



# IMPACT REPORT

Piloting digital application  
"FREEDOM FOR ARMY"

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OCTOBER 12, 2023 | FOGGIA, ITALY



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the European Union

PROJECT: "RESILIENCE AND INCLUSION FOR THE MILITARY"  
# 2022-1-R001-KA220-VET-000085808

# **ACTIVITY REPORT**

Piloting Digital Application

**" FREEDOM FOR ARMY "**

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Erasmus+ Program – Strategic Partnership  
"Resilience and inclusion for the military" project  
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**Partners:**

DIGITAL KOMPASS - Bucharest , Romania

IV International - Foggia, Italy

Organization for Promotion of European Issues - Paphos, Cyprus

BUMIR - Bucharest , Romania

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## **A. Introduction**

The Freedom for Army app was developed with the goal of supporting active military, veterans, and military personnel with disabilities in recognizing, assessing, and managing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a common mental health problem among military personnel exposed to traumatic situations. The piloting of the app in Italy was meant to test the effectiveness of its sections, assess usability and applicability for users, and get detailed feedback from participants.

This piloting had as its main purpose the validation of the content and structure of the application to guarantee that it best meets the awareness and psychological support needs of active military, veterans and military personnel with disabilities. The participants, chosen from among Italian active military and veterans, went through all sections of the application and were asked to answer a set of feedback questions after each section, thus giving us direct perspectives on the usefulness of each feature. The feedback collected at this stage is crucial to identify areas of success, but also possible points that need improvement, thus allowing the application to be adapted to the real needs of users.

## **B. Conducting the App's Pilot Test**

The piloting of the Freedom for Army app in Italy was carried out to allow participants to explore each section in detail and apply the techniques offered within the app. The group of participants included active military, veterans and military personnel with disabilities of varying degrees and experiences in theaters of operations, thus allowing a wide spectrum of perspectives and impressions to be obtained.

Each participant went through the sections of the application, with a focus on the use of the proposed techniques and exercises and on the analysis of the informative content. At the end of each section, participants were asked to answer feedback questions, giving us valuable data on the impact of the app on their perceptions, the degree of applicability and clarity of the information.

# C. Feedback and Responses by Section

## 1. SECTION I

### 1.1 About Post-Traumatic Stress

#### *Instructions and objectives*

This section includes a questionnaire-based test designed to help military members assess the intensity of their PTSD symptoms. By completing this test, users can get a preliminary assessment of their condition and better understand if they are experiencing symptoms that would require additional attention.

#### *Answers and feedback*

- Relevance and accessibility – Most participants found the quiz accessible and easy to complete. The questions were considered clear and well-tailored to assess the specific symptoms of PTSD. The participants appreciated the objectivity of the test, considering that it gives them a benchmark on the level of symptoms experienced.
- Monitoring the evolution – A common suggestion was to offer the option of repeating the test periodically to monitor the evolution of symptoms over time. The military expressed a desire to have a functionality that would allow them to compare test results over several weeks or months to assess the effectiveness of management techniques.
- Suggestions for improvement – Participants recommended introducing a brief interpretation of the scores obtained, providing suggestions for action based on different levels of symptom intensity. In addition, a guide that gives military members a deeper understanding of how test results can contribute to the choice of management techniques would be useful.

## **2. SECTION II**

### **2.1 Evaluation**

#### *Instructions and Objectives*

This section includes a questionnaire-based test designed to help military members assess the intensity of their PTSD symptoms. By completing this test, users can get a preliminary assessment of their condition and better understand if they are experiencing symptoms that would require additional attention.

#### *Responses and feedback*

- Relevance and accessibility – Most participants found the quiz accessible and easy to complete. The questions were considered clear and well-tailored to assess the specific symptoms of PTSD. The participants appreciated the objectivity of the test, considering that it gives them a benchmark on the level of symptoms experienced.
- Monitoring the evolution – A common suggestion was to offer the option of repeating the test periodically to monitor the evolution of symptoms over time. The military expressed a desire to have a functionality that would allow them to compare test results over several weeks or months to assess the effectiveness of management techniques.
- Suggestions for improvement – Participants recommended introducing a brief interpretation of the scores obtained, providing suggestions for action based on different levels of symptom intensity. In addition, a guide that gives military members a deeper understanding of how test results can contribute to the choice of management techniques would be useful.

## **3. SECTION III**

### **3.1 Managing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

#### *Instructions and Objectives*

This section is intended to present techniques and strategies for managing post-traumatic stress, including abdominal breathing, the 3-5-7 technique, progressive muscle

relaxation, and others. The goal is to provide users with practical tools to reduce symptoms and improve well-being.

#### *Responses and feedback*

- Applicability and effectiveness - Participants indicated that stress management exercises were useful and easy to apply, especially in acute stress situations. The techniques of breathing and progressive relaxation of the muscles were the most appreciated, being described as effective for calming and relaxation.
- Guidance Proposals - A common suggestion was to add audio guides to accompany these techniques, to help users follow the instructions correctly and be able to apply the techniques even without continuously consulting the app.
- Suggestions for improvement - Participants noted that a daily practice structure would be helpful, giving them a clear routine for applying these techniques every day, thus increasing the effectiveness of managing PTSD symptoms.

## **4. SECTION IV**

### **4.1 Treatment**

#### *Instructions and Objectives*

This section introduces different treatment methods for PTSD, including cognitive behavioral therapy, exposure therapy, and EMDR. The section is intended to inform users about the options available and to suggest appropriate intervention methods for PTSD.

#### *Responses and feedback*

- Clarity and usefulness - The servicemen appreciated the information about the various treatment methods, considering them clear and well structured. Most of the participants expressed interest in exposure therapies and EMDR, believing that they are methods that could be very helpful.
- Detailed suggestions - A constant recommendation has been to include detailed information about the process of accessing these therapies so that users know how to proceed to obtain professional support.

## **5. SECTION V**

### **5.1 Self-Therapy**

#### *Instructions and Objectives*

This section includes self-therapy methods, such as therapeutic writing, providing users with tools to process and express emotions. The goal is to allow military members to better understand their emotional states and manage their PTSD symptoms.

#### *Responses and feedback*

- Benefits of therapeutic writing - Participants indicated that therapeutic writing exercises were useful for emotional release, believing that they found a safe tool for expressing thoughts and emotions.
- Initial difficulties - A few servicemen reported initial difficulties in emotional openness, but once they began the writing process, they felt an emotional improvement and greater clarity.
- Suggestions for improvement - Examples of writing structures have been suggested to guide users in structuring thoughts and emotions, as well as additional exercises to diversify self-therapy methods.

## **6. SECTION VI**

### **6.1 Social Connection and Contacts**

#### *Instructions and Objectives*

The section provides a list of therapists' contacts and social support resources, with the aim of encouraging military members to maintain social connections and know where to turn for help.

#### *Responses and feedback*

- Relevance of contacts - Participants appreciated the list of therapists, considering it to be a real and accessible support for the moments when they need help.



- The importance of social support - The content of the section reminded them of the importance of social connection, and the participants mentioned that the section provides them with a solid foundation to build a circle of support.
- Suggestions for improvement - Options have been proposed for the creation of an online support community, where military members can share experiences and advice, thus helping to strengthen mutual support between users.

## **D. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The piloting of the \*Freedom for Army\* app in Italy has demonstrated its significant potential in supporting the mental health and social inclusion of military personnel. The feedback from the participants (active military, veterans and military with disabilities) highlighted the strengths of the application and some essential directions for improvement, essential to ensure an optimized experience.

### **Recommendations**

1. Introduction of audio guides for management exercises.
2. Options for periodic reassessment of symptoms to track progress.
3. Include an online community of support between military personnel for the exchange of experiences and advice.
4. Expanding detailed information about accessing therapies and therapeutic techniques.

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