financial savings 5. indifference and reluctance of the client	financial savings 5. indifference and reluctance of the client
efficiency	misuse of personal data
home environment (client openness, sense of security)	cyberbullying
recording of the information provided	I don't see any benefits of e-social work
recommendation of electronic links to find more information	I prefer personal contact, e-social work does not suit me
provision of multiple clients	

Source: own processing by the authors

Table 2 clearly summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of e-social work reported by respondents. The most frequently identified benefits include the speed of service provision, time flexibility and better availability of assistance without the need for a personal visit to the workplace. Respondents also appreciated the higher level of security, whether in terms of health protection or prevention of conflicts with clients. Financial savings, work efficiency, the possibility of communication in the client's home environment, which supports their openness, as well as the opportunity to use the information provided and recommend electronic resources, were also positively assessed. The possibility of working with multiple clients is also an advantage.

On the other hand, the table highlights several limitations of this form of work. A key shortcoming is the absence of personal contact, which is traditionally considered essential in social work. Respondents also pointed out technical barriers, such as work equipment and poor internet connections, as well as clients' digital skills. Risks include misunderstanding in communication, possible misuse of personal data or further occurrences of cyberbullying. Some respondents also stated that they do not see any benefit in e-social work or do not consider it a replacement for personal contact.

Since e-social work takes place mainly in the online space and the client has contact details for the social worker, we investigated whether respondents felt any threat from the client when providing e-social work services outside working hours and, if so, the degree of that threat on a 10-point scale. The results of the analyses are described in Graphs 3 and 4.

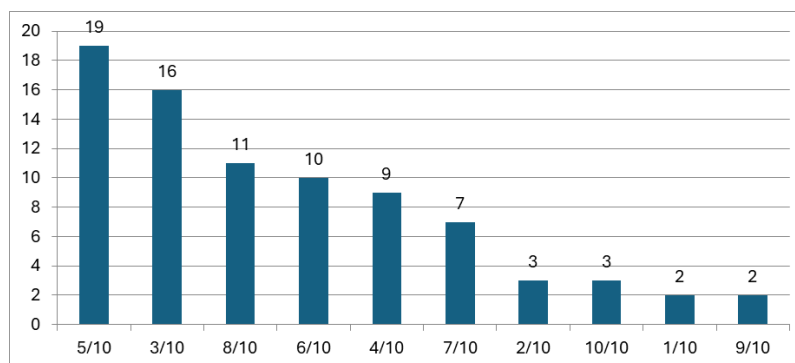


Graph 3. Respondents' level of agreement with the feeling of threat when providing services through e-social work

Source: own processing by the authors

We can positively assess that 146 respondents (58%) and 24 respondents (9%) stated that they did not feel any threat from the e-client. A total of 82 respondents (33%) stated that they felt threatened by the e-client on social networks outside of working hours.

Graph 4 describes the distribution of responses of the 82 respondents who felt threatened. On a 10-point scale of perceived threat, pole 1 indicated the lowest level of threat and pole 10 the highest level of perceived threat.



Graph 4. Level of perceived threat by e-clients on a 10-point scale

Source: own processing by the authors

In our research, we found comparable results. On the one hand, the picture of the perception of e-social work by social workers and their attitude towards e-social work as a new form of social work was provided by open-ended questions in which respondents stated the advantages of e-social work, the disadvantages of e-social work compared to social work carried out directly, and provided an opinion on what should be changed in order to be able to carry out e-social work effectively and without restrictions.

The respondents stated the speed of handling client requests as the greatest advantage, which also coincides with the opinion of Reamer (2013), who sees in online counseling the advantage of immediate response, which is very important in solving some social problems. We can conclude that even within the framework of the functioning of e-social work in Slovakia, there are visible advantages that can be Reamer (2006) also pointed out. Similarly, our respondents mentioned the advantages of e-social that e-social work services allow clients to access services at a time that suits them and from remote locations where mental health professionals may not be available (time flexibility and accessibility), among others.

The negative perception of e-social work and the lack of understanding of the focus of e-social work were particularly noticeable in open-ended questions, where statements such as: "in my opinion, e-social work will never completely replace classic social work" were made, "Social work should be carried out exclusively in person, what is e-social work. Nonsense. You will NEVER provide professional and high-quality social work through electronic means.", "e-social work = all wrong", "this impossible American, progressive and supposedly democratic mindset of the young generation..." It follows from the above that these respondents do not realize that the goal of e-social work is not to replace social work with direct contact with the client, but rather it is a form that can be effective in social work with a certain group of clients who are comfortable with the online space. E-social work is therefore not for every client and, according to opinions, not for every social worker.

The limitations of the research include the uneven gender representation of respondents, which does not allow for relevant gender comparisons, as well as the use of an online questionnaire, which may have favoured respondents with higher digital competencies.

4. Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world and affected every aspect of our lives. Health systems have come under enormous pressure, economies have been shaken, and many people have had to deal with unemployment, social isolation, and psychological problems. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's mental health, with many facing increased stress, anxiety, and depressive states. The long-term restrictions, isolation, and uncertainty associated with the pandemic have worsened the mental health of the general public. The importance of palliative and hospice care during the COVID-19 pandemic has been crucial, as these services have provided not only physical relief but also emotional and psychological support to patients and their families during difficult times.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant psychological impact was clearly evident, which was manifested mainly by increased levels of stress and depressive feelings. Younger people were most affected by these studies, as also found by Babinčák and Babjáková (2022) and Hajdúk et al. (2022), which reached a high level of psychological burden. In addition to age, increased stress and depressive feelings were closely associated with a higher subjective perception of pandemic threat, which, according to Kohút et al. (2022), led to a more significant decrease in life satisfaction and overall psychological well-being among participants.

Andersen et al. (2023), Bengtsson and Bønnhoff (2024), and Zenarolla (2024) also address the importance of digitalization and digital data in social work, emphasizing that digital technologies are penetrating all areas of practice and require the development of social workers' skills, the adaptation of work practices, and further research into their effective use.

Aasback (2022) analyses the use of digital platforms in social work, highlighting the potential to streamline services through online tools. Aparicio and Sánchez (2023) describe experiences with the introduction of technological and innovative approaches in social work, emphasizing the importance of training and systematic implementation of digital tools for social service professionals.

Zhu and Andersen (2021) examine digital competence in the practice and education of social workers, emphasizing the need to develop digital skills and integrate technology into the professional training and daily work of social workers.

We can clearly state that the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the possibilities of human interaction and communication, and in particular, it has accelerated the integration of digital technologies into social work practice.

López Peláez et al. (2020), Markovič (2024), Maiboroda et al. (2025), Molala (2025). address the issue of digital transformation and innovation in social services, focusing on the development of digital skills of social workers and the adaptation of social work to the online and digital environment. Their works emphasize the importance of e-social work as a new approach to the provision of social services in the context of modern technologies.

Research by Nordesjö and Scaramuzzino (2023) has shown that in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, social workers have been forced to reconsider how their professional values can be applied in new contexts and how remote work can ensure social workers' availability, sensitivity, acceptance, collaboration and a sense of belonging with the client. This trend has increased the need for training and education in social work on the use of digital tools, and social workers should be able to adapt digital services to specific needs. Their findings show that 90% of social workers agreed that they are using digital tools more often in their client relationships in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We would also like to reiterate the statement of Markovič (2022), who points out that a hybrid model of social work will gradually be applied in social work, which will use both the online environment and personal contact, or as one of the respondents in the sample we studied stated that e-social work can be used effectively, anyway, a combination of personal meetings would be recommended.

One current study of Swedish social workers regarding e-social work reached similar conclusions: they see both advantages and disadvantages to using digital tools in social work. According to them, the most optimal is a combination of digital tools, but also the possibility of personal meetings if the client wishes" (Nordesjö & Scaramuzzino, 2023).

Our research shows that respondents perceived the digital form of social work ambivalently. Among the benefits, they included faster implementation of interventions, greater flexibility in timing, and better service availability without the need to visit the facility in person. The possibility of working in a safe environment, cost savings, higher efficiency, and the opportunity to support multiple clients simultaneously were also positively evaluated. Some also pointed out the need for more open communication between clients in the home environment and the possibility of storing or sharing information via electronic means.

On the other hand, the absence of direct interpersonal contact, technical shortcomings and low level of digital competences of clients were shown as limits. Respondents also pointed out the risks of misunderstandings, misuse of personal data, or online attacks. Some respondents expressed a preference for the traditional form of work and do not consider the digital method an adequate replacement for a personal meeting.

From the respondents' recommendations for making e-social work more efficient based on their own practice, we select:

- improve the level of digital skills of workers and clients;
- improve and modernize digital equipment in social service facilities but also for clients;
- strengthen clients' trust in social work in the online space.

We mention the ideas of the prominent pioneer of e-social work Reamer (2013), that the task of social work in the future is to thoughtfully and constructively, critically assess the acceptability of digital technologies in social work. The author points to the development of social work over more than a century and the transition from providing personal services exclusively to providing services using digital technologies. At the same time, he emphasizes that it would be a mistake in social work if social workers were to avoid all non-traditional treatment protocols and interventions that involve digital technologies, but instead should push the boundaries of traditional practice in a constructive effort to create, implement and evaluate new but effective ways of helping clients.

Conclusions

E-social work is a new and innovative approach to providing social services through ICT. This type of work allows social workers to communicate more effectively with clients, monitor their progress, and provide support through online platforms and tools. In addition, e-social work enables better cooperation among professionals and institutions in the field of social care by enabling information sharing in an online environment. It is our task to develop appropriate e-social work methodologies and train social workers to raise awareness of the possibilities and benefits of e-social work in solving clients' social problems. This will reduce digital exclusion, and e-social work can be used effectively as one form of social work for selected clients. It

is necessary to emphasize the protection of e-clients' personal data and require social workers to comply with the Code of Ethics.

The research found that e-social work in Slovakia was not just a temporary solution tied to the pandemic period; in many facilities, it remained in place even after the end of emergency measures. It thus appears that digital forms of intervention are gradually becoming a stable part of social service practice, although their scope and intensity of use vary between workplaces.

In practice, professionals primarily use simple, readily available communication tools, while more complex online platforms remain in the background. The digitalization of social work is thus taking place more evolutionary and pragmatically than as a systematically managed process supported by methodological standards.

The research also revealed the ongoing tension between technological possibilities and traditional social work values. Although respondents appreciate the greater availability, flexibility, and operability of services, they still consider personal contact an irreplaceable element of a professional relationship. The opening of the topic of safety and setting boundaries in the online space, especially regarding communication outside working hours, can also be significant, underscoring the need for clearer rules and support for professionals in the digital environment.

References

- Aasback, A.W. (2022). Platform social work-a case study of a digital activity plan in the Norwegian Welfare and Labor Administration. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 12(3), 350-363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2022.2045212>
- Afrouz, R., & Lucas, J. (2023). A systematic review of technology-mediated social work practice: Benefits, uncertainties, and future directions. *Journal of Social Work*, 23(5), 953-974. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14680173231165926>
- Almáši, M., & Šavrnichová, M. (2020). Od klienta sociálnej práce k e-klientovi sociálnej práce: Výzva slovenskej sociálnej práce v digimodernizme. In: Šiňanská, K. – Petriková, F. (eds.). 2020. Čo prinieslo sociálnej práci 100 rokov? Minulé a súčasné podoby sociálnej práce. <https://unibook.upjs.sk/img/cms/2020/ff/kosicke-dni-socialnej-prace2020.pdf>
- Aguilar-Idañez, M. J., Caparrós-Civera, N., & Anaut-Bravo, S. (2020). E-social work: an empirical analysis of the professional blogosphere in Spain, Portugal, France and Italy. *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(1), 80-92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1476326>
- Andersen, L. B., Christensen, M., Danholt, P., & Lauritsen, P. (2023). The Role of Digital Data on Citizens in Social Work Research: A Literature Review. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 53(2), 848-865. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcac158>
- Aparicio, A., & Sánchez, P. M. (2023). Social Innovation and Technology for Social Work: A Training and Implementation Experience in Santiago de Chile. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Digital Social Work* (pp. 295-303). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003048459-30>
- Babinčák, P., & Babjáková, J. (2022). Coronavirus anxiety in Slovakia during the second wave of the pandemic – Associations with depression, insomnia and generalized anxiety disorder. *Human Affairs*, 32(2), 228-240. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2022-0017>
- Banks, S., Bertotti, T., Forlenza, D., Gemara, N., Reimer, E., Segal, M., Shears, J., Sobocan, A. M., Strom, K., & Uriz, M. J. (2025). Slow Ethics in an Age of Fast Technology: the Ethical Implications of Industry 4.0 for Social Work. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 19(2), 137-155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2025.2512949>
- Bengtsson, M., & Bønnhoff, M. (2024). Digitalization in Social Work: Challenges and Innovations. *Journal of Comparative Social Work*, Special Issue. <https://doi.org/10.31265/jcsw.v19i1.801>
- Berzin, S. C., Singer, J., & Chan, Ch. (2015). Practice Innovation through Technology in the Digital Age: A Grand Challenge for Social Work. Hong Kong Polytechnic University Working Paper No. 12 <https://grandchallengesforsocialwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WP12-with-cover.pdf>
- Bruni, A. et al. (2020). On the dualistic nature of power and (digital) technology in organizing processes. *Studi Organizzativi*, p. 209-221. <https://doi.org/10.3280/SO2020-001-S1012>

- Cavlak, S., Bolgün, C., & Uçan, G. (2026). Digitalization in social work practice: potentials and limitations from the Turkish context. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 40(2), 211-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2026.2655119>
- Cwikel, J., & Friedmann, E. (2020). E-therapy and social work practice: Benefits, barriers, and training. *International Social Work*, 63(6), 730-745. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872819847747>
- Hajduk, M., Dancik, D., Januska, J., Strakova, A., Turcek, M., Heretik, A., & Pecenek, J. (2022). Depression and anxiety among college students in Slovakia – comparison of the year 2018 and during COVID-19 pandemic. *Medical Journal*, 123(1), 44-49. <https://doi.org/10.4149/BLL.2022.007>
- Kapur, I., Sharkey, C. N., & Malorni, A. (2025). Digitalization and ICT in Social Work Education: A Scoping Review. *Journal Of Social Work Education*, 61(4), 629-647. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2025.2527028>
- Kohút, M., Šrol, J., & Čavojová, V. (2022). How are you holding up? Personality, cognitive and social predictors of a perceived shift in subjective well-being during COVID-19 pandemic. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 186, Part A, 111349. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.111349>
- López Peláez, A.L.-Marcuello-Servós, Ch. (2018). E-Social work and digital society: re-conceptualizing approaches, practices and Technologies. *European Journal of Social Work*, 21(6), 801-803. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1520475>
- López Peláez, A., Erro-Garcés, A., & Gómez-Ciriano, E. J. (2020). Young people, social workers and social work education: the role of digital skills. *Social Work Education*, 39(6), 825-842. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1795110>
- Maiboroda, O., Sushyk, N., Silvestrova, O., Haponchuk, O., & Martyniuk, Y. (2025). The Domain of Social Services in the Twenty-First Century: Digital Transformation and Innovative Development within New Paradigms. *Premier Journal of Science*, 13, 100096 <https://doi.org/10.70389/PJS.100096>
- Molala, T. S. (2025). Social work in the digital age: Towards adopting artificial intelligence in social work. *International Social Work*, Early Access <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728251383134>
- Markovič, D. (2022). Nástup digitálnych technológií do sociálnej práce. In: Žiaková, E., Šed'o T. (eds). *Metanoia v teórii a praxi sociálnej práce*. 9. ročník Košických dní sociálnej práce. Košice: Univerzita P.J. Šafárika v Košiciach, pp. 29-34. <https://eknizky.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/metanoia-v-teorii-a-praxi-socialnej-prace.pdf#page=29>
- Markovič, D. (2024). Digital social work or e-social work? Towards social work in a digital environment. SHS Web Conf. 9th International Multidisciplinary Research Conference Society. Health. Welfare, 184, Article Number 05005 <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202418405005>
- Neeraj, M.S., & Nirmala, B. P. (2025). The role of digital libraries and emerging technologies in enhancing social work education: a comprehensive analysis. *Social Work Education*, 44(8), 1869-1884. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2024.2445740>
- Nordesjö, K., & Scaramuzzino, G. (2023). Digitalization, stress, and social worker–client relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Social Work*, 23(6), 1080-1098. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14680173231180309>
- Reamer, F. G. (2013). Social Work in a Digital Age: Ethical and Risk Management Challenges. *Social Work*, 58(2), 163-172. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swt003>
- Reamer, F. G. (2015). Evolving Ethical Standards in the Digital Age. *Faculty Publications*. <https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/facultypublications/389>
- Robles, Y. M. D., & Cano, M. D. M. (2019). E-social work and at-risk populations: technology and robotics in social intervention with elders. The case of Spain. *European Journal of Social Work*, 22(4), 623-633. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1423550>
- Tóthová, L., & Žiaková, T. (2018). Vstup informačno-komunikačných technológií do oblasti sociálnej práce. *Revue Sociálnych Služieb*, 10, 2-10. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327704228_Vstup_informacno-komunikacnych_tehnologii_do_oblasti_socialnej_prace In *Revue sociálnych služieb#fullTextFileContent*
- Vašková, A., Lovašová, S. (2021). Implementácia informačno-komunikačných technológií do praxe sociálnej práce vo vybraných cieľových skupinách. *Sociální Práce/Sociálna Práca*, 6(2021), 19-40.
- Vašková, A., & Lovašová, S. (2020). Sociálna práca vo virtuálnom prostredí. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andrea-Vaskova/publication/350881402_Socialna_praca_vo_virtualnom_prostredi Social work in a virtual environment/links/607833392fb9097c0ce5d871/Socialna-praca-vo-virtualnom-prostredi-Social-work-in-a-virtual-environment.pdf

Wilkerson, D. A., & O'Sullivan, L. (2023). Social work in an online world. A guide to digital practice. Washington, DC: NASW Press. <https://naswpress.org/product/social-work-in-an-online-world/>

Zenarolla, M. (2024). From resistance to acceptance. How the digitalisation imposed by COVID-19 is changing the relationship between the social service and digital technologies. *Relational Social Work*, 8(1) https://rsw.erickson.international/archivio/vol-n-8/04_zenarolla_rsw_1-24/

Zhu, H., & Andersen, T.S. (2021). Digital competence in social work practice and education: Experiences from Norway. *Nordic Social Work Research*. Available online <https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2021.1899967>

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: Zuzana Draková, Anna Bérešová; methodology: Anna Bérešová; data analysis: Zuzana Draková, Anna Bérešová, writing—original draft preparation: Zuzana Draková, Anna Bérešová, writing; review and editing: Zuzana Draková, Anna Bérešová; visualization: Zuzana Draková. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Zuzana DRAKOVÁ is the Assistant Professor at the University of Trnava, Faculty of Health and Social Work. Research interests: social work, social services, social policy and volunteering.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5513-1484>

Anna BÉREŠOVÁ is the Professor at St. Elizabeth's University of Health and Social Work in Bratislava, n.o., Detached workplace of Blessed Sára Salkaházi, Rožňava. Research interests: social work, social workers, helping professions

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7669-9573>

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Vsl Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Center

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access