



Study on post Covid measures to close the digital divide

iclaves

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Objectives

A grayscale photograph of a person's head and shoulders in profile, looking towards a computer monitor. The monitor displays a video conference with several participants. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a desk with a keyboard and other office equipment. The overall tone is professional and focused on digital technology.

To analyse the impacts of the digital divide in Europe's economy and society

To identify effective initiatives to tackle the digital divide

To propose recommendations for NRAs to bridge the digital divide

Methodology

Literature Review
118 documents
reviewed



Interviews
23 experts on digital
divides interviewed



Recommendations

Case studies
5 BEREC member
countries analysed

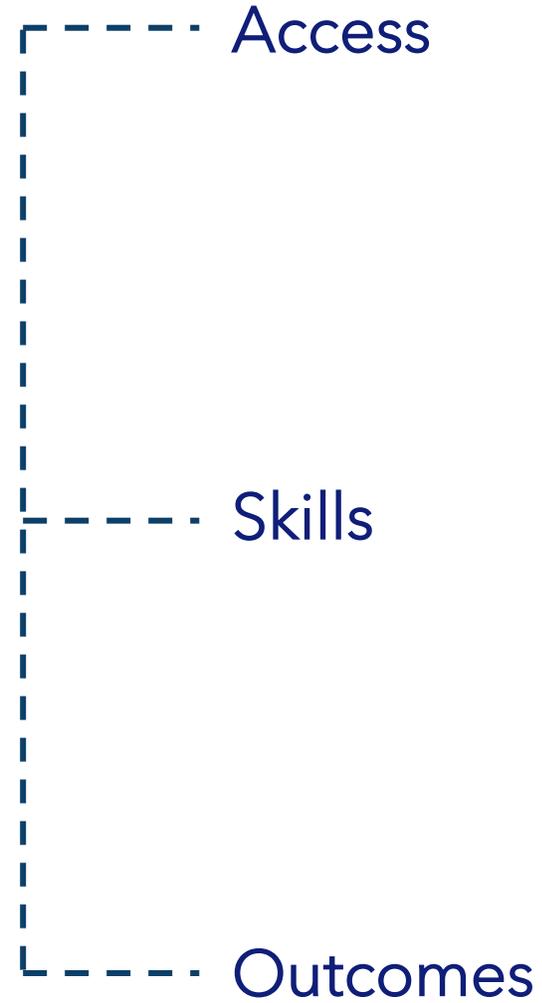


Quantitative analysis
Data from Eurostat,
ITU and OECD
analysed



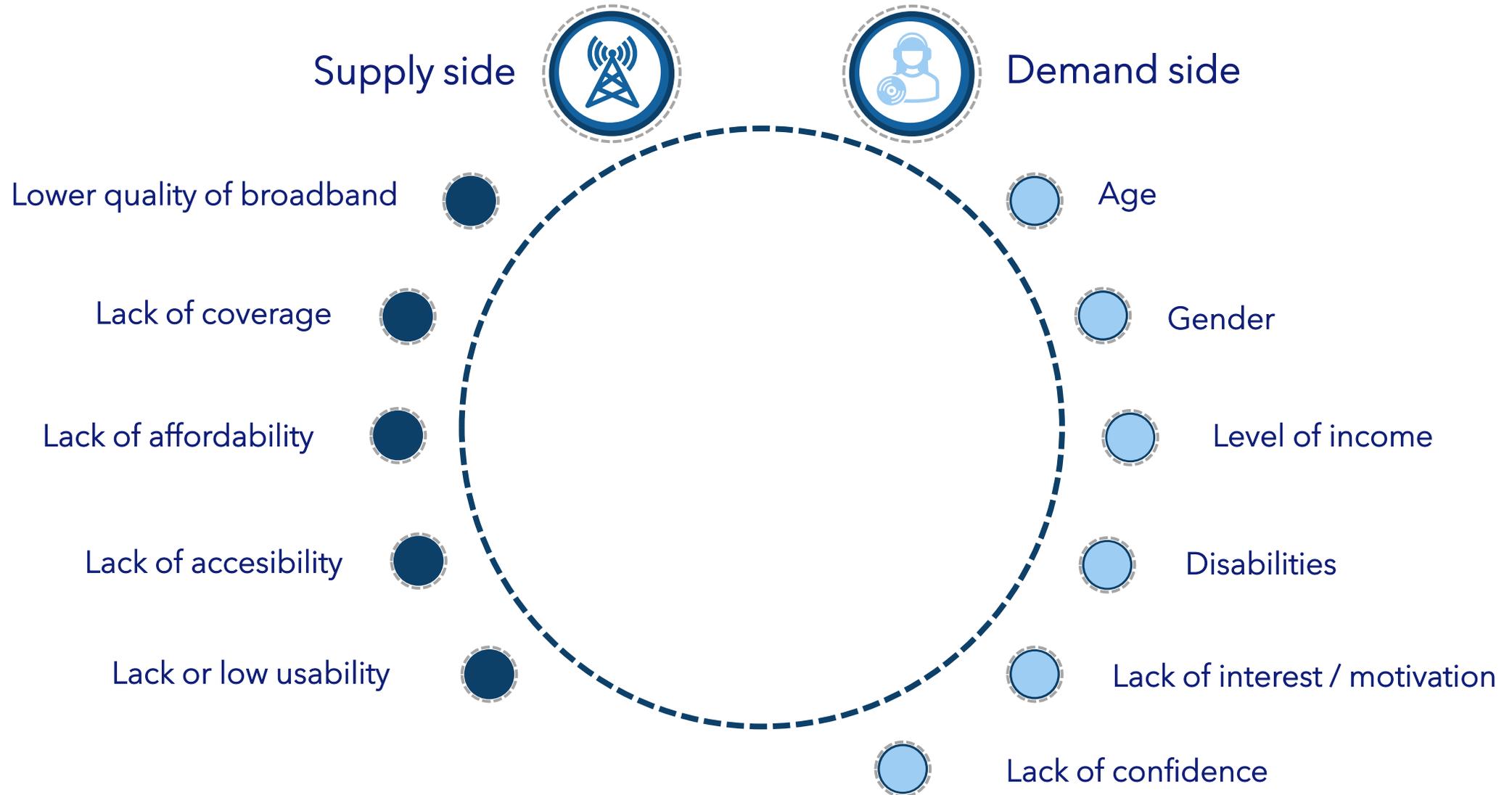
Main findings

Three levels of digital divides



Main findings

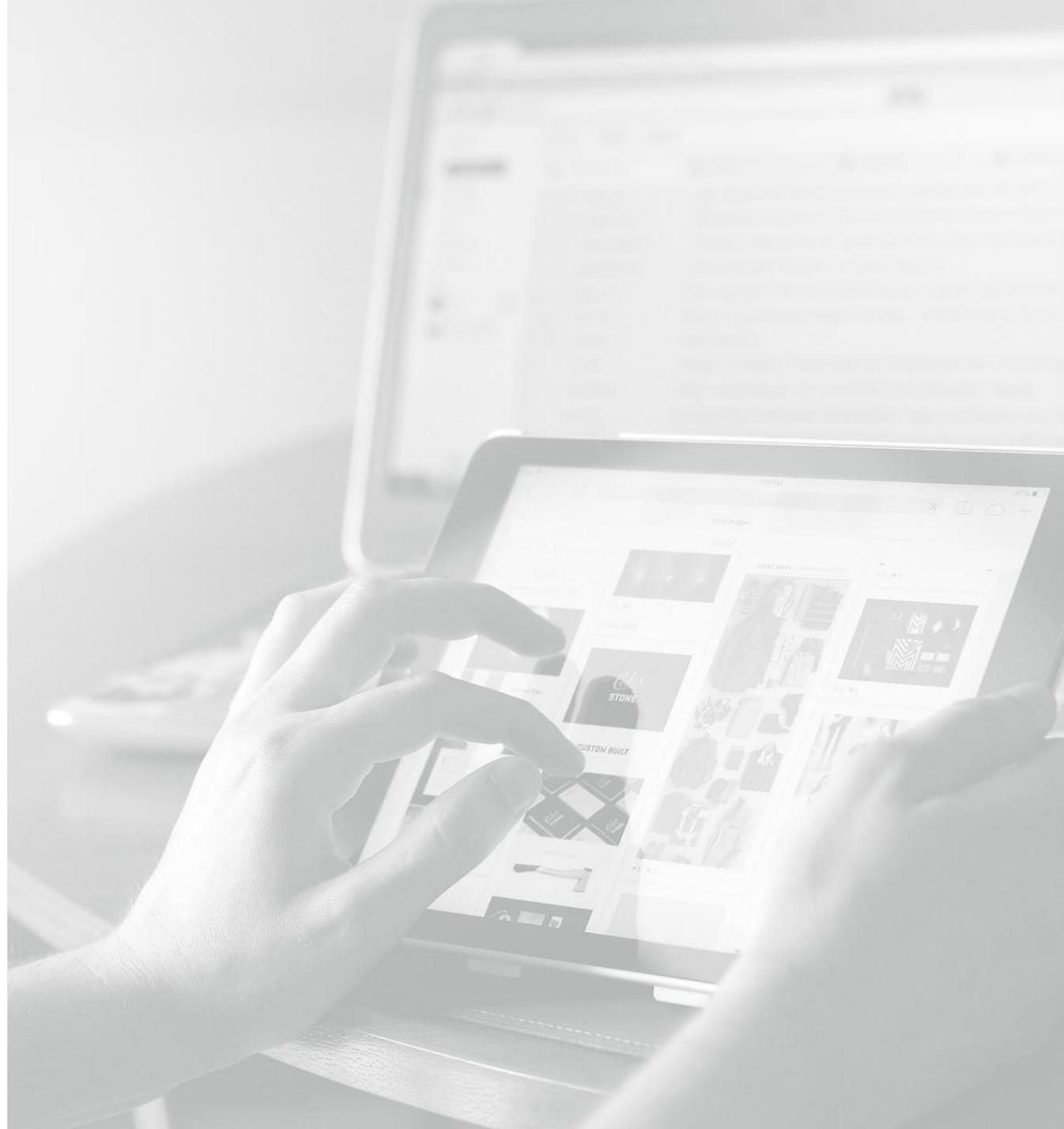
Causes and factors increasing digital divides



Main findings

All causes existed prior to the pandemic and became more evident during the coronavirus crisis.

Most of the factors in the supply side diminished during the pandemic. However, digital divides persist, specially between urban and rural areas.



Main findings

Consequences of the digital divides

Inequal access to educational resources.
Students have difficulties in finding technological support from their family environment.
Standstill in the educational process.



More exposition to the Covid-19 for disconnected people.
Lack of access to e-Health services.
Poorer healthcare for disadvantaged groups due to biased decisions of algorithmic decision-making systems.

Increase of financial exclusion.
Digital-only and digital-first approaches restrict access to e-Government services (public aids, benefits).
More exposition to cyber-fraud and online scams.



Increase of socio-economic gaps.
Increase of social exclusion.

Main findings

Groups most affected by digital divides:

- Elderly people
- People at risk of poverty
- People with low educational attainment
- Persons with disabilities
- Migrants/minorities



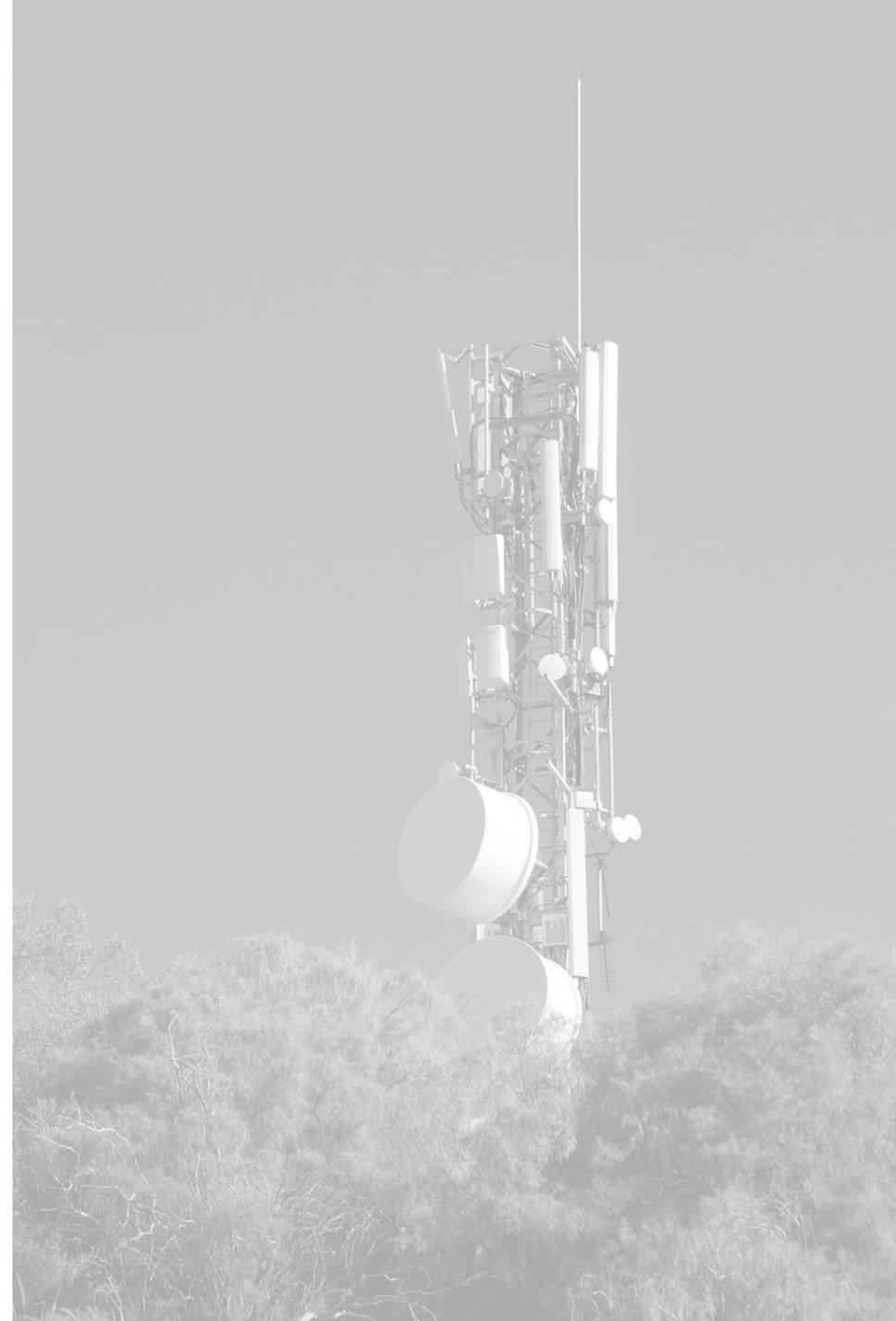
There is an intrinsic relationship between digital exclusion and social exclusion: **To be socially excluded leads to be digitally excluded, and vice versa.**

One positive effect of the pandemic is its contribution to **increase awareness about digital divides**. This increased awareness led governments, public bodies and the private and civil society sectors to take action to bridge digital divides.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations for NRAs

- Foster infrastructure sharing
- Foster dialogue between NRAs and international organisations to promote Open RAN architectures
- Foster collaboration among stakeholders to identify bottlenecks and obstacles to network deployment
- Establish mobile coverage obligations to address underserved areas



Recommendations

Specific recommendations for NRAs

- Develop or support the creation and use of comparison public tools of telecom services
- Conduct systematic research into the motivations of those who do not access the internet
- Promote communication and awareness campaigns on the benefits, safety and accessibility of the internet
- Include specific programs to address digital inclusion for persons with disabilities in Universal Service obligations and mandate NRAs to monitor the accessibility of services



Recommendations

General recommendations in which NRAs can cooperate

- Create a permanent European forum to make progress in bridging the digital divide
- Create incentives to facilitate network deployment in underserved areas
- Leverage coronavirus recovery funds to accelerate deployment of VHCN in underserved areas
- Define public aid programs for acquiring digital equipment and accessing telecom services for people with financial difficulties
- Collaborate with NGOs to identify socioeconomic vulnerable groups and working with telecom providers to define social tariffs for those groups
- Raise awareness about social tariffs and other facilities from telecom operators for vulnerable groups

Recommendations

General recommendations in which NRAs can cooperate

- Design usable digital services, especially those related to e-Government
- Put stronger focus in school curricula on the acquisition of digital skills
- Incentivise professional training (reskilling and/or upskilling) to those workers whose jobs have become more digitalised
- Consider cybersecurity issues, as well as online privacy concerns, to advise people how to stay safe online
- Promote collaboration between employers, schools and other supportive actors to create digital training programs for disadvantaged students
- Transpose the European Accessibility Act as soon as possible and adequately enforce its implementation
- Oblige governments and government-funded programs to mandate ICT accessibility in public procurement rules

Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the digital divides, playing a dual role. **On the positive side, it has accelerated the process of digitisation in many areas** that would otherwise have taken years in their digital transformation. **On the negative side, the pandemic has brought to light the pre-existing causes of the digital divide and it has accentuated the pernicious effects of digital divides.**

Despite the complexity of the phenomenon of the digital divide and the limited competencies that **NRAs** have in this area, **they are a key element in making progress towards bridging of digital divides.** Their role as an independent actor places them in an excellent position to foster and encourage dialogue and cooperation between all stakeholders.

Many thanks for your attention!



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