E-government impact on the grey digital divide
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Purpose To use policy experience on E-Government and the Grey Divide to improve governance. **Methods** Mixed method approach was used including literature review, information related to Roger's Innovation Diffusion Theory, cross walk analysis and international policy experience to fairly share citizen and state responsibility. **Results and Discussion** E-government is defined as the use of ICTs to more effectively and efficiently deliver government services to citizens (United Nations, 2024). The primary characteristics of democratic governments as stated by Abraham Lincoln: A government of the people, by the people and for the people. However, E-government renders this social institution faceless and devoid of social interaction. A proportion of the population is excluded, thereby creating the digital divide or those that benefit from the digital age and those who do not (IEEE, No Date.). The "Grey Digital Divide" is due to barriers of perception, access and use resulting in the exclusion of older citizens (Millward, 2003) from the benefits of digital participation arising from reasons beyond the usual factors related to disadvantage such as income although there are intersectionalities. Implementing generic and targeted policies for older citizens is critical because they are important beneficiaries of major policies such as pensions and health. A major difference in expectations can cause exclusion. Governments expect digitally competent citizens that can find information and access services and programs shifting responsibility to the user. Older citizens expect the right to government services regardless of their digital competences. This results in policy failure and inequitable results. There is the misguided optimism that with time the whole population will be digitally savvy, not recognizing that technology advances much faster than population adoption. While younger people can use prescriptive policies, older people forge personal technological pathways. According to the theory of innovation diffusion, the factors that would accelerate adoption among older people are: Relative advantage or the acceptance that the new idea or product is better than the one that is being replaced; Compatibility of the innovation with their values, experiences and needs; Complexity or how difficult the innovation is to understand and use, Trialability or the extent and opportunity to try and experiment before adoption; and Observability or the extent to which there are tangible results. For many older people, E-government fails all these factors. Unless there are wrap around policies to address these multiple needs, older people will be excluded. Successful policy experiences can be shared. At the international level the United Nations suggests that to meet the priority of serving the whole public, a hybrid system is recommended, ensuring inclusion (UN DESA, 2022). At the national level, each of the five factors for adoption can be addressed. Relative advantage is addressed by automatic enrolment and pre-populated tax forms as in Finland. Compatibility of values is the principle of the Silver Surfer project in Luxembourg that uses older volunteers to train their peers in digital technology. To diminish complexity, in Romania, public libraries provide free e-skills learning paced for older people. When older people are part of the design and testing process of products and services as in the UK, trialability is enhanced. In Slovenia, a mobile banking vehicle provides face-to-face support to older persons in using their mobile phones and other digital devices to perform online banking services where they experience tangible results and observability is achieved. E-government must be equitable and inclusive, not only efficient.

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