



FACTSHEET #9

VULNERABLE PEOPLE, ICTS AND DATA

WHY DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VULNERABLE PEOPLE, ICTS AND DATA?

The ethical and legal challenges around ICTs and data affect everyone. However, for vulnerable people, **these challenges can be even more acute** - and their ability to adapt to them is often lower. There is also the possibility that they miss out on the **opportunities and benefits that ICTs can bring**. This factsheet provides an introduction to who is vulnerable in society, and highlights some of the many ways in which they are more at risk of their personal data being misused.

KEY MESSAGES

- Vulnerability is complex: **people can be vulnerable in many different ways**, and often face more than one form of vulnerability at a time.
- **Vulnerable groups** include, among many others: older people; young people/minors; migrants; refugees; people living with disabilities; and those with health problems.
- The nature of a person's vulnerability determines **the risks they face in terms of data and ICTs** - and this diversity makes it difficult to establish specific laws and protections for each case.
- However, given their increased exposure to the risks associated with ICTs and data, **vulnerable people need greater protection and support**.

HOW ARE VULNERABLE PEOPLE AT RISK?

Vulnerable people face a higher risk of their personal data being used in ways they are not happy with, or its misuse. Often, they have **less awareness** of this risk; the power imbalances between vulnerable people and data collectors may also be greater. Furthermore, vulnerable people may be **incapable of giving consent** to the use of their data, for example if they are not fluent in the language(s) of their country. There is also a greater risk of **stigmatisation and discrimination**, for example being put into categories (i.e. based on their sexuality) for the purposes of research and analysis.



HOMELESS PEOPLE AND PERSONAL DATA

Homeless people are regularly exposed to **misuse of their personal data**. Their situation often means they lack up-to-date information on ICTs and data which, for many citizens, is available through their place of work/education, or via regular access to the internet. Personal data about homeless people may also be collected without their consent, for example when using services provided by charities. In other cases, they may feel obliged to provide personal information to receive services, even if they do not want to.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- If you consider yourself vulnerable, or work with vulnerable people, always ask: Who is asking for my data? What will they use it for? How long will they keep it? Who will they share it with?
- If you are still unsure or unhappy about how your data will be used, find out more: this could be through a citizen's advice office, or your national data protection authority.
- Those collecting data on vulnerable people (e.g. technology companies, local authorities, researchers) should always consider the specific risks that members of each vulnerable group will face when their data is used - and identify steps to reduce or overcome these.

FIND OUT MORE

READ: The PANELFIT 'Guide to ICTs, data and vulnerable people' explores these issues in more detail (www.panelfit.eu/). Other useful resources include this article about vulnerable data subjects (bit.ly/3j5AXeZ), Privacy International's article on threats to migrants and refugees (bit.ly/2SjsERS), and this example of a 'racist' algorithm (<https://tcrn.ch/3qkqGND>).

WATCH: A number of the Panelfit monthly chats focus on vulnerable people, especially the talk on 'Vulnerable Data Subjects and EU law': bit.ly/3gO2Re4