

AI FORA 2nd General Partner Meeting

Excursion to AI-using social service agency in Mataró

4th May 2023

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1. Brief description of the event

In the final day, attendees of the 2nd General Partner Meeting of AI FORA visited the premises of [Espai Mataró Connecta](#) in the city of Mataró, a town which is located north of Barcelona and is part of the AI FORA Spanish case study.

The visit consisted of two parts. First, welcome addresses by Toni Merino, Manager of Mataró City Council and responsible for the digital transformation of social services, and Clara Aurora Rodríguez, Head of the Technical Support Unit of Social Welfare at Mataró City Council. Second, a World Café session about data-driven approaches to social services. For the latter, the attendees of the 2nd General Partner Meeting of AI FORA were divided into five groups to discuss the topic of interest and how participatory efforts can lead to better targeting and allocation of resources, early intervention, evidence-based policy development, and continuous improvement in the delivery of essential services with data-driven approaches and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies.

The five groups also included public servants from Mataró City Council. The experience showed that by involving stakeholders from public administration and academia, there is an opportunity to leverage their expertise, perspectives, and resources to address key issues in AI-based social service provision.

2. Some examples discussed

The following are some examples discussed by the five groups in which social services such as housing, mental health, and migration-related challenges can be dealt with using a data-driven and participatory approach, mostly for targeting and resource allocation, predictive analytics and early intervention, decision support systems and policy development, and evaluation and continuous Improvement:

-Data-driven targeting and resource allocation:

Public administrations can leverage data to identify geographic areas or population groups with the greatest need for social services. By collaborating with civil society organizations and academia, they can ensure that data-driven targeting strategies are based on accurate and reliable data sources, and that

resource allocation is equitable and transparent. Academics can contribute by conducting research on data-driven targeting and resource allocation models for social services. They can collaborate with public administrations to develop algorithms and methodologies that take into account various factors such as demographic data, socio-economic indicators, and community feedback to optimize resource allocation for housing, mental health, and migration-related services. But civil society organizations can also contribute by collecting and analyzing data at the community level to identify specific housing, mental health, and migration-related needs. They can collaborate with public administrations to advocate for the use of data-driven targeting and resource allocation strategies that address the most pressing issues faced by vulnerable populations.

-Predictive analytics and early intervention:

Public administrations can work with civil society organizations and academia to develop predictive models using data from various sources such as public records, health records, and social services data. These models can help identify individuals or groups that may require specific interventions, enabling proactive measures to address housing, mental health, and migration-related issues. Meanwhile, academics can contribute by conducting research on predictive analytics and developing algorithms that identify early warning signs of housing instability, mental health issues, or migration challenges. They can collaborate with public administrations to ensure the responsible use of predictive models, address biases, and promote transparency in decision-making processes. Again, civil society organizations can also collaborate with public administrations and academia to leverage data and develop predictive analytics models that identify individuals or communities at risk of housing instability, mental health issues, or migration challenges. They can use this information to facilitate early intervention and provide timely support and assistance.

-Decision support systems and policy development:

Public administrations can establish data-driven decision support systems that leverage inputs from civil society organizations, academia, and various data sources. These systems can help inform policy development, resource allocation, and service provision in the areas of housing, mental health, and migration-related services. Academics can collaborate with public administrations and civil society organizations to conduct research and provide evidence-based recommendations for policy development in the areas of housing, mental health, and migration. Further, they can contribute to the design of decision support systems that integrate diverse data sources, address ethical considerations, and facilitate informed policy decisions. Civil society organizations can help the development of decision support systems by providing input on the needs and preferences of the communities they serve. They can also collaborate with public administrations and academia to ensure that data-driven policy development and decision-making processes are inclusive, transparent, and align with the interests of the affected populations.

-Evaluation and continuous improvement:

Public administrations can collaborate with civil society organizations and academia to establish evaluation frameworks that assess the effectiveness and efficiency of data-driven social services. They can use data to measure outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and make evidence-based decisions to enhance the quality of housing, mental health, and migration-related services. Academics can contribute by conducting independent evaluations and research to assess the impact of data-driven social services. They

can collaborate with public administrations and civil society organizations to ensure that evaluation methodologies are rigorous, ethical, and consider the perspectives of diverse stakeholders. Finally, civil society organizations can play a crucial role in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of data-driven social services for housing, mental health, and migration-related issues. They can provide inputs to public administrations and academia to ensure that evaluation methodologies are rigorous, transparent, and inclusive, with a focus on outcomes and impact assessment.

3. Risks and opportunities

The five groups also discussed risks and opportunities of implementing data-driven approaches to social services, such as housing, mental health, and migration-related services.

The main risks highlighted by the groups were:

-Bias and discrimination: Data-driven approaches heavily rely on historical data, which can contain biases and perpetuate existing inequalities. Biased algorithms and models may result in discriminatory outcomes, disadvantaging certain groups or reinforcing stereotypes. This can exacerbate social disparities and further marginalize vulnerable populations.

-Lack of human connection: Overreliance on data-driven approaches may lead to a reduction in human interaction and personalized support. It was discussed that it is essential to strike a balance between the efficiency and scalability of technology-driven solutions and the need for human empathy, understanding, and tailored assistance in social service delivery.

-Technological limitations: Data-driven approaches require reliable and accurate data sources, robust algorithms, and appropriate infrastructure. Inadequate data quality, algorithmic limitations, or technical glitches can undermine the effectiveness and reliability of these approaches, potentially leading to erroneous decision-making and ineffective service provision.

-Privacy and data protection: The collection, storage, and analysis of sensitive personal data raise concerns about privacy and data protection. If not properly managed, there is a risk of unauthorized access, data breaches, and misuse of personal information, potentially leading to discrimination or harm to individuals.

The main opportunities highlighted by the groups were:

-Improved service delivery: Data-driven approaches can enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of social services. They can help identify patterns, anticipate needs, and allocate resources more strategically, leading to improved outcomes for individuals and communities.

-Evidence-based decision-making: By leveraging data and analytics, policymakers and service providers can make more informed and evidence-based decisions. Data-driven insights can support policy development, resource allocation, and service planning, enabling interventions that are tailored to specific needs and backed by empirical evidence.

-Early intervention and prevention: Data-driven approaches can facilitate early identification of individuals or communities at risk, enabling timely intervention and prevention strategies. By leveraging predictive analytics, social services can proactively address housing instability, mental health challenges, or migration-related issues before they escalate.

-Equity and inclusion: When properly designed and implemented, data-driven approaches have the potential to reduce disparities and promote equity. By actively addressing biases and ensuring representation of diverse populations in data collection and analysis, these approaches can contribute to more inclusive service provision and decision-making.

-Continuous learning and improvement: Data-driven approaches allow for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning. By analyzing data on service outcomes and impact, stakeholders can identify areas for improvement, refine interventions, and iterate on service delivery models, leading to continuous learning and increased effectiveness over time.

4. Methodological difficulties

It is also important to emphasize that conducting a World Café session with stakeholders and attendees of the 2nd General Partner Meeting presented several inherent methodological difficulties, mostly related to balancing perspectives, technical complexity, and complex interactions. Here we explain each of them briefly:

-Balancing perspectives: Since the session involved multiple groups with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, balancing the discussions was challenging. Nonetheless, there were no conflicts or difficulties in finding common ground.

-Technical complexity: Since the topic of data-driven public services is inherently technical and multidimensional, there was a sense that some participants, especially those without a background in data or technology, struggled to understand the intricacies of data collection, analysis, and algorithmic decision-making. This showed the importance of simplifying and explaining these concepts in a concise and accessible manner to ensure meaningful participation and engagement.

-Complex interactions: Since the English language was mostly used for the interactions and not everyone was fluent, the involvement of some stakeholders was limited and further complicated the discussions. Navigating these complex interactions and ensuring that discussions remained focused was clearly challenging.

5. Photo vault







