



# Southern China International MUN

*Official Background Guide*

*United Nations Development Programme: On measures to encourage digital literacy among the youth to bridge the digital divide*

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## **1. Description of the Issue**

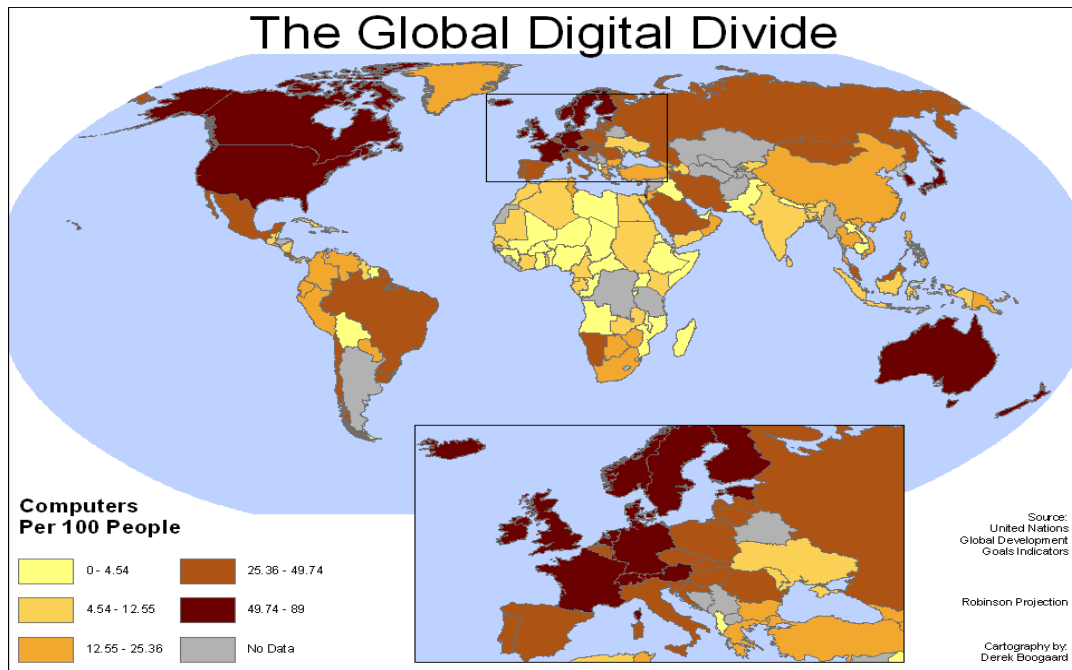
### **1.1 History of the Issue**

Since the mid-1990s, researchers have found persistent differences in technology use by different social categories. The United Nations defines the digital divide as the gap between people who have access to and use **Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)**, including Internet connectivity, Internet-enabled devices, and digital literacy skills, and those who do not. Access to all three is crucial for communities to establish a strong and sustainable connection to the digital world. The group of people who are not connected to the Internet mostly come from disadvantaged communities. The digital divide reflects and amplifies existing social, economic, and cultural inequalities such as gender, age, race income, and ability <sup>1</sup>.

This is especially important as critical aspects of society, like education, workforce development, and innovation, move online. Internet connectivity is considered the foundation for participating in a digital society and a crucial element of digital human rights. Without a reliable, affordable, sustainable, and inclusive Internet connection, people are systematically excluded from the benefits of digital technology, participation in the digital society, and access to digital services.

To be precise, digital literacy refers to the ability to use digital tools and platforms effectively, responsibly, and creatively. The "digital divide" refers to the gap between those with access to technology and the internet and those without. Also, to a gap between individuals, households, and regions that have access to modern information and communication technology (ICT) and those that do not. Addressing this divide is crucial to fostering equitable opportunities for education, employment, and social inclusion <sup>2</sup>.

The United Nations has emphasized the importance of digital literacy for achieving **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), Specifically in education (SDG 4) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10). Therefore, bridging the digital divide is a prerequisite for global equality in an increasingly digital world.



The digital divide affects more than just access to technology—it creates broad economic, educational, and social inequalities<sup>3</sup>. Here are some significant impacts:

First, **Educational Disparities** is one of the most critical consequences of the digital divide is its impact on education. Students without access to the internet or digital devices at home are often left behind compared to their peers who can use technology for research, homework, and online learning. This gap became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools shifted to online learning. Students in low-income or rural areas without reliable internet access struggled to keep up, widening educational inequalities. Second, **Economic Inequality**, as the digital divide also plays a role in perpetuating economic inequality. In today's digital economy, many jobs require at least basic digital skills, and opportunities for remote work often depend on access to reliable internet. Individuals without digital access or skills are at a disadvantage in the job market, limiting their employment opportunities and earning potential. Small businesses without access to digital tools also struggle to compete in an increasingly online marketplace, reducing economic growth in under connected regions. Thirdly, it causes **Limited Access to Healthcare**. The rise of telemedicine and digital health services has made healthcare more accessible for many, but it has also highlighted gaps for those on the wrong side of the digital divide. Individuals without internet access or digital literacy are less likely to use telehealth

services, which became a lifeline during the pandemic. This gap leaves many without essential healthcare services, particularly in rural areas where physical access to healthcare providers may already be limited. Lastly, **Social and Civic Disengagement**, as the access to digital tools and platforms also plays a crucial role in social and civic participation. Individuals without internet access are often cut off from social networks, online communities, and digital services, limiting their ability to stay connected with friends and family, access news, or engage in civic activities such as voting or community organizing. The digital divide can lead to increased isolation and disengagement, further exacerbating social inequalities.

In the past, many cities used Redlining, a form of discrimination that kept groups of citizens out of fair housing opportunities and allowed them to be relegated to live in designated areas. Many households and families were denied the option of living in areas outside of where they were assigned. Though the Fair Housing Act of 1968 was designed to put an end to these practices, the negative impact had already taken hold for millions of Americans. This issue was dated to “The National Housing Act” of 1934. Where this legislation found a federally guaranteed mortgage insurance program. It was considered successful, as the legislation segregated cities. Segregation continues to this day, while directly contributing to digital redlining <sup>4</sup>.

## **1.2 Recent Developments**

The digital divide began to be recognized as an issue in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the rapid expansion of personal computing and internet access. Then, the UN got involved in Initiatives such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS, 2003-2005), focusing on ICT access and capacity-building. In 2015, the UN introduced the SDGs, explicitly emphasizing digital inclusion.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the issue, as remote learning became essential, leaving millions of youths without access to education. Technological advances, such as 5G and satellite internet, started addressing infrastructure gaps, and private tech companies such as Google and Microsoft have launched global initiatives for digital literacy.

Following the recent applications, NGOs have implemented grassroots campaigns, such as providing digital training in underserved areas to lessen the digital division. Digital literacy has expanded to include competencies like online safety, ethical content creation, and critical thinking in media consumption.

Two-thirds of the world's population uses the Internet, but 2.7 billion people remain offline. This means that one in three people cannot benefit from the economic, educational, political, social, and health potential of being connected. The term encompasses not only access to devices and the Internet but also, the ability to use and benefit from them effectively. According to National Digital Inclusion Alliance, it is crucial for active involvement in civic and cultural affairs, employment, continuous learning, and access to vital services. The skills required to use these tools effectively which brings to the digital divide are commonly categorized into three:

**Access to Technology:** It is the most visible form of the divide, where some populations lack access to essential technologies like high-speed internet, smartphones, or computers. For example, rural areas often have less reliable internet infrastructure than urban areas, leaving residents at a significant disadvantage.

**Digital Literacy:** Even when access to technology is available, many people do not have the skills to use it effectively. Digital literacy involves understanding how to use devices, navigate the internet, and engage with online resources securely and responsibly. A lack of digital literacy can hinder a person's ability to access job opportunities, education, and essential services.

**Use and Impact:** This layer of the divide looks at how technology is used. Even among those with access to digital tools, there are disparities in how technology is used. Some people may use the internet primarily for entertainment, while others use it for educational or professional development, creating gaps in the potential benefits derived from technology <sup>5</sup>.

As we now live in an increasingly digitized world, access to digital literacy skills has become paramount for successful education, employment, and social participation. Nevertheless, for many youths in deficient communities, the digital divide remains a formidable barrier, limiting their opportunities for growth and advancement. Addressing the importance of this gap, not-for-profit organizations around the globe are spearheading initiatives to empower youth through digital literacy.

### **Key Terms**

**Digital divide** – The gap between individuals who have access to technology and those who do not.

**Digital literacy** – Skills that are required to effectively use and understand digital tools.

**ICT (Information and Communication Technology)** – Technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications.

**Educational Disparities** – Unequal distribution of academic resources, including but not limited to school funding, books, facilities, and technologies, to socially excluded communities.

**Economic Inequality** – Unequal distribution of income and opportunity between different groups in society.

**Social and Civic Disengagement** – The challenge faced by governments in fostering meaningful participation and collaboration with residents in decision-making processes.

**Sustainable Development Goals** – Aim to transform our world. They are a call to action to end poverty and inequality, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy health, justice, and prosperity. It is critical that no one is left behind.

## **2. Emphasis of the Discourse**

### **2.1 Right-Wing Approach**

To promote digital transformation, equal emphasis needs to be placed on digital skills development as to infrastructure development <sup>7</sup>. Integral to investment in digital skills development is the subsequent management and evaluation of digital training programmers. This paper assesses mechanisms to ensure digital training programmers are adequately managed using a standardized data collection framework to measure an internationally accepted digital literacy index. Such an index requires an agile definition of digital literacy, responsive to the fluid nature of the digital economy. The paper also explores the extent to which a G20 advisory body may inform a nationally representative data collection strategy within the context of a data collection process that is cognizant of the evolving demands of businesses and users alike.

### **2.2 Left-Wing Approach**

In Europe, Digital Opportunities Foundation (Germany): The Digital Opportunities Foundation (DigiBewegung) in Germany focuses on providing digital literacy training to disadvantaged youth, particularly those from migrant backgrounds. Through its "Digital Heroes" program, the organization offers hands-on workshops and mentorship sessions, equipping participants with essential digital skills such as coding, digital marketing, and cybersecurity. By partnering with local schools and community centers, DigiBewegung reaches out to marginalized youth across various regions, empowering them to thrive in the digital age.

As in the United Kingdom, the Digital Youth Academy (DYA) aims to bridge the digital divide by offering comprehensive digital literacy courses tailored to the needs of underserved youth. Through partnerships with tech companies and educational institutions, DYA provides access to state-of-the-art technology labs and online learning platforms. Additionally, the academy offers internship opportunities and career counseling services, enabling participants to transition into rewarding careers in the tech industry.

Then in Africa, the African Digital Literacy Foundation (ADLF) operates in Kenya, focusing on empowering youth in rural and urban areas through digital skills training. Through its "Digital Champions" program, ADLF recruits and trains local youth as community leaders in digital literacy. These champions then organize workshops and outreach programs in their communities, teaching essential skills such as internet usage, basic computer operation, and online safety. By leveraging grassroots initiatives, ADLF fosters sustainable digital empowerment across Kenya <sup>8</sup>.

In Nigeria, the Digital Inclusion Initiative (DII) works to bridge the digital divide by providing access to technology and training in underserved communities. Through its "Tech for All" initiative, DII sets up digital hubs equipped with computers, internet connectivity, and educational resources in rural areas. The organization also collaborates with local schools and youth organizations to integrate digital literacy into the curriculum and extracurricular activities, ensuring broad-based access to digital skills among Nigerian youth.

### **2.3 Stance of Intergovernmental Organizations**

Relevant organizations are **UNESCO**, Advocating for digital education through frameworks like the "Global Framework for Digital Skills." Following up with the support of **ITU** (International Telecommunication Union), which promotes global digital connectivity. Including, **One Gadget, One Child** (Philippines) which was launched in June 2020 by Ms. Menchie Hermosisima, this campaign addresses the digital divide caused by the pandemic by distributing smartphones, laptops, and tablets to students in need. The initiative aims to reduce school dropouts and promote online learning as a tool for academic and community development. **The Bridging Tech Charitable Fund** (USA) which is led by Isabel Wang and Margot Bellon, this organization combats educational inequity by providing laptops to homeless and underserved children in over 15 U.S. cities. In addition to distributing devices, they offer remote tutoring services and collaborate with partners like Computers 2 Kids for device refurbishment. **Streets to Schools** (Philippines), originally a community project for homeless children, this organization now promotes literacy and awareness through initiatives like "Ladders to Literacy," which features

online storytelling and portable radio stations for distance learning. They focus on equipping children with digital tools to secure a brighter future. **One Laptop Per Child** (USA), where this global initiative seeks to empower children through digital literacy by providing computers as tools for innovation and creativity. It also addresses the gap between educators and parents on the use of technology in education, fostering skills essential for future growth. Finally, **The Turing Trust** (UK), founded to honor Alan Turing's legacy, this organization refurbishes and distributes computers to disadvantaged communities, primarily in Africa. With over 55,000 students served, the Trust equips schools with technology and supports IT training in Malawi, the UK, and beyond, enabling academic and career opportunities <sup>9</sup>.

### **3. Possible Solutions**

One of the greatest advantages developed by countries possess is their economic and technological capacity and can tolerate almost any form of solution as long as they are doable and ethical.

A major solution to reducing the digital divide is to increase connectivity in all communities. Providing widespread internet access can help previously unconnected users take advantage of economic and learning opportunities. Whereas having access to computing devices can help increase connectivity. Additionally, equitable broadband access and strong, future-proof architecture are also important. With these investments, governments and organizations can connect as many people as possible to the digital world <sup>10</sup>.

Digital literacy is important for individuals to become connected citizens. By having a strong knowledge of digital technologies, users can effectively control the physical components of a computer, including the keyboard, monitor, and mouse. Access and utilize various software programs, such as word processors, internet browsers, and messaging applications, while understanding how to communicate in digital spaces, such as emails, social media sites, and other online forums, and identify the elements of a credible source and effectively conduct online research

With these skills, users can effectively engage with digital technologies and leverage these platforms to their benefit. For example, a person who understands how to find credible information online is more likely to obtain a research-based job than someone who struggles to navigate search engines.

Improved literacy is necessary to reduce the digital divide. If a user does not know how to navigate a computing device or the internet, they are unable to derive as much value from these technologies as their tech-savvy counterparts.

The cost of internet service makes it difficult for many people to gain relevant skills, heightening the digital divide. For unconnected groups to gain technological proficiency, they need affordable access to the internet.

However, many free or low-cost initiatives provided by the private sector can exacerbate the divide. For example, Facebook's Free Basics program provided data-light access to websites and services in developing economies, like Colombia, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

#### **4. Keep in Mind the Following**

When researching your country's stance on this topic, make sure to investigate the current situation of the digital divide in the scope of your country at a national level. Then, expand the scale to how your country is affecting the measures on encouraging digital literacy among the youth to bridge the digital divide. Lastly, consider how the countries should develop and be involved in literacy on the digital divide. Some questions to guide you through your research are the following:

- 1. What role should private companies play in solving the digital divide and bridging the divide?*
- 2. How can governments ensure digital literacy programs?*
- 3. Should digital literacy be a fundamental right in the community and politically?*
- 4. How can we address the cultural barriers to adopting digital education?*
- 5. What measures can ensure the sustainability of digital bridging initiatives?*
- 6. How can international cooperation help in the acceleration of the digital division?*

#### **5. Evaluation**

The digital divide is characterized by two crucial problems: limited and costly infrastructure and limited digital literacy in low/middle-income communities. These countries with insufficient income have limited access to digital technologies due to high costs and a general lack of infrastructure, ranging from intermittent supply of electricity to limited availability of ICT facilities. Generally, this irrationality from disadvantaged communities where large portions of



the population were not engaged in formal employment. Although individuals in disadvantaged communities recognize their personal skills gap, it is the role of government agencies to holistically measure the extent of the gaps and identify their location.

When discussing the digital divide, it is significant to acknowledge that technological advancement is exponential. When a scientist or engineer develops an innovative solution, multiple new technologies can be formed from that single invention. Likewise, the state of the internet looks much different in 2024 than it did in the early 2000s.

With the advancement of 5G and other technologies, digital capabilities have vastly increased for wealthier, already connected communities widening the gap for marginalized groups. As a result, the standard for digital proficiency will become more advanced, and it will become more difficult to catch up <sup>11</sup>.

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