Digicoaches approach in Ghent

Trees De Bruycker
Director of Social Services
City of Ghent – Public Centre for Social Welfare
Belgium

DIGI BANKEN

Iedereen UP-TO-DATE

Digital divide

Everything is becoming more digital & transforming our daily lives

BUT:

- 1 in 10 households with low income have no internet access
- 3 in 10 Belgians have limited digital skills; 5% do not use the internet
- 40% of the Belgian population is digitally vulnerable

Digital inclusion Barometer 2024

In the City of Ghent, we focus on **digital inclusion** to prevent **digitization leading to exclusion**

by making our digital services user-friendly

by ensuring that citizens and employees can keep up digitally

and by boosting and coordinating digital inclusion

gent:

District 09

3 challenges, 7 solutions

by making our digital services user-friendly

1 Prioritize the user when designing digital applications
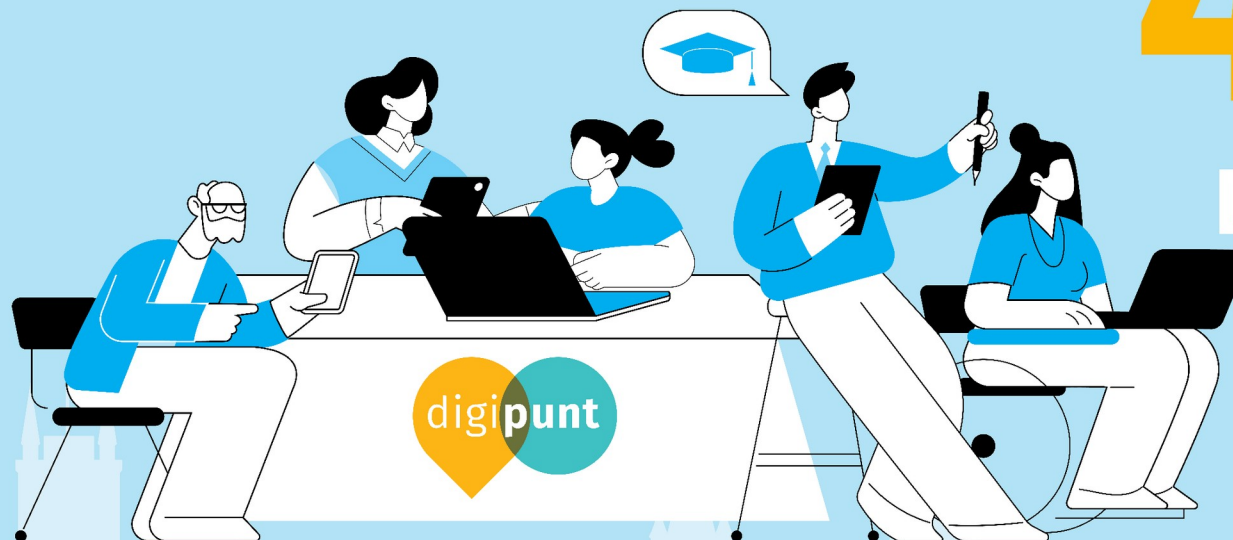
Implement a multi-channel strategy for urban digital service **2**

gent:

District

3 challenges, 7 solutions

by ensuring that citizens and employees can keep up digitally

3 Focus on individual support for citizens and employees

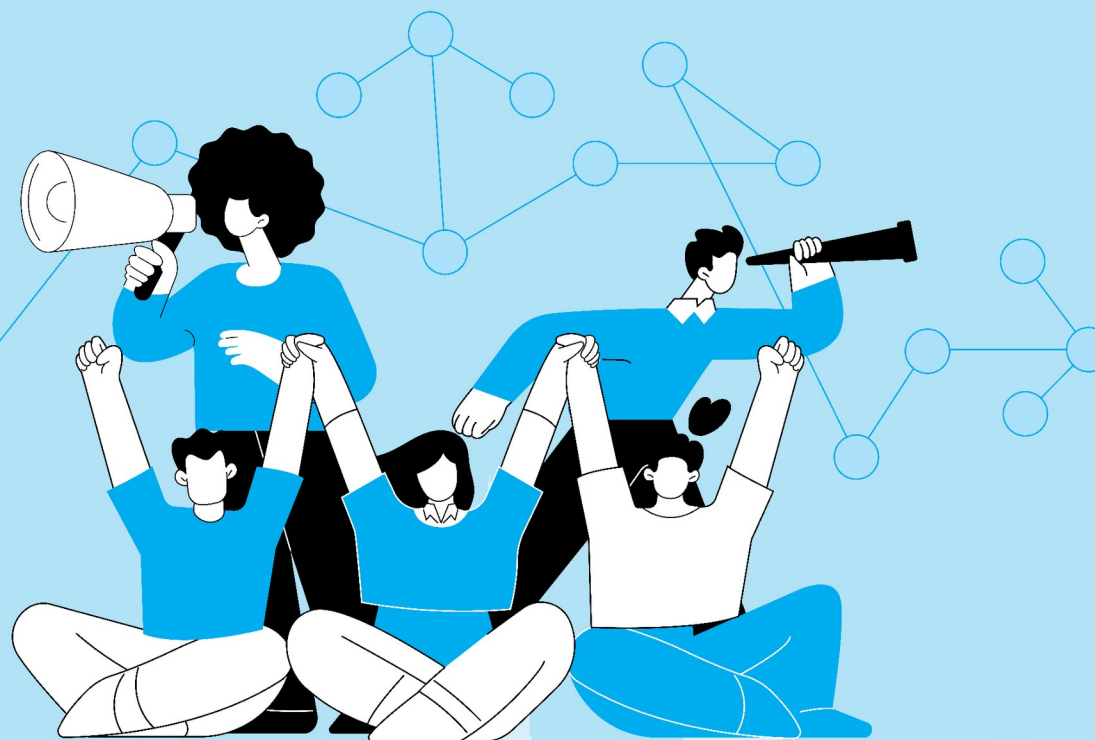**4** Provide learning opportunities for basic digital competencies

5 Bring digital support to vulnerable audiences

digi**punt**

gent:

District

and by boosting and coordinating digital inclusion

Combine transversal and domain-specific coordination

6

Appoint a central driving force who ensures growth, collaboration and sustainability

7

gent:

District

Bring digital support to vulnerable
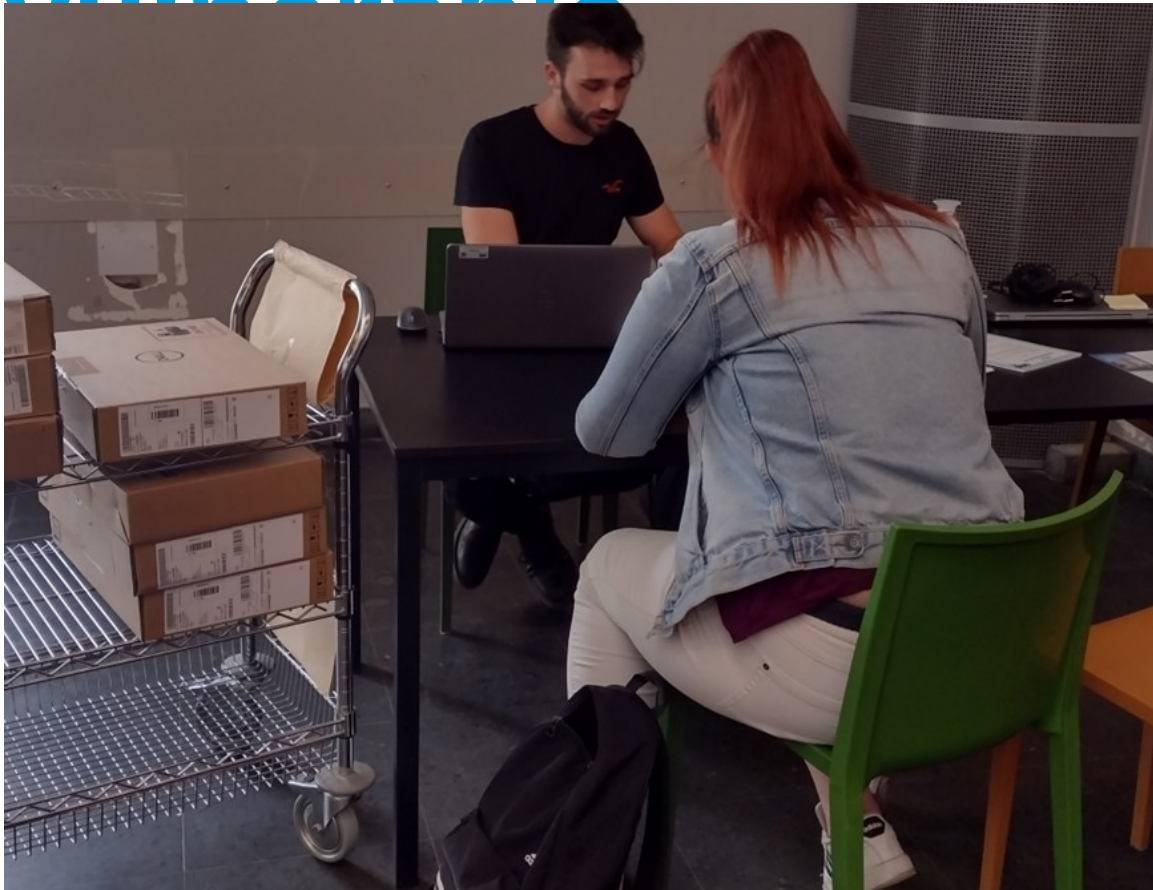

Work at different levels:

- **Access** to digital tools (laptops, tablets, smartphones) and internet
- **Digital learning** opportunities within education, services, social work, etc.
- **Training** for those who want to learn more
- **Individual aid** for those who need help with digital questions ➔ **Digicoaches approach**

Digicoaches in the "welfare bureaus"

Social professionals (1,6 FTE) provide tailored support to citizens for various digital questions:

- **Individual aid**, mostly with digitalised government services
- **Coaching 1-on-1 and in small groups** on certain apps or themes (itsme, Mijn Gent, online safety, phishing, etc.)
- **Giving laptops** to those in need (for studies, personal administration, etc.)
- **Working** together with **neighbourhood organisations**
- **Supporting social workers**
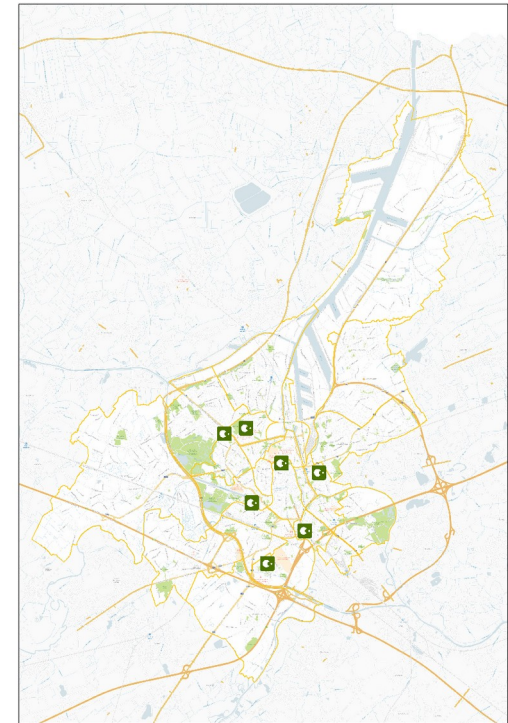
Results in 2023

Digicoach in each "welfare bureau"

Assisted 508 unique clients

Answered 720 digital questions

119 refurbished devices distributed

More than 1500 financial interventions for internet

10 workshops (e.g. online security, secure passwords...)

Lessons learned

- (Digital) learning takes time
- Create opportunities for practising
- Integration of digital skills starts with the social workers
- Ensure centralized management of the digicoaches
- Digitization enforces existing exclusion

Three challenges for the future

1. The more public services digitize, the more we need people who assist those who are digitally excluded

> There are always more questions/more difficult questions and it is increasingly hard to keep up and to get volunteers/professionals to help out

2. Life long learning is an attitude, but not an individual responsibility

> Digital exclusion is not limited to vulnerable groups: also highly educated people, youngsters, or people with a high income can have difficulties catching up

> Social workers must also stay digitally up-to-date, so they can fully support their clients in improving their digital skills

3. Short term project funding and ownership

> In the last four years, there has been a boost of initiatives on different levels but it's hard to build a persistent strategy on temporary funding calls. A long term strategy at national/regional level is missing

Questions?

Contact info
Trees De Bruycker
Director of Social Services
City of Ghent - Public Centre for Social Welfare
Belgium
trees.debruycker@ocmw.gent