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THE DIGITAL DIVIDE: CAUSES AND WAYS OUT

The use of the Internet has a high degree of analysis of the life of society in the XXI century. However, there is a problem of citizens' access to state information and communication technologies. The purpose of this paper is to analyze causes and consequences of the digital divide and suggest ways to overcome it.

An international report [1] presents the results of measuring digital development in the world. The analysis of the report data [1; 2] shows that each region, each country has different levels of digital inequality in the use of digital infrastructures, Internet services. The problem of digital inequality is more typical of countries with transitional economies and, in particular, of certain segments of the population: the poor, rural residents, the elderly and people with disabilities. For example, in Scandinavian countries more than 90% of the population has access to the Internet, while in African countries this figure fluctuates around 30%. The digital divide at the national level is determined by the number of Internet users in urban and rural areas. According to the population census in the Republic of Belarus, the difference between the shares of urban Internet users and rural Internet users is 16.3% [3].

The conducted analysis of the relevant literature has revealed the main causes of the digital divide: the lack of motivation to use the Internet, the high cost of computer equipment and connection to the global network, and the lack of ICT skills among the population. Factors of digital inequality can also include the level of education, income, and race.

The causes and factors of the digital divide affect socio-economic development and have the following *consequences*:

1. Households with high levels of education are more likely to use computers and the Internet. People with higher education are 10 times more likely to have access to the Internet in the workplace than those with only a high school education [4]. In direct correlation with the level of education is the level of household income, which also plays a significant role in increasing the digital divide.

2. Information and communication technologies are more accessible to highly developed countries, which increases their investment attractiveness. Countries with low levels of economic development become less attractive for outside investment, further exacerbating the digital divide.

According to the annual global report *Digital-2022* the world's population is 7.91 billion people in January 2022, of which 67.1% are Internet users [2]. Europe has the biggest number of Internet users (87%). Belarus accounts for 82.8% of Internet users.

At present, just over 30% of the world's population does not yet have access to the Internet: more than 1 billion people in South Asia and nearly 840 million in Africa. In the Central African Republic, where Internet penetration remains extremely low, barely 1 in 7 people now has access to electricity, the vast majority of people do not have access to basic sanitation. As African peoples have historically had a negative attitude toward advanced technology, rates of use of information and communications technology are quite low.

Thus, the digital divide as a whole remains a huge and complex problem, closely intertwined with issues of race, education, and poverty. The following solutions can be proposed:

1. Government funding for community access centers, which are a critical resource for those who do not have access to computers and the Internet at school or work [1].

2. Overcoming the digital barrier requires additional, well-trained technical personnel, in addition to mastery of new technologies, to promote the best use of information resources.

3. Developing appropriate policies and providing economic incentives for development and innovation will help overcome the digital divide, increase new employment opportunities, and ultimately improve the quality of life.

4. Developing an enabling telecommunications environment for digital services and the use of the Internet will be a key to digital transformation and reducing the digital divide in the world.

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