A DECADE OF E-ADMINISTRATION UTILIZATION IN EUROPE: A TALE OF INCOME, EDUCATION, AND AGE-RELATED DIGITAL DIVIDES

In an era of increasing digitalization of many life domains – from social relations to economic transactions and administrative processes – digital divides are becoming more relevant and consequential. Previous research has extensively documented the role of age and birth cohort as two of the most influential determinants of ICT utilization.

Drawing on findings from the ICTAGE project, this contribution adds to the literature by integrating technological innovation diffusion frameworks with social stratification approaches. Specifically, we examine the impact of age, social stratification, and their intersection on the utilization of E-Administration tools in Europe. We achieve this by using data from Eurostat's IC household Survey, which covers the years preceding and following the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the period of subsequent massive public investments in digitalizing public administrations. The results suggest that: (i) the digital divide is a dynamic process in which the social bases of digital exclusion evolve rather than simply diminish; (ii) the protective role of higher education and income varies depending on the age group considered, with a marked weaker role among individuals aged 75 years or more. More generally, we document the role of (forced) digital literacy and public investments in shaping the digital divide.

📅 **January 28, 2026**

🕐 **12 - 1 PM**

📍 **Public Policy 204**

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Using Europe-wide data from before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the study shows that the digital divide remains a shifting form of social inequality shaped by age, education, income, and public investments in digital services, with markedly weaker protective effects of socioeconomic resources among adults aged 75 and older.