



CIFAL Flanders | UNITAR at EU Development Days 2019

Antwerp, 25 June 2019

With “How to make digitalisation SDG-proof?” CIFAL Flanders had the pleasure to organise a well-attended and inspirational workshop at the EU Development Days 2019 (EDD19), Europe’s leading forum on development since 2006, organised by the European Commission. The overarching theme of this year’s edition was “Addressing inequalities: building a world which leaves no one behind”.

On the 18th and 19th of June, the development community was brought together to share ideas and experiences in ways that inspire new partnerships and innovative solutions to the world’s most pressing challenges. CIFAL Flanders’ session was one of the opening workshops during the event and addressed more specifically how to bridge the digital divide in an inclusive and sustainable way. More than 50 guests attended this workshop.



CIFAL Flanders invited four organisations as examples of best practices that aim to bridge the digital divide both on a local and global scale. After their presentations a debate took place on which Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) propose the biggest challenges for each practice to be realised, thereby making use of the holistic SDG assessment tool developed by CIFAL Flanders.

Didier Appels, Strategic Partnerships Director of **Close the Gap**, was the first to introduce his organisation.

Close the Gap is an international social enterprise that aims to bridge the digital divide by offering high-quality, pre-owned computers donated by European companies to educational, medical and social projects in developing and emerging countries.

“Bridging the digital divide means bridging the opportunities gap.”



Hack Your Future, that aims to enable refugees to build digital skills for a career in web development, facilitate the integration of newcomers, and address the shortage of qualified workforce in the IT sector, was presented by its Brussels’ Coordinator **Maité Cluydts**.



She was followed up by **Adéline Brion**, the Programme Coordinator of **Lie Detectors**. This award-winning project aims to turn schoolchildren in Europe aged 10-15 into powerful lie detectors and critical thinkers in a world increasingly populated by propaganda and distorted facts online, empowering them to understand news media, make informed choices and resist peer pressure as they assemble their worldview.

Fourth and final best practice was presented by **Julie Foulon**, founder and CEO of **Girleek**. This initiative solves the problem of the employment of women and minorities in the new technologies and digital sector through training for recruiters in order to develop their employer brand, take advantage of community resources and unfair advantages, and recruit a diverse talent pool.

After all best practices were explained, **Peter Wollaert**, UNITAR Fellow and Managing Director of CIFAL Flanders, guided the participants through an interactive brainstorming session. Making use of a holistic SDG assessment tool, part of CIFAL Flanders’ Action Learning Methodology, the presented





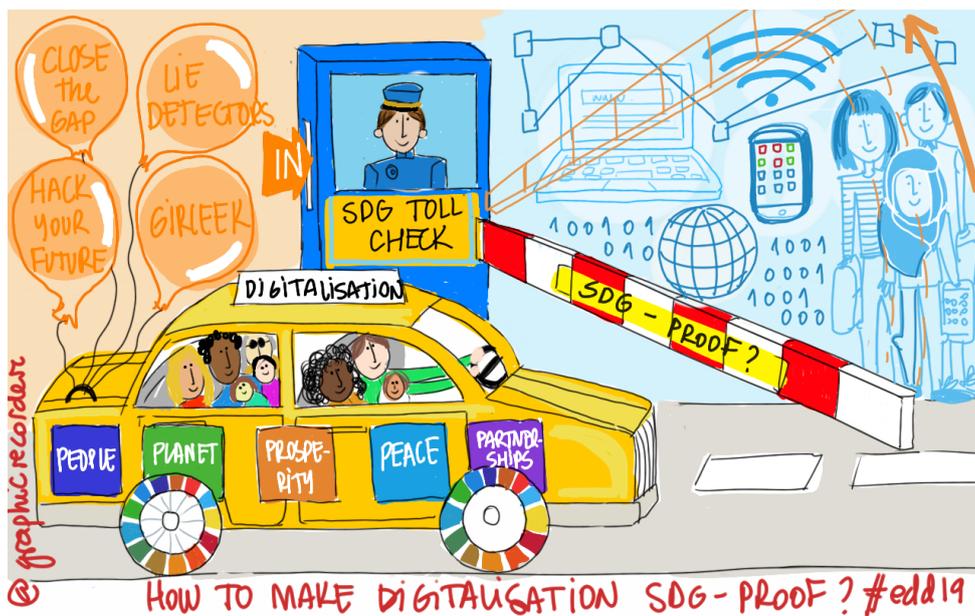
initiatives were evaluated against the broader framework of Agenda 2030, thereby providing hands-on solutions and recommendations to improve the sustainable impact of digital projects, combat inequalities and become SDG-proof.

Anne-Sofie Van de Velde, Advisor Legal affairs at Cabinet Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Digital Agenda, Post & Telecom of Alexander De Croo, concluded the workshop and elaborated on the challenges and opportunities for Belgium and digitalisation for development: “The digital world truly opens up a world of opportunities”.

However, she acknowledges that, due to the rapid evolution of technology, efforts of policymakers are clearly not yet sufficient in order to facilitate an SDG-proof digitalisation. Even within Belgium there’s a clear digital divide, which can only be overcome by strengthening digital literacy and technological skills. “Bridging the digital divide means bridging the opportunities gap”, which will turn out to be essential in order to make sure that everyone is on board.



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