Integrated Action Plan (IAP)

City of Aarhus

CITY OF AARHUS

Introduction

This report presents an integrated action plan, building upon Aarhus Municipality's existing "Strategy for digital inclusion". The strategy for digital inclusion is very high-level, and we have used the collaboration in the Next gen youthwork network to be inspired in relation to how the strategy's overall tactics can be translated into concrete actions.

A central part of this work has been the involvement of our Urbact Local Group (ULG). Through workshops, discussions, and knowledge sharing, the ULG has functioned as a platform where local stakeholders, including young people, professionals, and representatives from relevant organizations, have contributed their perspectives and expertise. This collaboration has been crucial in identifying the specific challenges that vulnerable young people in Aarhus face in the digital age, and in developing tailored solutions that address these challenges.

The work of the ULG has been based on the challenges described in the "Strategy for digital inclusion" and has aimed to concretize and operationalize the strategy's goals. Through an iterative process, the group has explored various approaches and methods that can strengthen young people's digital skills, increase their access to digital resources, and promote their participation in the digital society.

This report presents the results of the ULG's work and the concrete actions developed in collaboration with the network. It describes the challenges we have identified, the solutions we have developed, and the recommendations we provide for future efforts. The report also provides insight into how the collaboration in the Next gen youthwork network and the ULG has contributed to strengthening Aarhus Municipality's work with digital inclusion of vulnerable young people.

Local Context

Aarhus, Denmark's second-largest city, is a dynamic urban center situated on the eastern coast of the Jutland. With a history spanning over 1,000 years, the city has evolved from its origins as a Viking settlement into a modern hub of culture, education, and innovation. The name "Aarhus" is derived from the Old Danish word "Arhus," meaning "river mouth," reflecting its strategic location along the Aarhus Bay. Historically, the city played a significant role as a trading port and ecclesiastical center during the Middle Ages, as evidenced by landmarks such as the Aarhus Cathedral, which dates back to the 12th century.

Today, Aarhus is a blend of rich historical heritage and contemporary development. The city's architectural landscape showcases a mixture of medieval, classical, and modern styles, with notable examples including the award-winning ARoS Aarhus Art Museum and the distinctive architecture of the Dokk1 cultural center. Aarhus is also a prominent center of education, with institutions like Aarhus University fostering a vibrant student population that contributes to the city's youthful energy and innovative spirit.

Culturally, Aarhus is renowned for its thriving arts scene, evidenced by its numerous galleries, music festivals, and theaters. The Latin Quarter, with its cobblestone streets and boutique shops, serves as a testament to the city's historical charm, while also providing a space for contemporary artistic expression.

The city's transformation from a medieval town to a modern, cosmopolitan city illustrates the complex interplay between tradition and progress that defines Aarhus today. Whether through its historical sites, cultural institutions, or cutting-edge urban development, Aarhus offers a unique perspective on the intersection of history, culture, and modernity in Scandinavian urban life.

Local Policy Challenges

Vulnerable young people face unique and complex challenges in the digital age, and these challenges pose significant policy issues for Aarhus Municipality. Lack of access to technology, inadequate digital skills and inadequate public solutions create a significant barrier to their full participation in society. Financial constraints, disabilities, and language barriers further exacerbate this situation, creating a digital divide.

As society increasingly relies on digital platforms for essential services such as healthcare, education, and public communication, digitally excluded young people risk becoming further marginalized. This digital inequality contributes to maintaining and reinforcing existing social and economic disparities, limiting the young people's opportunities for personal and professional development.

In Aarhus Municipality, there is a growing concern about the potential risks that the digital world poses to vulnerable young people. Young people spend a significant portion of their time online, where they build relationships, express themselves, and seek information. However, this increased online presence also increases their vulnerability to cyberbullying, misinformation, and harmful content. The municipality faces the challenge of protecting these young people from these risks while promoting their digital literacy.

Another key challenge is the unequal access to digital resources and opportunities. Economic inequality and lack of digital skills create a barrier that prevents many vulnerable young people from taking advantage of the opportunities that digitalization offers. The municipality struggles to develop and implement effective strategies that can equalize these differences and ensure that all young people have equal access to digital resources.

Finally, there is the challenge of developing effective methods to engage and support vulnerable young people online. Traditional methods of outreach and communication are often insufficient in the digital age. The municipality faces the need to develop innovative and relevant digital platforms and approaches that can reach and engage these young people in a meaningful way.

Existing Policies and Action Plans

In this section, we present the "Plan for Digital Inclusion" in Aarhus Municipality. With this plan, the municipality is committed to ensuring that all residents, regardless of their digital literacy or background, can access and benefit from the municipality's digital services. This plan forms a central foundation for our work to reduce the digital divide and promote digital equality.

Aarhus Municipality also has a range of policies that support work with vulnerable young people, including a policy on homelessness that recognizes the specific challenges this group faces in a digitized world. These policies reflect the municipality's overall commitment to ensuring that no citizens are left behind in the digital development.

As a central underlying framework for our work, we have the "Aarhus Compass," which describes how collaboration with citizens should be. This compass emphasizes principles such as respect, dialogue, and empowerment, and it serves as a guiding document for all municipal efforts, including those related to digital inclusion.

In connection with this report, we specifically build upon the "Plan for Digital Inclusion." This plan provides us with a strategic starting point to address the digital challenges faced by vulnerable young people. We use the plan's overall goals and principles as a guide for our work, while adapting and specifying them through the insights and recommendations that have emerged from our work in the Urbact Local Group (ULG) and the Next gen youthwork network. This ensures that our efforts are both strategically grounded and practically relevant.

Plan for Digital Inclusion

Aarhus Municipality's "Plan for Digital Inclusion" is a key strategic document that defines the municipality's vision and goals for ensuring digital equality for all citizens. The plan was developed by Aarhus Municipality with input from a wide range of stakeholders, including citizens, professionals, and organizations. It was launched in recognition that digitalization is an integral part of modern society, and that all citizens must have the opportunity to participate actively and meaningfully in digital development.

The plan is based on an understanding that digital inclusion is not just about access to technology, but also about developing the necessary skills and competencies to use digital tools and services. It focuses on breaking down barriers that can prevent citizens from taking advantage of the opportunities that digitalization offers, and on ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital development. This includes particularly vulnerable groups who may have special challenges in navigating the digital world.

Principles for Digital Inclusion

1

Minimizing Barriers: This principle focuses on identifying and removing obstacles that prevent individuals from accessing and using digital services. This could include providing accessible technology, offering digital literacy training, and simplifying online processes.

2

Ensuring Support and Alternatives: This principle emphasizes the importance of providing support and alternative ways for people to access services when they are unable to use digital channels. This could involve offering in-person assistance, providing printed materials, or using telephone-based services.

3

Empowering Helpers: This principle recognizes the role of family, friends, and community members in supporting individuals with digital challenges. It aims to provide training and resources to these individuals to help them assist others

Key Goals	Minimize barriers: To reduce obstacles preventing individuals from engaging digitally with the municipality.	Provide alternatives: To offer accessible alternatives for those facing digital challenges.	Empower citizens: To equip citizens with the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape.
Target Groups	International citizens	Marginalized citizens	Vulnerable youth Elderly

The groups appears to be a rather diverse range of target groups, differing significantly in terms of competencies and prerequisites related to public digitalization. Nevertheless, there are clear overlaps between the groups regarding the challenges they face in digital communication with authorities. In our initial efforts to gain knowledge in this area, we have identified the following recurring issues across several target groups:

- Difficulties understanding communications from the municipality (e.g., Digital Post) due to the use of technical jargon.
- Difficulties navigating municipal self-service solutions and managing tools like MitID.
- Difficulties engaging with Aarhus Municipality due to a general lack of understanding of authorities.
- General lack of trust in authorities.
- General unease with digital technologies.
- Limited digital skills.
- Reliance on support persons.

There may also be specific challenges that only occur in certain target groups. For example, seniors may feel technologically challenged by their digital devices and have difficulty updating their phones or installing apps, but they often have a good understanding of why it is important to read their Digital Post. For young people, the opposite is typically true.

In the following sections, we will elaborate on the plan's content and examine how it forms the basis for our work to promote digital inclusion in Aarhus Municipality, especially in relation to vulnerable young people.

Problem Identification and Local Challenges

As a central part of our work in the Next gen youthwork project, we have held a series of meetings with our Local Urbact Group (ULG). These meetings have served as a platform for dialogue and collaboration between a wide range of local stakeholders, including young people, professionals, representatives from relevant organizations, and municipal employees.

Through these meetings, we have systematically worked to identify and delineate the specific local challenges that Aarhus Municipality faces in relation to young people and digitalization. We have used various methods to facilitate this process, including workshops, group discussions, and brainstorming sessions. This has allowed us to gather a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences, which has been crucial in obtaining a nuanced picture of the challenges we face.

Specifically, the meetings have focused on examining the following areas:
- Young people and digital access: Here, we have discussed young people's access to technology, the internet, and digital resources, as well as the barriers that can hinder this access.
- Young people and digital skills: We have examined young people's digital skills and competencies, including their ability to navigate the digital world safely and critically.
- Young people and digital participation: We have discussed how we can strengthen young people's participation in the digital society, including their opportunities to express themselves, engage, and influence decisions online.
- Young people and digital vulnerability: We have identified the specific challenges that vulnerable young people face in the digital world, including cyberbullying, misinformation, and harmful content.

Through these meetings, we have gained a deeper understanding of the local challenges and identified a number of focus areas that we will address in our action plan. This has formed the basis for the further work in the project and ensured that our efforts are tailored to the specific needs and challenges in Aarhus Municipality.

Our Strengths and Challenges

Strenghts

When developing solutions to support young people in the digital age, it is crucial that we build upon the existing strengths within Aarhus Municipality. These strengths provide a solid foundation on which we can build, and they offer us unique opportunities to create innovative and effective solutions.

Aarhus is known for its dynamic innovation environment, where new ideas and technologies thrive. This environment fosters the development of digital solutions tailored to young people's needs and challenges. We have a strong public sector committed to creating digital offerings that are accessible and relevant to all citizens. This commitment ensures that our efforts are rooted in a broader vision of digital inclusion.

The city's university, Aarhus University, is a vital resource that contributes research and expertise in digitalization and youth culture. Collaboration with the university provides us with access to the latest knowledge and best practices, strengthening our ability to develop evidence-based solutions.

Finally, we have a long tradition of involving young people in the city's development through a fundamentally good dialogue. This ensures that our efforts are based on young people's own perspectives and experiences, which is crucial for creating solutions that are relevant and meaningful to them. By leveraging these strengths, we can create a sustainable and inclusive digital future for young people in Aarhus.

Challenges

While Aarhus Municipality possesses a range of strengths when it comes to digitalization and young people, there are also significant challenges that we must address. These challenges are complex and require a multidisciplinary approach involving municipal actors, young people, and other relevant stakeholders.

One of our primary concerns is the declining interest among young people in participating in democratic life. In an era where digitalization has transformed our society, it is crucial that young people are engaged and informed citizens. However, we are witnessing a trend where young people increasingly seek information and interact with each other online, where they may be exposed to misinformation and alternative facts. This can undermine their trust in traditional democratic institutions and processes.

Another key challenge is protecting young people from the increasing amount of misinformation they encounter online. The digital world is filled with fake news, conspiracy theories, and harmful content, which can negatively impact young people's worldview and critical thinking. We must find effective methods to equip young people with the necessary digital skills to navigate this information flow safely and critically.

Additionally, there are challenges related to digital access and digital skills. Although most young people have access to the internet, there are still groups who are digitally excluded. This can be due to financial constraints, lack of digital skills, or other factors. We must ensure that all young people have equal opportunities to participate in the digital society.

Finally, there is the challenge of developing digital solutions that are relevant and engaging for young people. Young people are a diverse group with different interests and needs. We must therefore develop digital offerings that are tailored to their specific needs and that are based on their own perspectives and experiences.

Our Vision

Our vision, developed in collaboration with our Urbact Local Group, is:

> - to create a digital Aarhus where young people are curious, engaged, and equipped to navigate a digitalized world – and where Aarhus Municipality itself is a curious and innovative actor and support those young people who need support in the new digital world

This vision sets the direction for our planned actions and initiatives, which aim to strengthen young people's digital skills and promote their participation in the digital society.
We recognize that digitalization holds both opportunities and challenges. Therefore, we will work to create a digital environment characterized by openness, trust, and critical thinking. We will explore the opportunities offered by new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), and we will experiment with concrete, smaller pilot projects that build upon the work we are already doing for vulnerable young people.

Our vision includes:
- Curiosity and Innovation: We will promote a culture where both young people and the municipality are curious about digital opportunities and engaged in developing innovative solutions that can contribute to a better society.
- Democratic Participation: We will strengthen young people's participation in democratic life by creating digital platforms and initiatives that promote dialogue, debate, and engagement.
- Critical Thinking and Information Literacy: We will equip young people with the necessary digital skills to navigate the digital world safely and critically, including the ability to identify and assess misinformation.
- Inclusion and Equality: We will ensure that all young people, regardless of their background or digital skills, have equal opportunities to participate in the digital society.
- Experimental Approach: We will work with concrete, smaller pilot projects to test and develop new digital solutions that build upon our existing work with vulnerable young people.
- AI Opportunities: We will explore and utilize the opportunities offered by artificial intelligence (AI) to create more effective and targeted digital solutions for young people. Here, the municipality itself must be an active and exploratory party.
- Municipal Curiosity: The municipality must actively explore and experiment with new digital opportunities and be curious about how these can be implemented in work with young people.

By pursuing this vision, we will create a digital Aarhus where young people are active citizens who contribute to shaping their own future and the city's development, and where the municipality is an innovative and curious partner.

The Next Step: Interventions & Actions

Aarhus Municipality uses pilot projects as a core strategic tool to evaluate new initiatives before large-scale rollout, ensuring continuous learning and adaptation. This approach forms the basis for subsequent initiatives with greater reach.

The following two strategic development activities establish a crucial developmental and overarching framework for the more concrete pilot activities described below.

Strategic development activities

Can AI help us work in a smarter way?

Our AI initiative explores how AI can bolster municipal social and employment activities. By automating routine tasks, AI can free up staff for direct citizen interaction and offer deeper insights for better resource targeting. We are demonstrating this potential with our Case Summary tool, which is expected to halve preparation time and ensure consistent case handling. Crucially, AI must complement, not replace, human judgment, and we are actively working to bridge the gap between this clear implementation potential and existing outdated legislation in the authority area.

PH.D Project on Inclusive Digitalisation

Complementing this, a Ph.D. Project on Inclusive Digitalisation began March 1, 2025, in partnership with DTU Management and funded by Innovation Fund Denmark. Recognizing the challenges digitalisation poses for many citizens, this project will use research to delve into the overlooked costs of municipal digital care efforts and the broader economic and social impacts of public digitalisation. The goal is to develop sustainable solutions that enhance citizen support and strengthen our shared society.

These two concurrent activities establish a broad and conceptual resonance and background for the more concrete pilot activities described below.

Actions and Strategic Objectives

In collaboration with our Local Urbact Group, we have chosen to focus on three activities based on the objectives in the Digital Inclusion plan.
Each activity connects to one of the three Objectives, but with varying levels of focus.
The activities are presented below:

Objective 1: Provide alternatives: To offer accessible alternatives for those facing digital challenges.

The BRUS Project

BRUS is a free, inter-municipal service in Central Jutland for children and young people aged 0-25 who grow up in families with substance abuse problems (alcohol/drugs). The service includes individual, group, and family counseling, tailored to the young person's specific needs. The project has a strong digital focus via ungbrus.dk with offers such as SMS counseling and Letterbox counseling.

Link to the Digital inclusion strategy

BRUS's digital track—including SMS counseling, the Letterbox, and future digital treatment—directly supports the principles of a digital inclusion strategy. By offering nationwide, anonymous, and time-flexible counseling, assistance is ensured for young people who are mentally or socially burdened, find it difficult to attend physical treatment (e.g., due to changing residence, boarding school, parenthood), or live outside the participating municipalities. This addresses barriers to participation and creates equal access to welfare services via digital channels.

Intended results

The intended results include:
- Increased accessibility of help and support for all young people in Denmark, regardless of geographic location.
- Flexibility in treatment courses for young people who cannot attend physical offers.
- Reduction of waiting lists and faster assistance.
- Strengthened digital clarity and low-threshold entry to the system (via SMS counseling and the Letterbox) for young people in the clarification phase.
- Establishment of a digital treatment track for young people over 18 as a supplement or alternative to physical treatment.

Responsible for the implementation

The existing digital offer is managed in cooperation between the participating municipalities in Central Jutland, who staff the SMS counseling in rotation. The future digital treatment track will be handled by BRUS therapists.

Timeframe

The existing digital offer (SMS counseling and the Letterbox) is continuously being developed. The goal for 2025 is to test digital treatment for young people over 18 from families with substance abuse problems.

Objective 2 : Empower citizens: To equip citizens with the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape.

Robot Café

The project utilizes the ground-floor café at the House of Generations (Aarhus Ø) as a pilot environment. The House of Generations in Aarhus Ø is a pioneering architectural and social initiative designed as an intergenerational community space, integrating housing for all ages with public facilities like a café to foster social connection and collaboration.

The goal is to address social and labor market exclusion among young people through the use of advanced telepresence robotics. Young individuals facing barriers to traditional employment (e.g., mobility issues, anxiety, geographical limitations) operate mobile service robots in the café remotely from their homes via a high-fidelity interface. The robots are used to interact with customers, take orders, and manage table service. This creates a digitally accessible workspace, allowing the youth to gain valuable work experience and contribute to the local community without the need for physical presence.
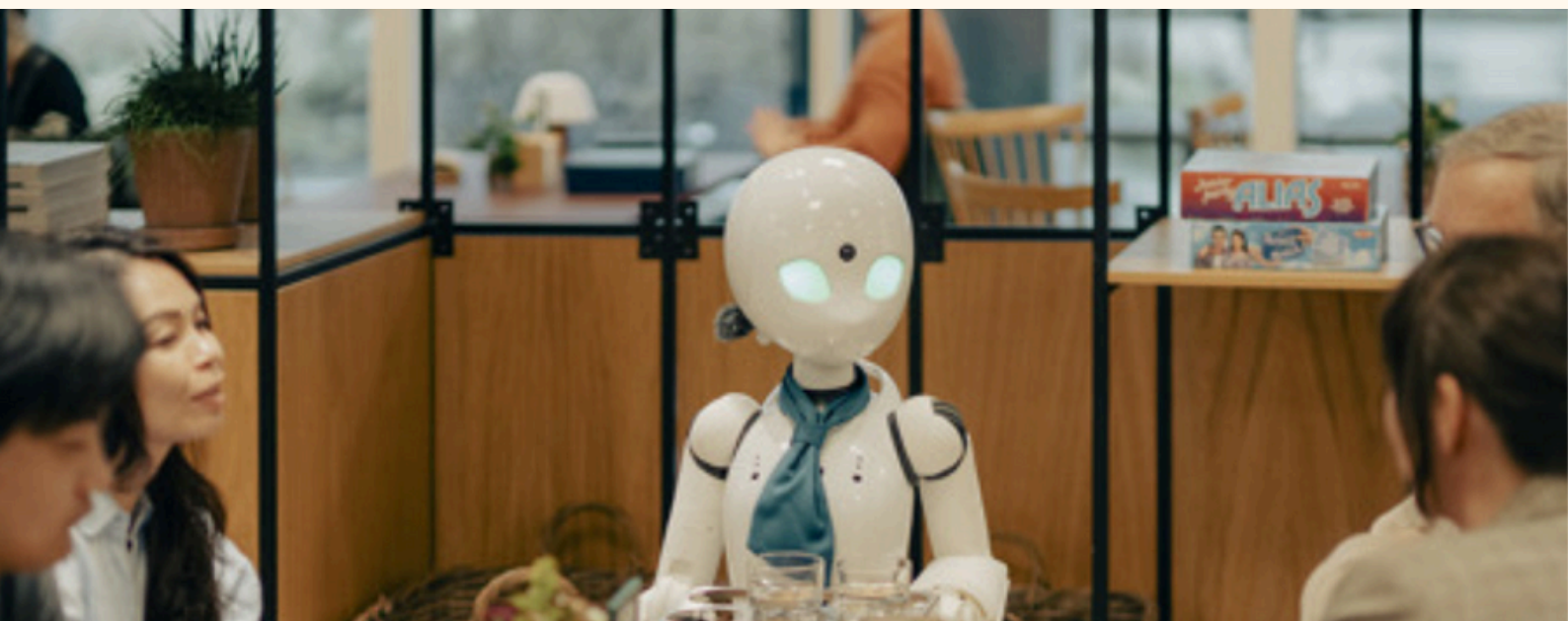
Link to the Digital inclusion strategy

The Robot Café project directly supports Aarhus Municipality's Digital Inclusion Strategy, particularly Objective 2: Empower citizens: To equip citizens with the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape, by transforming technology from a barrier into a pathway for participation. It achieves this by providing marginalized young people with hands-on, practical digital skills that are highly relevant in the modern job market. Participants don't just use a digital platform; they learn to master remote operation protocols, navigate human-robot interaction dynamics, and effectively manage a service role in a blended physical-digital environment. This initiative moves beyond basic digital literacy by offering professional training in advanced telepresence technology, thereby equipping citizens with the high-level competencies required to actively navigate and contribute to the rapidly evolving digital landscape and fostering genuine labor market integration

Intended results

The intended results include:
- Labor Market Integration: Provide tangible job opportunities and professional training in hospitality and remote operations for marginalized youth.
- Social Participation: Foster a sense of belonging and mitigate isolation by enabling remote interaction with café patrons and staff.
- Developing Future-Ready Skills: Train participants in managing human-robot interaction and remote work protocols, skills increasingly vital in the modern labor market. The project is intended to serve as a replicable model for inclusion.

Responsible for implementation

Aarhus Municipality and the local NGO, FO, are responsible for the implementation of the project in close collaboration with the House of Generations.

Timeframe

The project is a development initiative scheduled to run over a two-year period spanning 2024 and 2025.

Objective 3: Minimize barriers: To reduce obstacles preventing individuals from engaging with the municipality.

Digital Detox Zones

As an integral test action within the EUI project ImperfectCity, we are launching 'Digital Detox Zones' at the local community center, Bunkeren. This initiative addresses the challenges of constant digital flow and excessive social media use among young people, which can lead to stress, reduced concentration, and isolation. The project will create a sanctuary where phones are put down, and analog pleasures are rediscovered. We will revive elements from the 70s by introducing activities such as board games, analog creative workshops, communal music listening, and face-to-face conversations without screens.

Link to the Digital inclusion strategy

Although this project focuses on digital disconnection, it is fundamentally linked to a digital inclusion strategy by promoting digital well-being and healthier digital habits. It serves as an intervention to mitigate the negative consequences of excessive online presence (stress, isolation), which are prerequisites for meaningful and productive digital engagement. By studying the negative effects of social media use, the project informs future initiatives aimed at achieving a healthy balance between online and offline life, ensuring that digital tools serve the community positively rather than dominating it detrimentally.

Intended results

The intended results include:
- Establishment of a dedicated 'Digital Detox Zone' within Bunkeren community center.
- Increased Social Interaction and Creativity: Young people will immerse themselves in analog activities, leading to improved social connection and creative expression.
- Documented Impact: Data will be collected via observations, interviews, and questionnaires to document the effects of the zone on participants' mental and social well-being (e.g., reduced stress, increased concentration, stronger sense of community).
- Deeper Understanding: Contribute empirical evidence to the challenges of digital dependency, informing future urban and community initiatives that promote a healthier balance.

Responsible for the implementation

Aarhus Municipality - Social Affairs & Employment Department and the Project Management Team ImperfectCity. The implementation will be conducted in close collaboration with the local community center Bunkeren and participating youth groups.

Timeframe

2025 – 2027. The project involves an initial setup/revitalization phase, an active testing and data collection period, and a final reporting/dissemination phase.

Monitoring Plan

This Monitoring Plan outlines the key indicators for the three selected activities detailed in our Integrated Action Plan, focusing primarily on the digital services offered by Project BRUS, The Digital Detox Zone and the Robot Café.

The primary purpose of this monitoring framework is to enable close, ongoing tracking of the project's progress and performance. By regularly collecting and analyzing the data outlined below, we will be able to follow the project closely, assess whether targets are being met, and ensure we have the necessary evidence to make timely, informed adjustments to the project strategy and implementation as needed.

This proactive approach will maximize our ability to achieve the intended results.

Action	Output indicator	Baseline value	Target	Source	Responsibility
SMS Counselling	Number of unique users of the SMS counseling service per quarter.	(To be retrieved from existing data, e.g., average number in 2024)	Increase the number of unique users by 10% in 2025 compared to the Baseline.	Ungbrus.dk's SMS system data.	The participating municipalities (rotation).
Digital threatment	Percentage of young people in the digital course who state they would not have received help otherwise (due to distance, busy schedules, mental barrier).	N/A (Starts in 2025)	At least 75% of the young people state "digital" was the decisive factor for their participation	Questionnaire/ exit interview with young people after completing the course.	BRUS Therapists/Project Management.

Action	Output indicator	Baseline value	Target	Source	Responsibility
Robot cafe	Number of young individuals who successfully complete the training course in robot remote control and service protocols.	0	10 young individuals have completed the course.	Certification documentation / Training logs	Municipality of Aarhus

Action	Output indicator	Baseline value	Target	Source	Responsibility
Digital Detox Zone	Number of 'Digital Detox Zone' events/sessions successfully held at Bunkeren.	0	≥24 sessions conducted over the project period (1 per month minimum).	Event/ Attendance Logs	Management team Kulturhus Bunkeren