Public Policymakers' Attitudes on Planning and Implementing Measures for 54+ Population e-Inclusion

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Abstract. *Social inclusion is a crucial component of sustainable development, and digital technologies now play a facilitating role for those who have access and the skills to use them effectively. However, the challenge lies in the exclusion of groups without Internet access or digital skills, which often includes the 54+ population. Addressing this problem, known as the digital divide, requires a systematic and comprehensive approach to creating and implementing public policies. This paper aims to examine public policymakers' awareness of the 54+ population e-inclusion issues and to explore the connection between their views on the importance of recognizing the 54+ population e-inclusion in public policies and their personal levels of e-inclusion. Data were collected electronically using a validated measuring instrument across eight counties in the Republic of Croatia. Inferential statistical analysis of the data confirms a connection between public policymakers' views on the importance of e-inclusion for the 54+ population in public policies and their personal levels of e-inclusion.*

Keywords. E-inclusion, Public policies, vulnerable population groups

1 Introduction

Recognition of this problem on national, as well as international level, resulted in development of active aging measures (UN, 1990). The growing percentage of the elderly population in the total population has become a global problem today and is recognized in many countries. Predictions by the United Nations (UN) say that the number of people over the age of 60 could account for about 34% of total population in Europe by 2050 (United Nations, 2017, p. 1). Active aging measures are nowadays contained in a series of acts and documents of international organizations, such as Agenda 2020 on sustainable development, which aims to "provide the possibility of inclusion, the right to equality in education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all people" (European Commission, 2014). The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda contains a plan of activities within the 17 set goals related to population, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. Among other things, the sustainable development policy contains guidelines for solving today's social problems adopted for the period up to 2030 (United Nations, 2015a). One of the conclusions is the comprehensiveness of digital inclusion and the widest possible inclusion of citizens with the aim of achieving equal opportunities in sustainable development. Achieving equal conditions for all citizens cannot be attained without determining the main causes of digital divide, identifying homogeneous groups of users who are not e-Inclusive, as well as a systematic approach by the Public Sector in the creation and implementation of measures aimed at preventing the digital divide. Recent crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic have shown that at least part of the negative social and economic consequences of crisis situations can be mitigated (or even prevented) by e-inclusion of citizens (Robinson et al. 2020). The advantages of e-inclusion are particularly evident in the case of the population living in rural areas and/or affected by some of the more difficult life circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, health problems, disability, etc. Measures to restrict movement and daily migration caused by the pandemic led to isolation and inaccessibility or lower quality of public services, especially in the case of such vulnerable population groups (Guenther et al., 2020). Therefore, solving the problem of insufficient e-inclusion of certain social groups has significant implications on the development of economic and other activities in society, especially during emergency and crisis situations.

In the continuation of this Paper, the specifics of the 54+ population are explained, and the research problem is defined. This is followed by the conceptualization of the research question, research objectives and hypotheses, after which the research methodology is described. In the following chapter, the research results are presented and analysed. The last chapter highlights the most important conclusions and recommendations, as well as limitations of the conducted research and indications for future research.

2 54+ population e-inclusion

The growing percentage of the 54+ (population aged 55 to 74) in total population makes the e-inclusion issue an increasingly important social issue. At the same time, a prerequisite for a successful implementation of digital transformation is the public policymakers' and the general public awareness of the importance of quality aging. Through their joint efforts, United Nations member countries accepted the challenge by creating national, regional, and local strategies. In a series of acts, the European Union focused on digital technologies, accelerating access to knowledge, economic growth and job creation, as well as equality to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Vincent, 2019, United Nations, 2015a).

Bearing in mind the specifics of the 54+ population, public policy measures that should be emphasized and that can be considered relevant are: ensuring adequate digital infrastructure available to users equally in urban and rural areas, developing e-government, ensuring digital content (open data, English open data) and electronic public services (e-administration, English e-government), the availability of which, on the one hand, affects the quality of life of citizens in general, but also the empowerment to participate in the development of society (e-participation, English e - participation). On the one hand, a sufficient level of e-Involvement of public officials is needed (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2010), while on the other hand, user involvement in the development and provision of services is an important component of their accessibility. The reason for this is that the involvement of users in the development of practical application of digital solutions contributes to the prospects for acceptance and legitimacy, and thus to a higher level of their use (Simonofski et al. 2019, Tuan, 2022, Callens, 2023). Promoting the benefits resulting from the use of different types of electronic services - especially aimed at target groups of users - is another necessary measure. This contributes to the effective use of certain public digital services (e.g. e-learning, e-health, e-culture), as well as commercial services (e-commerce, e-banking), while more economic activity yields higher tax revenues for the budget in general, regardless of the level of public administration we are talking about. The analysis by the Center for Economics and Business Research (CEBR, 2023) in Great Britain which conducted a study of ten-year investment cycle of funds through numerous measures in e-inclusion showed that it resulted in multiple profits since the effects of e-inclusion of certain sensitive population groups reflect on: efficient use of time, increased income, employability, benefits in the supply sector, communication, data exchange with public administration, efficiency and savings due to digitalization of systems, corporate benefits and general benefits.

Furthermore, necessary measures include encouraging the activities of non-profit organizations dealing with issues of vulnerable population groups (citizens of the third age, people with disabilities) to organize activities aimed at raising digital literacy and encouraging e-inclusion of the target population. Encouraging and promoting the policy of active aging can be carried out precisely through the activities of non-profit organizations. Encouraging greater e-inclusion as designed in the Digital Agenda (European Commission, 2014) is expected to bring economic benefit (resource savings, availability of goods and services on the global market) and the achievement of high social goals of environmental protection and socially responsible business. Achieving these goals is possible provided that a large part of the population is active in the modern digital environment and if the e-inclusion is supported by public policies (Yu, Ndumu, Mon and Fan, 2018). Bearing in mind EUROSTAT data (Eurostat, 2020, e-society), this represents a challenge in the case of the 54+ population, since this particular group shows a significantly lower level of e-inclusion compared to the younger population, as evident from Table 1. In Table 1. data presents four categories of EU countries grouped by the percentage of 54+ population that never used Internet (in 2019). As it can be seen the in most of EU countries the percentage of digital divided 54+ between 31-40%. At that time the percentage of digital divided 54+ population is over 40% (41%), as well as it is in Portugal, Greece and Bulgaria.

Table 1. Percentage of respondents aged 55 to 74 who have never used the Internet in 2019 (European Union, 28 countries)

% of resp. 54+ popul.	% countries	Comment
Up to 10%	21,43	Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg, UK
11 - 20%	14,28	Germany, Belgium, France, Estonia
21-30%	17,86	Spain, Ireland, Czech Republic, Austria, Latvia
31-40%	28,57	Slovakia, Slovenia, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Cyprus, Poland, Romania
41%+	17,86	Croatia, Portugal, Greece, Bulgaria
Total	100	

Source: Zdjelar, according to EUROSTAT, e-society (2020).

3 Conceptual framework of the research

Considering that a systematic and horizontal approach in the creation of public policies is necessary for the successful integration of e-inclusion into public policies, and one of the assumptions being the willingness of public policymakers to adopt the issue of e-inclusion of the 54+ population, two basic research questions were formulated.

1. What are the attitudes of public policymakers in the Republic of Croatia towards the need to include 54+ population e-inclusion in public policies, and what is the personal level of e-inclusion of public policymakers?
2. Is there a connection between the level of readiness of public policies regarding 54+ population e-inclusion and the attitudes and personal level of e-inclusion of public policymakers?

In an effort to answer the formulated research questions, the research goal is to develop an instrument for measuring attitudes towards e-inclusion of the 54+ population in public policies and the personal level of e-inclusion of public policymakers, which would serve as a base for drawing a conclusion about the existence of a connection between attitudes about the importance of including 54+ population e-inclusion in public policies and the public policymakers' personal level of e-inclusion.

The research hypothesis is: H1: There is a connection between the views on the importance of including e-inclusion of the 54+ population in public policies and the personal level of e-inclusion of public policymakers.

In the continuation of the Paper, the research methodology is described, in order to be able to answer the research questions accordingly, achieve the research goals and accept or reject the set research hypothesis.

4 Paper Research methodology

In order to examine and determine the views of public policymakers on planning and implementation of measures for e-inclusion of the 54+ population through public policies and their personal level of e-inclusion, a validated measuring instrument was developed for which the steps of the methodology developed by DeVellis (2012) were used. The basis for determining the constructs (categories), attributes and items of the measuring instrument was an overview of the relevant literature in the field of e-inclusion. As the most suitable model for the production of a new measuring instrument, the general theoretical conceptual model of e-inclusion of the general population developed by Žajdela Hrustek (2015) was chosen together with a validated measuring instrument developed during the research by Žajdela Hrustek (2015). The newly constructed measuring instrument is formulated in such a way as to put emphasis on the impact of public policies and their focus on e-inclusion of the 54+ population.

In the measuring instrument, 31 claims are formulated, simple or with several sub-claims. The measuring instrument was divided into three parts, and included a total of 10 general variables on subjects and 79 variables on attitudes, of which six nominal variables and 73 rank variables. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement with the claims on an ordinal semantic scale and expressed their views on frequency. The claims in the measuring instrument were of a closed type, with the possibility of selecting exclusively one of the multiple answers offered.

After the measuring instrument was created, data was collected in the second step using the survey. The defined population of the research included a total of 128 respondents from the following areas: Zagreb County, Međimurje County, Krapina-Zagorje County, Varaždin County, Koprivnica-Križevci County, Bjelovar-Bilogora County, Virovitica-Podravina County and Istria County. The selection of counties was made on the basis of geographical similarity and readiness for cooperation of county services, because a significant part of the counties did not provide public e-mail addresses to members of the county assembly, and a significant part of them was unavailable due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The survey was conducted in the period from (October to December 2020). The respondents were members of county assemblies and county prefects, their deputies and heads. The measuring instrument was forwarded by random selection to a total of 386 respondents, of which a total of 128 (33%) responded voluntarily, who completed the questionnaire in full for the following three data sets: general data on respondents (county, gender, age, level of education and place of residence); a number of information and communication technology claims (ICT abbreviated) – claims 6 to 23; a series of claims about public policy preparedness for the e-inclusion of the population of people over the age of 54 – claims 24 to 31.

The measuring instrument was completed by respondents through an online questionnaire. The link leading to the online questionnaire was delivered to the respondents directly, i.e. to the professional service of a particular county that distributed a further sent request to the respondents by e-mail with a request for it to be filled in within the stipulated deadline. The introduction of the online questionnaire briefly describes the purpose of data collection, notes on confidentiality or the fact that the answers are anonymous in order to collect the highest quality and honest answers. For further processing and analysis, only questionnaires that were fully completed were

taken into account, while questionnaires that were not fully completed were excluded from further analysis. The following are the methods of statistical analysis that were applied after the data collection phase and the preparation of data for analysis:

- descriptive methods (percentages, mean values, dispersion, asymmetry and roundness measurements, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient);
- inferential methods (Kolmogorov-Smirnov distribution normality test, chi-square test and Kruskal-Wallis test);
- multivariate methods (reliability analysis; Cronbach α coefficient).

Based on SPSS files, statistical analyses of IBM SPSS Statistics 25 were performed using a statistical package. Conclusions related to differences and correlation between variables were made at a level of significance of 0.05 or with a reliability of 95%.

5 Research results and discussion

The results of the analysis are presented and described in the following two chapters: descriptive statistical analysis and inferential statistical analysis.

5.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

The sample of respondents consisted of 71 males (55%) and 57 females (45%). The representation of age groups of respondents was predominantly between 35 and 54 years of age (58%), mostly university degrees (55%).

Respondents' claims regarding information and communication technology (ICT) indicating their personal e-inclusion show that they form a very homogeneous group with regard to experience in ICT and internet use; between 3 and 5 years for 91% of respondents.

The majority of respondents acquired digital skills at work independently or with the help of colleagues (44%), followed by those who acquired these skills independently at home (24%), as part of their education (19%), while the least was acquired through courses (13%), which may indicate the need for additional research on how much attention is being paid to the acquisition of digital skills in the employers' organization or with the encouragement of other profit and non-profit organizations or public authorities.

The majority of respondents declared that they have a desktop computer, a laptop and a mobile device (60.16%), a desktop computer and a mobile device (7.03%), a laptop and a mobile device (31.25%), only a mobile device (0.78%), while 0.78% do not have any of the three mentioned devices.

In order to express the frequency of using the device with a single number, based on the values 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, the arithmetic averages were calculated,

which amount to: for desktop computers $\overline{X} = 3.4$; for laptops $\overline{X} = 4.1$; for mobile devices $\overline{X} = 4.7$. Based on the above averages, it can be concluded that desktop computers are the least frequently used devices (average $\overline{X} = 3.4$), while mobile devices are the most frequently used (average $\overline{X} = 4.7$).

Accessing the Internet via a fixed telephone network or via a mobile broadband network is frequent or very frequent (93% of respondents). The averages are very high, both amounting to $\overline{X} = 4.55$ (between the terms "often" and "very often"). The most common place of access to ICT and the Internet is from home and from the workplace (the averages are $\overline{X} = 4.54$ and $\overline{X} = 4.38$, which is between the terms "often" and "very often"). Access in public places is very rarely used or not used at all, which leads to the conclusion that public places are not sufficiently placed in the function of serving citizens in terms of free Internet access.

ICT and Internet users are relatively satisfied with the speed or availability of the Internet network they use the most (the averages are $\overline{X} = 3.80$ and $\overline{X} = 3.90$, which is the closest to the term "agree"). 12% of the respondents are not satisfied with the speed of the Internet network, and 9% with the availability.

The intensity of using ICT and the Internet is usually between 1 and 5 hours per day on average, both for work and personal needs (averages are $\overline{X} = 3.39$ for work and $\overline{X} = 2.83$ for personal needs, while both medians are 3).

Respondents rate their ICT and internet skills as predominantly "very good". They rate the following four skills as the worst: using forums to exchange information, using software for creating charts in a spreadsheet (Excel and Lotus), downloading and installing software tools on a computer, and creating presentations (Power Point). For these skills, the averages are between $\overline{X} = 3.4$ and $\overline{X} = 3.5$ respectively. Respondents rate their skill in using software for writing and editing text (Word) and using internet search engines (Google, Yahoo) as the best, for which averages of $\overline{X} = 4.2$ and $\overline{X} = 4.4$ were calculated. On the whole, it can be said that the self-assessed skills are rated with averages between $\overline{X} = 3.4$ and $\overline{X} = 4.4$ and that these assessments are uniform (coefficients of variation range between 19% and 34%).

Most often, the respondents agree with the statements that examine attitudes towards security and privacy of the use of digital technologies. What is surprising is that the least accepted is the statement regarding personal data privacy concerns (average is $\overline{X} = 3.59$), which can be positive in the sense that it is not an obstacle to using ICT. In a negative sense,

however, it may indicate insufficient attention to an important aspect of (irresponsible) ICT use.

From the results related to "social support for users", it is evident that it is mostly "very common". Therefore, the arithmetic averages are slightly higher - above 3.7.

Regarding the statements related to the attitudes of the purpose of using ICT and from the results, an extremely positive attitude towards the use of ICT and the Internet is visible, especially for the purpose of employment, the use of public services via the Internet and for communication. Respondents see the use of ICT and the Internet useful for educational purposes, entertainment and hobbies, as well as for buying and selling products and services. They express their positive attitudes somewhat less regarding the use of ICT and the Internet for cultural content and for health purposes.

Statements related to the field of "e-participation" are most often accepted by respondents either rarely or often. Therefore, averages were also calculated for these statements between the terms "rarely" (3) and "often" (4). They are $\overline{X}$ =3.48 $\overline{X}$ =3.79 =3.57 and $\overline{X}$ =3.33 while the median values are also between 3 and 4. Public services via the Internet related to e-counselling are used the least, with around 60% of respondents declaring that they either "do not use" them at all or use them "very rarely" or "rarely". What ICT and the Internet are used for more often is finding "information I need related to the work of the Government and other public administration bodies", where more than 69% of respondents declared that they use ICT and the Internet for this activity "often" or "very often ".

Respondents mostly completely agree with the statements related to "e-democracy". Therefore, the arithmetic means are also high, between $\overline{X}$ =4.16 and $\overline{X}$ =4.55, while the coefficients of variation are moderate (between 15% and 24%). Great agreement is observed, for example, for the statement about availability of information and documents of public authorities via ICT and the Internet, more than 94% of respondents "agree" or "completely agree" with the statement. This is also valid in terms of finding information about "various social organizations/associations and their initiatives", which is very important nowadays for the normal functioning of modern society.

The respondents' engagement with social media is very diverse. According to the results, respondents do not prefer the use of ICT and the Internet in terms of activities such as "creating and editing a blog or website" either for themselves or for others. It is also evident that "forums for obtaining information and sharing opinions" are rarely used. Those activities that are slightly more prevalent in use than all the ones offered are "social networks", which nowadays boils down to the most commonly used social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as "communication via the portal and reading comments" and "adding independently created content". Given that nowadays social media plays a very important role related to social inclusion/exclusion, the role of e-inclusion of the 54+ population holds special significance in this context.

Respondents predominantly responded to statements regarding the importance of the topic of "e-inclusion of the 54+ population" in public policies with "I completely agree", which largely confirms the respondents' positive attitude regarding its importance. This is extremely important information since it is indicative of the awareness of public policy holders regarding the benefits of digitization and the inclusion of the 54+ population in the information society, as well as all the advantages and possibilities thereof. On the other hand, respondents stated that despite the fact that e-inclusion of the 54+ population is important, it is not incorporated into public policies in practice. This is reflected in their not so proactive action on the subject of "e-inclusion of the 54+ population". Less acceptance of that statement is reflected in the smallest average, which is $\overline{X}$ =3.6, while the other three averages are $\overline{X}$ =4.4. The respondents are relatively homogeneous in their attitudes since the coefficients of variation are smaller (between 17% and 32%).

The remaining four statements in the measurement instrument also refer to public policies: their influence, need to encourage, need to empower and their impact on improving the quality of life of the 54+ population. The largest number of respondents fully agree with the statement that public policies need to influence the greatest possible availability of ICT and the Internet. This can be seen from the highest frequencies as well as the arithmetic means, which for the mentioned three modes of influence amount to $\overline{X}$ =4.7, as well as low coefficients of variation (between 10% and 13%), i.e. very similar opinions of respondents. The respondents' positive attitude is particularly significant, as they are responsible for implementing measures into strategies, putting these strategies into action, and allocating financial resources. This is crucial, especially when considering budget creation and the management of public funds, which often present the greatest obstacles to "e-inclusion" for the 54+ population.

Respondents have very similar opinions regarding encouraging 54+ population to use ICT in different ways. This is confirmed by the highest frequencies for the rating "completely agree", arithmetic means that are high (between $\overline{X}$ =4.5 and $\overline{X}$ =4.6) and coefficients of variation that are low (between 12% and 15%). What the majority of respondents decided to "completely agree" on is in the matter of "skills development", which indicates the fact that policymakers are aware of the importance of their adoption and constant upgrading and improvement, given that the trends in the field of ICT and the Internet are subject to rapid change. They attach great importance to support, which is one of the key factors

when it comes to the inclusion of the 54+ population. They attach equal importance to strengthening motivation as well as changing attitudes, which should also be taken into account when it comes to the 54+ population.

When it comes to empowering the 54+ population for active e-Involvement and digitization, as well as the use of digital content, the respondents' opinions are also very similar and positive. This statement can be supported in several ways: through the highest frequencies for the rating "completely agree", through arithmetic means which are high ($\overline{X}$ =4.20 and $\overline{X}$ =4.4) and through low coefficients of variation (between 17% and 19%). Thus, according to the results related to the claims related to the empowerment of the 54+ population using ICT and the Internet for active participation in "decision-making processes", "expanding and deepening political participation" and "networking and social inclusion" more than 80% of respondents "partially agrees" or "completely agrees" with the statements. A slightly smaller percentage also expresses agreement on the issue of empowerment related to "creating digital content".

The empowerment component is very important; as shown by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as situations of natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, fires...), digitalization can greatly facilitate the availability and use of public and commercial e-services. In addition, some often undesirable and risky situations can be prevented if timely and accurate open data is available. It is possible to raise the quality of life of the 54+ population by developing and encouraging the use of services related to the domain of e-health, e-Learning, e-business, e-commerce, e-banking, e-entertainment, e-culture and e-government. This is the prevailing opinion expressed by the respondents in the last statements in the measuring instrument. This is shown by the highest frequencies for the rating "completely agree", high averages (between $\overline{X}$ =4.4 and $\overline{X}$ =4.7) and low coefficients of variation (between 13% and 20%). Respondents expressed the greatest agreement with the statements regarding the development and encouragement of the use of e-government, e-banking and e-health services. All this can both contribute to increasing the quality of life of the 54+ population, but also cause synergistic positive effects in terms of creating increased added value for the economy as well as the development of society as a whole. A large number of variables were defined as part of the measuring instrument, which is why it was necessary to summarize them for the purposes of inferential statistical analysis. For this purpose, two composite variables were formed, and one of them was further analysed.

Specifically, the following scales or subscales were formed: Scale A: personal level of e-inclusion of public policymakers (includes statements 9 – 26, without statement 13 and statement 16, which are negatively worded); Scale B: attitudes about the importance of including the topic of e-inclusion of the 54+ population

in public policies (includes statements 27-31), which is broken down into five subscales: Subscale B0: includes statements 27a - 27d, related to the county development strategy; Subscale B1: includes statements 28a - 28c, which need to be influenced by public policies; Subscale B2: includes claims 29a - 29d, which needs to be encouraged by public policies; Subscale B3: includes statements 30a - 30d, which needs to be strengthened by public policies; Subscale B4: includes statements 31a - 31g, which aspects of the quality of life should be improved by public policies. Scales A and B and subscales B0, B1, B2, B3 and B4 were possible to form thanks to the coding of respondents' answers always in five degrees according to frequency and in five degrees according to acceptance of statements. At the same time, the lowest level 1 indicates the lowest frequency, and level 5 the highest frequency, i.e. the lowest and highest acceptance of statements that are always positively formulated. For each respondent, the variables were aggregated by adding up their responses and then dividing that total by the number of statements included. This calculation produces averages (arithmetic means with two decimal places), which can be used to classify data, compare differences, and determine the existence or absence of connections between scales or subscales, as well as between these scales/subscales and independent variables such as gender, age, education level, and place of residence. On scale A (personal level of involvement of public policymakers), the average value is = 3.69 ± 0.480, which gives a low coefficient of variation of 13%. The distribution of these values is slightly asymmetric to the left (Sk= -0.24) and is somewhat flatter (with a lower peak) than the normal distribution (K = -0.57).

On scale B (attitudes about the importance of including the 54+ population in public policies), the average value of high $\overline{X}$ = 4.46 ± 0.477, which gives a low coefficient of variation of 11%. The distribution of these values is also less asymmetric to the left (Sk = -0.86) and its peak is very similar to the normal distribution (K = 0.09). Subscales B0, B1, B2, B3 and B4 have high arithmetic means ($\overline{X}$ = 4.21 to 4.70) and low dispersion (coefficients of variation are 10% to 17%). The distributions of these values are all left-sided asymmetric and most of them have a sharper peak than the normal distribution (especially distribution B4).

5.2 Multivariate statistical analysis

The reliability of the measuring scales (Reliability Analysis) of the mentioned seven scales and subscales was analysed with the Cronbach alpha coefficient for individual groups of variables. The Cronbach alpha coefficient is a measure of the internal consistency of a set of statements, and can take a value between 0 and 1; the closer it is to 1, the more reliable the measuring scale is, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient values

around 0.7 can be considered acceptable (Gliem, Gliem, 2003, Mejovšek 2008). The results of the analysis of the reliability of the measuring instrument based on the internal consistency of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient show that the answers to certain groups of statements are well aligned with each other according to individual scales or subscales, all Cronbach's alpha coefficients were satisfactory (Cronbach α >0.70; 0.76 and 0.94) which ensures reliability of the measuring instrument, i.e. that by using the same measuring instrument in repeated measurements, the same or similar measurement indicators can be expected.

5.3 Inferential statistical analysis

The empirical verification of the statistical significance and connection of the data from the survey was started in the first step by checking the normality of the distribution of seven composite variables (scale and subscale) using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The distribution on scale A is the only one that follows a normal distribution ($p = 0.200$), while the distribution of other scales or subscales is not similar to the normal distribution ($p < 0.001$). This means that when applying inferential statistical analysis, it is possible to use parametric tests for scale A, while for all other scales (scale B, subscale B0, B1, B2, B3 and B4) it is possible to use only non-parametric tests. Values on scale A and values on scale B were classified into three categories based on quartile values for the purposes of testing with inferential statistical analysis tests. In this way, three categories of respondents were obtained with approximately a quarter of the respondents, half of the respondents and a quarter of the respondents (like a normal curve).

Therefore, the ratio variable was transformed into a ranking variable in the following way: a) scale A are not e-Inclusive at all (2.41-3.29) 32 respondents or 25% are partially e-Inclusive (3.30-4, 06) 64 respondents or 50% are fully e-Inclusive (4.07-4.56) 32 respondents or 25% b) scale B disagree (3.00-4.10) 30 respondents or 23% are undecided (4.11-4.82) 65 respondents i.e. 51% agree (4.83-5.00) 33 respondents i.e. 26% For scale B to each assigned expression ("do not agree", "are undecided", "agree") should add the phrase "that public policies can influence the key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population".

5.3.1 Inferential method – Distribution normality

In the first part of the inferential statistical analysis, the connection between variables on scale A and values on scale B was examined in order to gain insight into whether there is a connection between the personal level of e-inclusion of public policymakers (scale A) and attitudes about the importance of e-inclusion of the 54 + population into public policies (scale B). The analysis of this connection was examined using the following three methods: - Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and scatter diagram, - the chi-square test,

which tested the hypothesis of independence of variables in the contingency table, and - the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test. Only non-parametric tests were used, because the agreement tests confirmed that the values on the B scale were not normally distributed. The rank correlation was obtained by Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, which is $rS = 0.39$. Thus, the values on the A scale are related to the values on the B scale. In addition, it can be stated that this connection is positive and statistically significant ($rS = 0.39$ n = 128 p < 0.001). This means that those respondents who are less e-Inclusive (low personal level, i.e. lower value on scale A) on average less accept the views that public policies can influence the key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population (lower value on scale B). It can also be said that respondents who are more e-Inclusive (indicated by a higher value on the A scale) tend to more strongly believe that public policies can influence the key components of e-inclusion for the 54+ population (higher value on the B scale).

5.3.2 Inferential methods - chi-square test

Another method of statistical analysis is the chi-square test based on the observed frequencies in the contingency table. The results of the chi-square test ($\chi 2 = 12.028$ df = 4 n = 128 p = 0.017) show that the hypothesis of no association between the two variables (two scales) in the contingency table cannot be accepted because $p < 0.05$. Therefore, there is a statistically significant correlation between the three categories of scale A and the three categories of scale B. The nature of this connection can be discerned from the percentages calculated on the basis of the contingency table. That is why horizontal percentages were calculated for the two end categories "not at all" and "completely". Of the total number of respondents (32 or 100%) who were classified as "not at all" on the A scale, 41% disagree, and only 9% agree that public policies can influence the key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population. On the other hand, out of the total number of respondents (32 or 100%) who are classified as "fully" e-Included on the A scale, only 9% of them disagree, and 38% agree that public policies can influence on the key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population. Therefore, with a lower personal level of e-inclusion, there is a lower acceptance of the views that public policies can influence key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population. On the other hand, with a higher personal level of e-inclusion, there is greater acceptance of the views that public policies can influence key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population.

5.3.3   Inferential methods - Kruskal-Wallis test

The third method used is the Kruskal-Wallis H test, which compares three or more medians that are better means than arithmetic means in distributions that do not resemble normal distributions. Respondents who are classified into different categories according to

scale A statistically significantly differ with regard to the views that public policies can influence key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population (H = 13,341 df = 2 n = 128 p = 0.001). With regard to scale A, respondents who are in the "not at all" group least accept the views that public policies can influence key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population. Respondents who, with regard to scale A, are in the "fully e-Inclusive" group most accept the views that public policies can influence key components of e-inclusion of the 54+ population.

The research hypothesis reads "There is a connection between the views on the importance of including e-inclusion of the 54+ population in public policies and the personal level of e-inclusion of public policymakers". According to the previously presented analyses and the described results of the three methods used, it can be concluded that the research hypothesis can be accepted.

6 Conclusion

Considering the problems and consequences caused by the growing social and democratic digital divide, and the fact that public policies are crucial in reducing this gap, it became clear that it is important to explore public policymakers' attitudes towards the e-inclusion of the 54+ population within public policies, as well as how these attitudes are related by their own levels of e-inclusion. To determine the views of public policymakers on including e-inclusion for the 54+ population in public policies and their personal levels of e-inclusion, a measuring instrument was developed as part of this research. After conducting empirical research and statistical analysis of the collected data, a positive and statistically significant association between the personal levels of e-inclusion of public policymakers and their attitudes towards the importance of including e-inclusion for the 54+ population in public policies was determined. This confirms the research hypothesis: "There is a correlation between views on the importance of including e-inclusion for the 54+ population in public policies and the personal levels of e-inclusion of public policymakers."

As sustainable development becomes a key focus in the upcoming programming period until 2030, it is evident that significant changes in thinking, economic and social structures, as well as in consumption and production patterns are necessary. This shift will inevitably affect the 54+ population, who must become active stakeholders in the digital society due to their own interests and those of society. Further research should be conducted across a wider geographical area of the Republic of Croatia and compared with other EU Member States to gain a comparative insight and provide a larger research sample. Additionally, it is important to investigate whether strategic plans for the digitalization of the economy and society, for the new programming period until 2030, include substantial measures to promote e-inclusion of the 54+ population, both at the European and national levels, and to understand how these measures will be implemented.

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