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Abstract

ICT Skills and the Digital Gender Divide in the Republic of Serbia †

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1. Objectives

Information and communication technology (ICT) is a fundamental component of contemporary society. Possession of ICT skills facilitates daily life, affects positioning in the business environment, and facilitates the educational process. [1,2] Equality in the possession of ICT skills is one of the fundamental human rights. However, research conducted in recent years has shown that the gender digital divide is particularly noticeable in underdeveloped and developing countries. [3–6] The main objective of this research is to investigate the gender digital divide in the Republic of Serbia and to determine the potential gap's impact on women's ability to find a job, be more competitive, have better access to education, and earn an income.

2. Methodology

The study is based on the data from the annual survey of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) "*The Usage of Information and Communication Technology by Individuals and Households in the Republic of Serbia*". The data were collected in the territory of the Republic of Serbia according to the methods of Eurostat, excluding the data of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. The sample consists of males and females between the ages of 16 and 74, regardless of their age, work status, or education level. For the purposes of this study, data from the last 10 years were used.

3. Results

The secondary research results show some disparity in ICT skills between men and women, which is even more pronounced in underdeveloped and developing countries. The research results for Serbia are similar. From 2013 to 2022, a certain gap was found in using computers in the last three months and using the internet in the last three months.

In 2013, 60.6% of men and 53.4% of women used computers. [7] In 2017, more than 72% of men used computers, while only 63.4% of women did so as well. [7] In 2022, nearly 80% of men used the internet, while only 72.7% of women did so. [7] Regarding internet usage in the last 3 months, the situation is identical. [7] In 2013, 57.0% of men and only 50.0% of women used the internet; in 2017, 73.7% of men and 67.4% of women did the same. [7] In 2022, 85.9% of men and 81.2% of women had used the internet in the last three months. [7] The results show that, during those ten years, there has been a noticeable increase in the total usage of computers and the internet among both genders, which is expected in the era of digitization of business processes, education, and health care. However, even while the total consumption rate has greatly increased over the previous ten years, there is still a disparity. These findings show that in order to lessen the gap, specific steps and actions must be taken.

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4. Implications

In order to achieve gender equality, the digital gender gap must be closed, and the findings of this research can be helpful in this process. Through various education modes, workshops, and training, building an inclusive workplace that enables women to be more competitive is possible.

5. Originality Value

This study contributes to the existing literature addressing the digital divide gender gap. The importance of gender-sensitive policies in the digital realm is highlighted.

6. Contribution

By addressing the digital divide in the context of women and ICT skills, this research contributes to the broader discourse on digital inclusion and gender equality. It can provide evidence-based recommendations that can guide stakeholders in the process of bridging the digital divide and empowering women in the digital age.

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