United Nations ESCAP/79/18

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 March 2023

Original: English

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Seventy-ninth session
Bangkok and online, 15– 19 May 2023
Item 4 (i) of the provisional agenda*
Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission: information and communications technology, science, technology and innovation

Promoting digital transformation in Asia and the Pacific through the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The digital environment is developing at an unprecedented speed, transforming societies and their economies. In particular, the expansion of digital connectivity and the increased availability and use of innovative technology applications have played an important role in addressing cascading global and regional threats and risks, notably the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

However, this rapid transformation has also accentuated the risk of widening the digital divide and deepening development gaps, as the digital dividends are not being equitably shared.

In the light of the above, at its fourth session, the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation endorsed the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026. The Action Plan, which sets out 25 actions that support more strategic planning with foresight is centred on three pillars: connectivity for all; digital technologies and applications; and digital data.

The present document contains an outline of the key features of the Action Plan and of the progress that has been made in its implementation. Policy recommendations are presented on how to bridge the digital divide and accelerate digital transformation for an inclusive society. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific may wish to consider the issues highlighted in the document and provide guidance to the secretariat on its future work in this regard.

* ESCAP/79/1/Rev.2.

I. Introduction

1. The digital environment is developing at an unprecedented speed, transforming societies and their economies. The recent expansion of digital connectivity and technology applications has played an important role in addressing many global challenges, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and natural disasters, which are occurring simultaneously and with increased frequency and severity across the Asia-Pacific region. However, the development of the digital environment is also widening the digital divide, as the digital dividends are not being equitably shared. Because the digital transformation process is one of the key drivers of socioeconomic inequalities across the region, it is important to bring digital infrastructure connectivity to all, leverage innovative digital technology applications and ensure a more effective management and use of digital data, as key prerequisites for more inclusive digital societies.

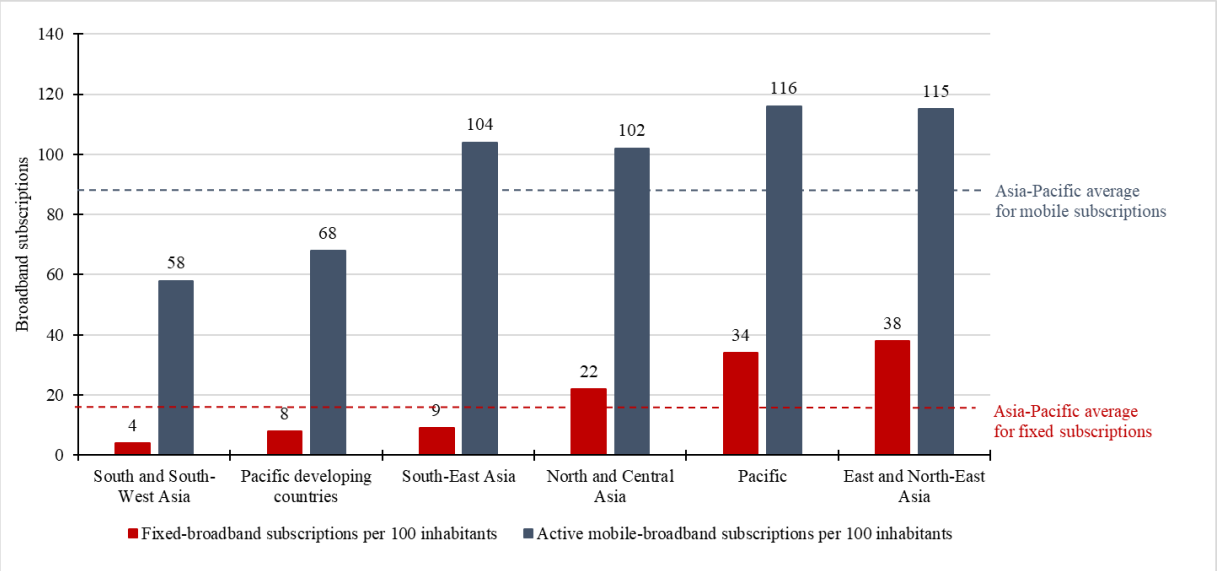
2. The present document has been prepared mindful of resolution 78/1 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in which members and associate members recognized that science, technology and innovation, including information and communications technology (ICT), were critical for the pursuit of sustainable development, and stated their intention to cooperate at all levels, including the ministerial level, to close the digital connectivity divide, with the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative serving as one of the useful regional platforms for promoting digital cooperation.

II. Key trends in digital connectivity and transformation

3. The rapid adoption of digital technologies, in particular in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has significantly transformed the socioeconomic activities of citizens across the Asia-Pacific region. Digital is now default, as during the pandemic the use of ICTs accelerated and penetrated the home, the workspace, the delivery of all forms of government and private sector services, as well as recreational activities. This change has not only highlighted the crucial contribution of digital connectivity but has also laid bare and even intensified long-standing socioeconomic inequalities driven in part by the persistent digital divide.

4. While more devices and systems have begun to rely on Internet connectivity, businesses and people without reliable and affordable Internet connections or the necessary digital skills are being denied access to the benefits and opportunities of the digital economy. For example, in Asia and the Pacific, digital gaps are widest in terms of fixed broadband connection, which generally provides the fastest and most stable Internet connectivity. The lowest access rates are in South and South-West Asia and in Pacific small island developing States, while the highest access rates are in East and North-East Asia. For mobile broadband connection, the divide persists, even though overall access is greater and the gaps are narrower. Connection rates range from 58 per cent in Pacific small island developing States to 115 per cent in East and North-East Asia (figure I).

Figure I
Broadband connections per 100 inhabitants, by subregion, 2021



Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database", 26th ed. (2022). Available at www.itu.int/pub/D-IND-WTID.OL-2022 (accessed on 28 October 2022).

Notes: The category "Pacific developing countries" excludes Australia and New Zealand. Percentages are weighted by population.

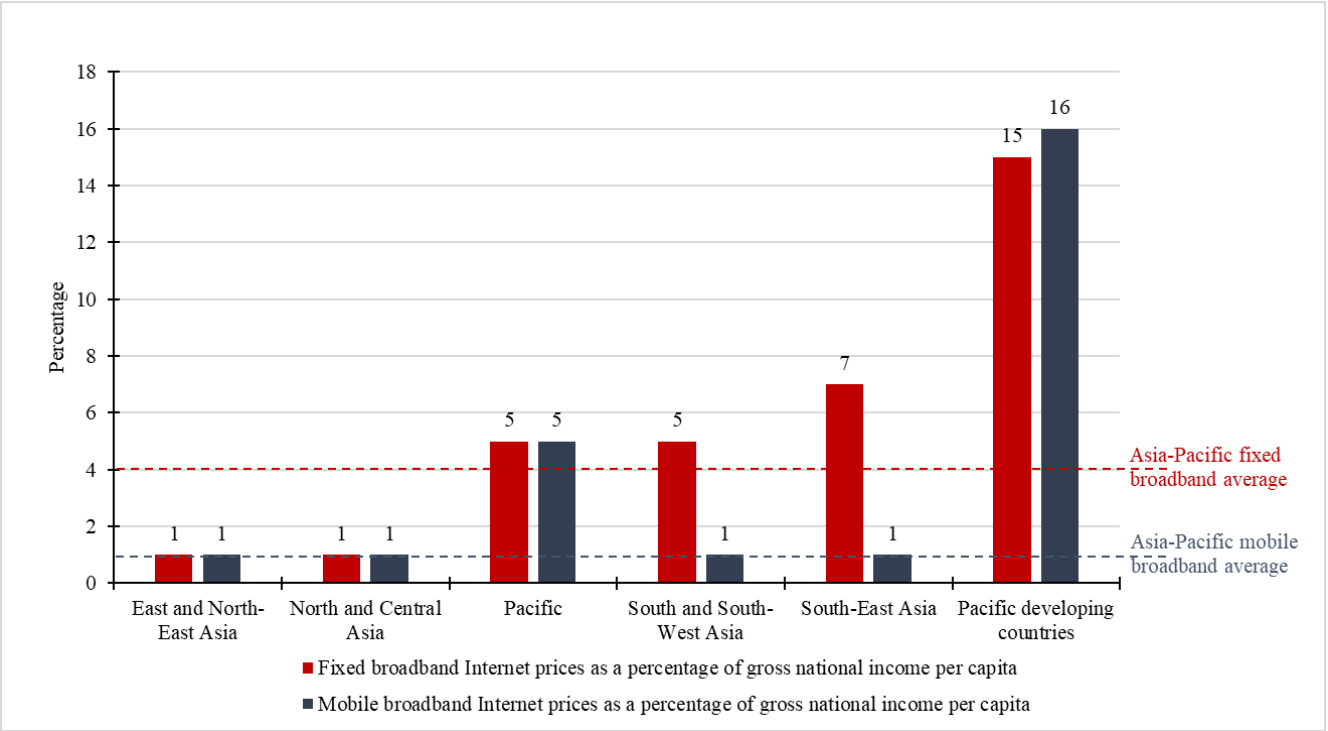
5. There are also notable digital gaps between urban and rural areas within countries. For example, in Azerbaijan, 98 per cent of the population living in urban areas use mobile services, compared to 80 per cent in rural areas. There are similar urban-rural gaps in Georgia (96 and 90 per cent, respectively) and in Indonesia (83 and 73 per cent, respectively).[1]

6. Variations in Internet connection access rates among ESCAP member States show gaps in affordability. Figure II displays the average prices of fixed and mobile broadband subscriptions as a percentage of per capita gross national income in 2021. In only two subregions of ESCAP – East and North-East Asia and North and Central Asia – were both fixed and mobile broadband subscriptions considered affordable.[2]

[1] International Telecommunication Union, "World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database", 26th ed. (2022). Available at www.itu.int/pub/D-IND-WTID.OL-2022 (accessed on 28 October 2022).

[2] According to the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development target, a value equal to and below 2 per cent is considered affordable and vice versa. See Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, "Achieving the 2025 advocacy targets: universal connectivity, affordability, skills, access, equality and use", available at www.broadbandcommission.org/broadband-targets/ (accessed on 10 December 2022).

Figure II
Fixed and mobile broadband subscription prices as a percentage of gross national income per capita, 2021



Source: ITU, "World Telecommunication/ ICT Indicators Database", 26th ed. (see figure I).

7. The high cost of buying or upgrading digital devices such as mobile telephones is also a persistent challenge for end users. According to a report on global mobile device pricing, the global average cost of a smartphone in 2021 was approximately $104, equal to 26 per cent of the average monthly income per capita.[3] Significant price differences between income groups and geographic groups remain. In the least developed countries, users spend 53 per cent of their average monthly income per capita on smartphones, which is more than double the global average. In South Asia, which has the second most expensive average smartphone price by geographic grouping, users spend about 40 per cent of their income on devices; in sub-Saharan Africa, users spend even more on their smartphones, equal to 45 per cent of their income.[4]

8. ESCAP has aggregated and mapped data on real-time download speeds (map 1), which has revealed stark differences among Asia-Pacific countries.[5] For example, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam, as well as the eastern part of China, have higher average fixed-broadband download speeds (shown in green). The archipelago countries of Indonesia and the Philippines have lower speeds, as do several countries in South and South-West Asia (shown in orange). Pacific island developing States and parts of

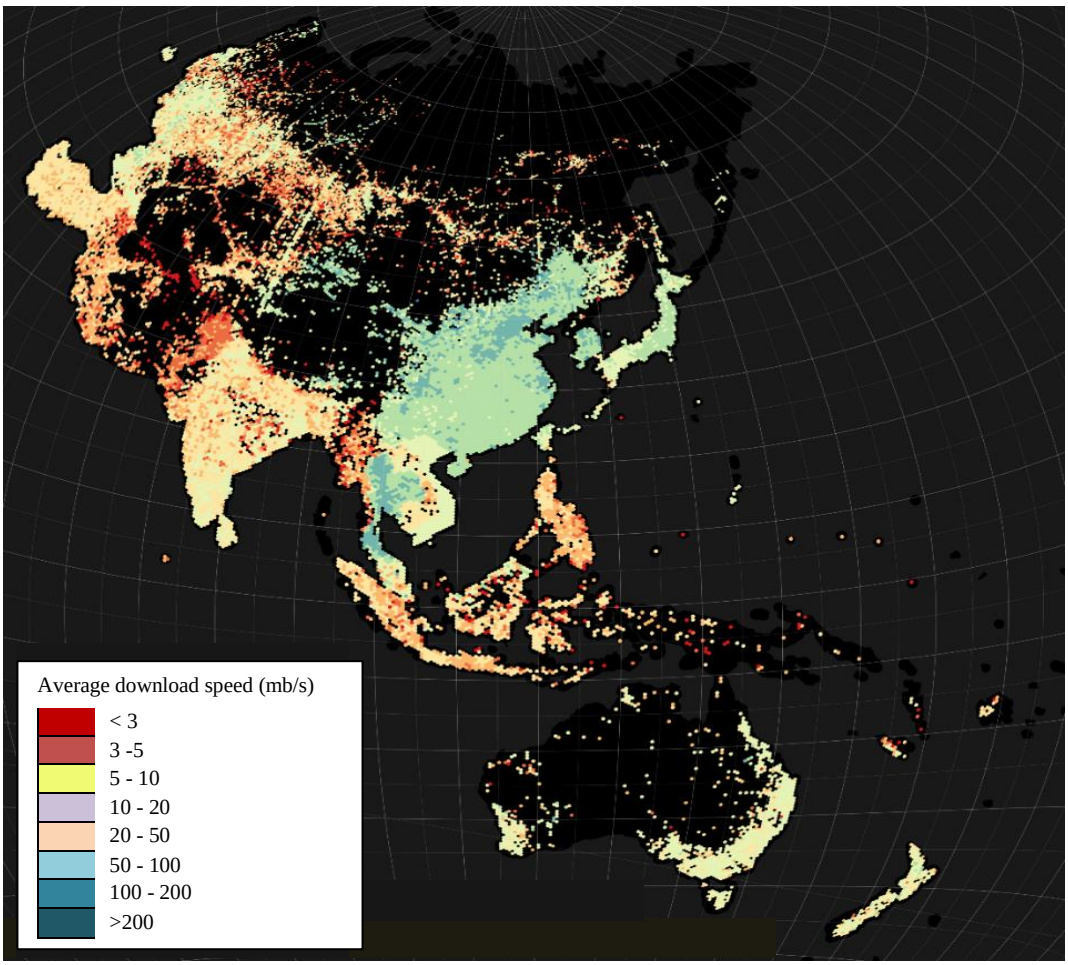
[3] Alliance for Affordable Internet, "Device pricing 2021", 7 October 2021.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Siope Vakataki 'Ofa and Cristina Bernal Aparicio, "Visualizing broadband speeds in Asia and the Pacific", Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Working Paper Series, No. 2 (Bangkok, ESCAP, 2021).

Central and West Asia are among the areas that experience the lowest speeds (shown in red).

Map 1
Fixed-broadband download speeds in Asia and the Pacific



Abbreviation: mb/s, megabits per second.

Note: Map prepared by Gispo Limited based on Speedtest by Ookla Global Fixed and Mobile Network Performance Map Tiles for ESCAP.

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

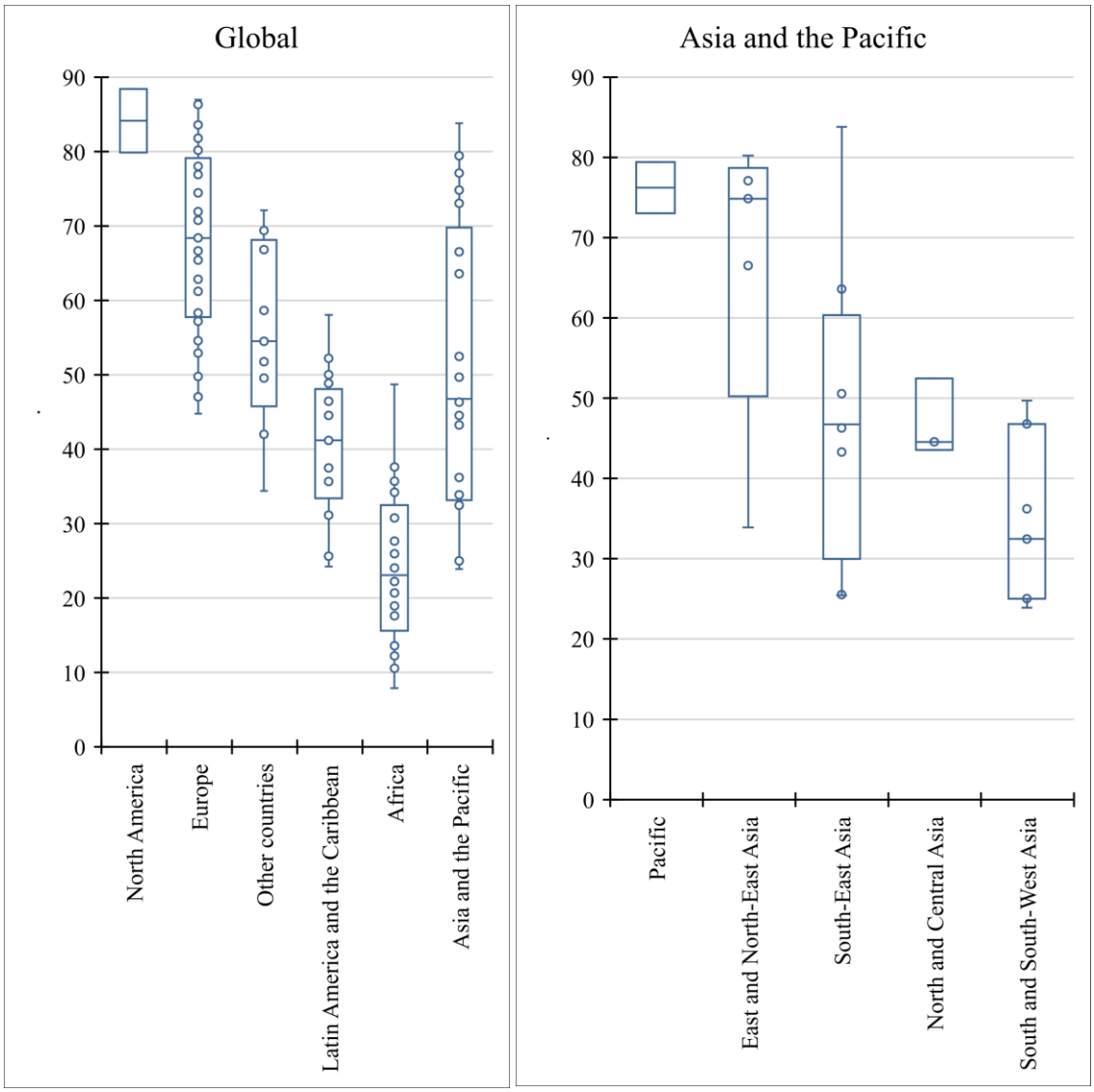
9. The digital gaps in terms of Internet access and connectivity between rural and urban areas, the cost of subscriptions and of buying or upgrading digital devices and the gaps in download speeds expose and exacerbate existing social, economic and geographical divisions, including in respect of age, gender, level of education and disability status. Geographical divisions include divisions among the subregions of Asia and the Pacific.

10. Relatedly, the *Asia-Pacific Digital Transformation Report 2022: Shaping Our Digital Future* shows that the digital transformation divides among individual countries and among the five subregions in the region are wider than those of countries and subregions in other regions (figure III). [6]

[6] Jongsur Park, Seunghwa Jun and Jeong Yoon Kim, "Methodology for data analysis of digital transformation", Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, ESCAP Working Paper Series (Bangkok, ESCAP, 2022).

While some Asia-Pacific countries, such as China, the Republic of Korea and Singapore, exhibit advanced digital connectivity and transformation status, many Asia-Pacific developing countries, including in South and South-West Asia and the Pacific, are lagging behind in alarming ways.

Figure III
Digital divides: globally and among the subregions of Asia and the Pacific



Source: *Asia-Pacific Digital Transformation Report 2022: Shaping Our Digital Future* (United Nations publication, 2022).

Notes: "Other countries" includes all countries not in Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, or the Pacific.

Each dot represents a country's digital transformation score. The length of the box indicates the distribution of the majority of the countries. The horizontal line inside the box indicates the median country score for each region or subregion. Dots outside the box indicate outlier countries (i.e. countries with either a significantly higher or lower score than the majority of the countries inside the box). A larger digital divide is shown by the longer length of the box (i.e. there is a big difference in the majority of the countries inside the box between high and low ranked countries). As can be seen in the figure on the left, the Asia-Pacific region has the largest digital divide.

11. In order to deepen understanding and improve the ability to foresee the implications of these rapid transformations to the digital environment, the ESCAP secretariat has developed an analytical tool that allows for comparisons to be made among 107 countries worldwide by using data on 105 indicators collected by global organizations.[7]

12. At the global level, the preliminary findings indicate that the Asia-Pacific region is the most divided in terms of digital transformation status, with the largest difference recorded being between countries with advanced ICTs, which can further accelerate their digital transformation, and countries with less advanced ICTs, which are unable to keep up and are therefore lagging further behind. With digital technologies now underpinning all aspects of socioeconomic policy planning and implementation, many government and business services have become digital by default. It is therefore important to gain foresight through the development of future scenarios on new digital paradigms and on the policy and regulatory frameworks that will be needed to become flexible, adaptive and corroborative, in other words evidence-based and developed in partnership with all stakeholders.

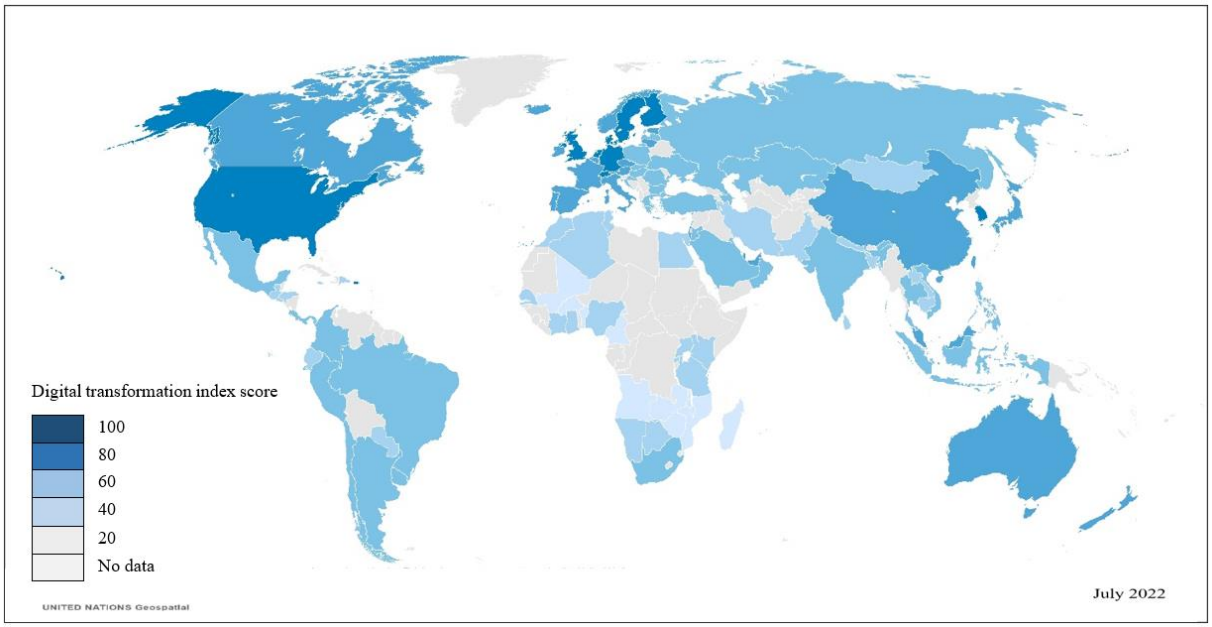
13. Another finding is that there is a high correlation between the income levels of countries and the digital transformation score: the majority (67 per cent) of high-income countries scored higher than 60, while the majority (71 per cent) of low-income countries scored lower than 20. Businesses recorded the highest correlation between the advancement of digital transformation at various stages of their business development and the digital transformation score through innovative digital technology applications and business models. It has been estimated recently that 96 per cent of the population in Asia and the Pacific has mobile broadband access and that even the poorest countries have begun to offer basic Internet connection and services. Governments therefore need to consider the new digital-by-default development paradigm, not only connectivity infrastructure. In this new paradigm, the question is no longer whether to opt for digital transformation but, rather, how to improve the adoption and performance of digital technologies in rapidly changing environments. This too underlines the need for foresight and adaptability.

14. In this regard, the business sector clearly emerges as a driver of research, innovation and development in the area of frontier technologies and as an adopter of disruptive technologies for digital transformation. And, while it is difficult, if not impossible, for Governments to predict the nature and direction of technological innovation, the need for a business-enabling environment and for innovation-friendly government policies is clear. If technological innovation is to serve the public good, it will be important to foresee megatrends and their impacts so that policies actually promote the development of business-led technology innovation and are underpinned by regulatory regimes that are adaptable and corroborative.

15. The overall status of ESCAP members and associate members for which data are available is included in map 2.

[7] *Asia-Pacific Digital Transformation Report 2022: Shaping Our Digital Future* (United Nations publication, 2022).

Map 2
Status of digital transformation in Asia and the Pacific



Source: *Asia-Pacific Digital Transformation Report 2022: Shaping Our Digital Future* (United Nations publication, 2022).

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16. In this regard, the services that result from the integration of geospatial information and digital technologies have not only become an integral part of the daily life and economic activities of millions of people who have become active consumers of applications and services, they have also helped improve the ability of policymakers to make predictions in a range of areas, including telecommunications and broadcasting, satellite positioning and navigation, Earth observation, weather forecasting, and location-based services. The breadth, speed and relative cheapness of data and services coming from space, in tandem with digital innovations, have not only augmented observation capacities and deepened insights about the current state of the natural environment and societal dynamics, it has also enhanced the ability to plan strategically exercising foresight.

17. Integrated digital and geospatial applications have assisted Governments in providing accessible, available, actionable and affordable services that have enhanced the capacities of businesses and individuals to make predictions. For example, some Governments in the Asia-Pacific region have actively used digital twin applications through digital technologies, three-dimensional maps and geospatial data to develop complex scenarios, run simulations and visual models and generate insights and solutions for smarter and better-targeted socioeconomic plans and policies. Similarly, to overcome the challenges resulting from natural disasters overlapping with the COVID-19 pandemic, integrating digital technologies and geospatial data has supported disaster hotspot mapping, contact tracing and early warning activities. Such practices have demonstrated the power of integrated digital technology applications and geospatial data to process, manage and deliver better services to end users and ultimately benefit people and inform practices, processes and policies with foresight.

18. In the Jakarta Ministerial Declaration on Space Applications for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific,[8] the representatives of ESCAP members and associate members participating in the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific,[9] held in October 2022, noted the strong potential that the integrated use of emerging technologies brought by the fourth industrial revolution offered for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The ESCAP publication *Geospatial Practices for Sustainable Development in South-East Asia 2022: A Compendium*[10] features over 60 good practices of using and applying geospatial information in the public sector, together with well-established space applications in disaster prediction and monitoring, and applications that improve the spatial mapping of poverty, increase the availability and accessibility of air pollution data, track greenhouse gas emissions, map renewable energy potential and improve the management of forests and other natural resources.

19. With support from ESCAP members and associate members, the secretariat continues to make efforts to demonstrate the usefulness of integrating digital technologies with space applications. These efforts include developing open source and easy-to-use models to produce maps of flood hotspots and other risks. Such technical tools enable users to produce flood-related data and fill information gaps by using digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, big Earth data and cloud computing. The pan-Asia partnership for geospatial air pollution information is building the capacity of eight countries to process and develop digital applications that use integrated surface data and data from a geostationary environment monitoring satellite to improve air pollution monitoring.

20. These initiatives are deepening users' understanding of megatrends and the dynamic interface between socioeconomic activities and long-term climate change adaptation measures, as well as understanding of environmental sustainability, which are crucial for contributing to the development of strategic foresight in policy planning for sustainable development. Regional cooperation remains vital for ensuring that all countries can benefit from the increasing capability of new digital application technologies to unlock the value of geospatial information and other sources of information. For example, regional cooperation can play a role in overcoming the North-South divide in geospatial artificial intelligence-related knowledge generation and technology adoption for disaster risk reduction.[11]

21. At its fourth session, held in September 2022, the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation recommended that the secretariat continue to strengthen regional cooperation to increase access to and leverage innovative digital applications of geospatial information to further strengthen the contribution of space applications to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.[12]

[8] ESCAP/MCSASD/2022/3/Add.1.

[9] ESCAP/MCSASD/2022/3. See also www.unescap.org/events/2022/fourth-ministerial-conference-space-applications-sustainable-development-asia-and .

[10] United Nations publication, 2023.

[11] Hamid Mehmood, "Strategic foresight to applications of geospatial artificial intelligence (GeoAI) to achieve disaster-related Sustainable Development Goals" (Bangkok, ESCAP, 2022).

[12] ESCAP/CICTSTI/2022/6.

22. This was further reinforced by the adoption of the Jakarta Ministerial Declaration, in which it was recognized that leveraging innovative digital applications was one of the elements that needed to be further enhanced within the broader efforts of ESCAP to increase the uptake and contributions of geospatial information towards sustainable development, in conjunction with multisectoral user engagement; the effective management of data and information; and enhanced partnerships. In this regard, regional cooperation will continue to be instrumental. Through regional cooperation, countries that are active providers of data, expertise, capacity development and resources will assist other countries, especially those in special situations.

III. Progress made on the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026

23. The Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026, contains 25 actions[13] grouped under three pillars: connectivity for all, digital technologies and applications, and digital data. Three working groups (one for each pillar) were established by the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee, which is currently chaired by a representative of Maldives and vice-chaired by representatives of Mongolia and Samoa. The table shows the composition of the bureaux agreed to by the Steering Committee.

Composition of the bureaux of the working groups established by the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee

	Working group on connectivity for all	*Working group on digital technologies and applications*	*Working group on digital data*
Chairs	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan
	United States of America	India	Republic of Korea
Vice-Chairs	Kazakhstan	Armenia	Armenia
	Sri Lanka	China	Philippines
	Uzbekistan	Russian Federation	Sri Lanka

A. Progress made by the working group on connectivity for all

24. The working group on connectivity for all promoted the use of universal service funds through the organization of a regional workshop on universal service fund modernization in a post-COVID-19 world.[14] While recognizing that the track record on the deployment of universal access service funds was mixed, the workshop participants deepened their understanding of how public-private partnership modalities had increased the effectiveness of fund disbursement, which in turn had allowed for the more timely deployment of ICT infrastructure in rural and remote areas. The working group also promoted understanding of the net benefits of co-deploying fibre-optic cables with other kinds of infrastructure, such as pipelines, electricity grids, railway networks and highways. As infrastructure relies increasingly on intelligent, frontier technology-driven systems, knowledge of the policy and regulatory

[13] See ESCAP/CICTSTI/2022/INF/1, annex III.

[14] See www.unescap.org/events/2022/universal-service-fund-modernization-post-covid19-world-capacity-building-workshop.

reforms needed for the digital infrastructure to function as a "metainfrastructure", in other words in a way that can enhance productivity and resource efficiencies across all other kinds of infrastructure, has improved through the working group.

B. Progress made by the working group on digital technologies and applications

25. The working group on digital technologies and applications strengthened the knowledge and capacity of members on digital technology applications for enhancing the delivery of public services. By enabling the sharing of good country practices, for example, the DigiLocker platform – implemented by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of India for the digital issuance and verification of documents and certificates – has assisted citizens, businesses and other government ministries to shift towards a paperless process and has promoted greater transparency, efficiency and ease of doing business in service delivery. The use of the platform increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it recorded 120 million users and facilitated the verification of 6.6 billion documents.

26. The ArMed National Digital Health System is an innovative digital platform in the health sector in Armenia that is aimed at facilitating patient engagement and support to collect clinical, administrative and financial data linked with the provision of standard health-care services. In the Russian Federation, a digital technology project was implemented by the Government to create favourable conditions for business start-ups. Technical support that stimulated demand for solutions during the COVID-19 pandemic was provided to information technology companies.

C. Progress made by the working group on digital data

27. The working group on digital data enhanced understanding of how big data generated through better connectivity and a greater use of digital technology applications provide numerous opportunities in a wide range of sectors, including public services, disaster risk reduction, air pollution monitoring and mitigation. It has also considered how an increase in the use of big data could lead to challenges related to transparency, privacy and the security of data, which need to be addressed through regulatory policy reforms on data privacy and protection, information security and trust, and cybersecurity.

28. The working group has recognized that a key building block of data privacy and protection is the provision of national identity documents. Legal identities are now likely to include a digital aspect that is linked to a personal identification number. The use of such legal identities for authenticating users is fast becoming fundamental to e-governance, e-business and better public services, while also running the risk of deepening inequality in access to digital services, including in terms of financial inclusion and support, as certain vulnerable groups have low levels of digital literacy and lack relevant skills.

29. Attention needs to be paid to countries in special situations, notably the Pacific small island developing States and the least developed countries, where a dearth of data is preventing a deeper analysis and better understanding of the digital divide. The significant data gaps, including on gender-disaggregated data, constrains analysis and targeted policy interventions, as well as policy development, for addressing challenges related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

30. The working group has recognized that there is a need to encourage the development of data infrastructure and of sufficiently large workforces that include digital data specialists and big data analysts, while also nurturing whole-of-society digital mindsets and literacy among government officials and others. The Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development has been encouraging such developments among Asia-Pacific policymakers and civil servants through its Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders.

IV. Strategic foresight to address the digital divide and accelerate digital transformation for an inclusive digital society

31. Evidence-based methodologies and tools for enhancing strategic foresight and projections on the digital divide and digital transformation have shown that long-term policy pathways for fostering an inclusive digital society must be identified urgently.

32. Drawing on the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026, three policy pathways are hereby proposed to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships, notably between civil society and government on digital initiatives that tackle the widening digital divide in rural communities. In addition, the three policy pathways anticipate the scenarios and projections set out in the Secretary-General's report entitled "Our Common Agenda".[15] In particular, by advocating the strengthening of methodologies for data analysis and evidence-based policymaking for digital transformation,[16] the three policy pathways will leverage and consolidate the analytical research, policy dialogues and capacity-building carried out by secretariat and regional partners with the aim of deepening strategic foresight on how cooperative actions can augment the contribution of digital technologies to sustainable development.

A. Pathway 1: infrastructure networks and connectivity

33. On the supply side, pathway 1 promotes good policy practices for the cost-effective development of network infrastructure. Policymakers and regulators are encouraged to actively enhance investments, in particular in public-private partnerships, in next-generation infrastructure and in the co-deployment of ICT, transport and energy infrastructure. In order to make investments in digital infrastructure more cost-effective, efforts should be made:

(a) To review regulations with a view to streamlining and simplifying infrastructure deployment policies and regulations, including through the adoption of a "dig once" policy for the co-deployment of fibre-optic cables;

(b) To promote co-deployment and infrastructure-sharing. Not only should investments be made in new connectivity infrastructure and technologies such as satellite Internet connectivity, but approaches should be adopted to reduce investment costs, for example by laying down fibre-optic

[15] A/75/982.

[16] Jongsur Park, Seunghwa Jun and Jeong Yoon Kim, "Methodology for data analysis of digital transformation".

cables at the same time as new power lines, roads or railways, following a "dig-once" policy;

(c) To promote Internet exchange points in the subregions through cooperative mechanisms that aim to reduce operational costs, promote the use of local traffic, reduce latency, enhance efficiency and improve the stability and resilience of local networks;

(d) To promote government support for environmental sensing and for expanding connectivity in remote areas that are not economically viable and assess the effectiveness of universal service funds in such areas;

(e) To raise the awareness and enhance the capacity of policymakers on resilient ICT infrastructure development, including the incorporation of an e-resilience component in ICT infrastructure investment and development plans as an essential element.

B. Pathway 2: digital technologies and applications

34. Equally important is the demand side. Policies that stimulate demand for knowledge-intensive Internet and big data use should include policies that bring more affordable new digital products and services to all people. For example, there is a need:

(a) To strengthen the use of innovative digital technologies to improve the impact and efficiency of government services, especially the health- and disaster-related sectors, including those addressing climate change, as well as businesses;

(b) To boost the demand for digital services and make Internet access, handsets and data bundles more affordable, in particular for poorer people. Governments could provide subsidies for devices, Internet subscriptions and mobile services. Policies should also enable innovative financing mechanisms for devices and ensure flexibility of pricing data bundles. Governments could also devise tax policies that encourage the uptake of Internet subscriptions and Internet-enabled devices and data services;

(c) To leverage new technologies, including artificial intelligence, robotics and biotechnology, for sustainable development in striking new ways. For example, new technologies could be used in smart transport, smart energy grids, digital financial services and e-environment and e-health services. That said, serious attention should be paid to digital security;

(d) To provide opportunities for skills development and capacity-building to government officials. Governments need to build the capacities of their own workforces. This applies not just to digital or data officers but to all policymakers, who stand to benefit from digital literacy and digital mindsets that cultivate strategic foresights for a digital future.

C. Pathway 3: data about data

35. Digital connectivity and the greater use of digital technologies and applications generate data extensively (billions of devices) and intensively (detailed data in real time). At present, few Governments can take full advantage of the data being produced. All countries need to become more adept at managing, using and monitoring data by strengthening digital data infrastructures and skills. Efforts should be made:

(a) To promote people-centric skills development and capacity-building. Everyone, not only policymakers, need the knowledge and skills to take full advantage of the Internet. This involves making available educational

and skills-development programmes that range from basic to advanced, that meet lifelong learning needs and that focus on the elderly, women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. In his Road Map for Digital Cooperation, the Secretary-General identified digital capacity-building as a key area for action;[17]

(b) To promote national digital identities and identification systems as legal instruments for authenticating users of e-governance and e-business services, as means of creating favourable environments for economic and social inclusion;

(c) To address data gaps by strengthening the capacity to collect, manage and use digital data, including gender-disaggregated data in countries with special needs, notably the Pacific small island developing States and the least developed countries, for timely and accurate evidence-based policymaking.

V. Issues for consideration by the Commission

36. The Commission may wish:

(a) To welcome the endorsement by the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation, at its fourth session, of the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026;

(b) To invite the secretariat to continue to support members and associate members in implementing the Action Plan, including through evidence-based policy research and analysis, capacity-building, and multi-stakeholder policy dialogues;

(c) To encourage the active engagement and contributions of various stakeholders in the implementation of the Action Plan;

(d) To also encourage the sharing of national policy perspectives and experiences on digital transformation through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative.

[17] A/74/821.