Chapter XI

E-Government for an Inclusive Society: How Different Citizen Groups Use E-Government Services in Europe

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Abstract

This chapter examines the role of e-government in supporting an inclusive society by focusing on how government and e-government services are used, and who uses them. In this context, the socioeconomic and other characteristics of users and nonusers of e-government services are examined, as is the importance of the different user access channels, including the digital channel, and the consequences this has. The focus is also on user experiences of e-government and the role of human intermediaries in delivering services. In each case, the benefits and challenges of e-government for an inclusive society are documented and analyzed. Finally, conclusions are drawn concerning appropriate inclusion policy.
Introduction

There has been a relative dearth of studies and data on the user demand and usage side of e-government services compared with the supply side. This is both because it is much easier to collect supply side data from mainly public organizations than it is to collect usage data from citizens, and because chronologically roll-out takes place before take-up and use. This chapter presents new data and analysis (Millard, 2006) which, to some extent, redress this imbalance. These findings are related to other sources and specifically to the issue of an inclusive society by examining the consequences of e-government for inclusion and how the benefits could be optimized.

The overall focus of the chapter is thus on the role e-government plays in an inclusive society by examining who the users of government and e-government are, the channels they use, and the role of social intermediaries in delivering e-government services.

Who Uses Government and E-Government Services

According to the eUSER survey, almost 70% of all adults had direct contact with the public administration in the previous 12 months, although the average number of contacts was only 1.6 per person during that period. Figure 1 shows the four main types of such service users and their main distinguishing characteristics, each of which is examined in the following.

Government Service User

Based on multivariate statistical analysis techniques, Figure 2 shows that a citizen’s educational level is the most important factor determining whether or not they use government services. For example, citizens with a tertiary education are 2.5 times more likely to be government users than those with the lowest educational level, while Figure 3 shows that citizens in the over 65 age group are 1.9 times more likely to be government users than the 18-24 age group.

Other important factors include income, where citizens with over median income are 1.3 times more likely to be government users than citizens below the poverty level, and employment status which shows that unemployed citizens, followed closely by those who are early retired and invalids, are marginally more likely to be government users than other groups.
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