

VOICE

— UN DESA —

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More than 20 years of data – and a vision of the future

So much has changed since the inaugural issue of the United Nations E-Government Survey in 2001. Back then, the Survey included assessment points that now seem firmly entrenched in the past. Fast forward to 21 years of publication, the Survey no longer measures telephone lines and televisions – instead it assesses mobile and broadband. Stay tuned for the latest edition out on 28 September.

Looking back, earlier editions tracked the number of telephone lines and televisions per 100 inhabitants in an area. At that time, it observed “moderate expansion of the Internet in Africa”, where, for the first time, “all countries and territories are now online”. It also described the ultimate goal of “seamless” e-government as a “futuristic” ideal. Today, the African region has an ever-increasing digital presence and wireless access.

In the upcoming United Nations E-Government Survey 2022 – now in its 12th edition – the concept of “seamless” government is not “futuristic” but discussed in the context of cutting-edge technologies, such as predictive analytics and artificial intelligence. The 2022 Survey will provide a compelling look at the latest trends in e-government – how much has changed, how much has stayed the same, and what that means for the future.

Relying on its extensive data – a composite of independent UN DESA-owned research, with data from other UN agencies, produced for all 193 Member States – the Survey covers both broad trends and granular detail.

“E-government is growing. Growth in developed countries is, largely, outpacing that of countries in special situations. Lessons learned come from looking at the 2022 edition – but also the previous editions,” said Vincenzo Aquaro, Chief of the Digital Government Branch in UN DESA’s Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, highlighting the 2022 Survey’s trends.

Rapid changes in technology affect the Survey’s assessment areas, but a consistency in the general basis of the methodology is critical for tracking trends. “Digital government trends indicate steady growth globally, and notable progress in some areas. However, it also shows us who is left behind, with more than 3 billion people from countries – mostly in Africa, Asia and Oceania – that have a lower-than-average e-government development levels,” noted Arpine Korekyan, author of the chapters analysing the 2022 Survey data at global and regional levels.

“We also see how trends and observations over time can be heightened by current events,” added Wai Min Kwok, the author of a chapter exploring digital inclusion and access issues“. One of the key lessons learned – even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic – is that the future is hybrid. The objective is not purely digital development, but rather supporting human development through digitalization. An inclusive, integrated digital/analogue ecosystem is needed to facilitate and sustain inclusive e-government development.”

For Deniz Susar, who has worked on a pilot study looking at e-government development at city levels with a Local Online Service Index (LOSI) and has written a chapter on its findings in the 2020 and 2022 editions, there are other important takeaways. “The LOSI study has adapted the Survey’s processes and yielded information that is very interesting – for example, GDP does not correlate with online services development in the same way as it does for the national results. It also shows strong connections to local needs, including a range of digital environmental services across a number of cities – which is very promising given Our Common Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals affirmation of the key role cities play in driving change and improving people’s lives.”

With governments developing digital services and embracing new technologies, they are setting themselves up to better anticipate and respond to the needs of all members of society. These exciting innovations must strive to be truly inclusive, and to carry people forward rather than leaving them behind.

The United Nations E-Government Survey 2022: The Future of Digital Government will be released on 28 September. Watch the press briefing live at webtv.un.org.





“Knowledge-sharing is a superpower”

Capacity development plays a key role in UN DESA's efforts to support countries as they strive to achieve the global goals. As part of this work, e-learning is an important enabler for accessible and agile learning. We spoke with Nina Brandt in UN DESA's Capacity Development Programme Management Office to learn more about the benefits of digital learning

and how technology can help us all to be more connected.

Why did UN DESA develop an e-learning platform?

“UN DESA plays a unique role in engaging Member States on many aspects of implementing the 2030 Agenda. This includes providing timely, relevant, high-quality, and accessible learning opportunities. UN DESA's [Digital Learning Center](#) is a curated repository of the Department's digital capacity-building portfolio which includes self-paced courses and microlearning and is open to anyone interested in learning together with our experts. We see digital engagement and connecting with our stakeholders through the platform as a privilege that allows us to overcome time and space restrictions and offer our content to a much larger audience. Having this digital space as a new meeting point complements the experiences we collect when engaging through in-person workshops and advisory services, so we see it as an integral part to implementing our vision, which is ‘to be a premier policy and capacity building partner, by integrating digital technologies, to deliver agile support and achieve measurable results for our stakeholders.’

What benefits does the platform offer its users, and how will it help countries?

“UN Secretary-General António Guterres has repeatedly emphasized the importance of technology in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In his Strategy on New Technologies, he identified four strategic commitments where the UN system can take action to support governments in harnessing the power of technology. One of these is capacity development. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a demand-driven urgency in delivering purposeful and high-quality digital learning and knowledge-sharing. The “modern learner” is keen on receiving visually engaging, accessible, and customizable content that can be consumed at any time, including on mobile devices. The Digital Learning Center is still in its infancy, but we already offer a 24-module program on “building back better from the COVID pandemic” as well as self-paced courses on “Transformational Leadership Capacities” as well as “Accountability and Ethics in Public Institutions”, among others. Our courses provide context and recommendations on topics that are on the minds of anyone dealing with policy challenges for sustainability. UN DESA also offers tailored and longer-term capacity building for countries that have a specific need for support. You can find out more on the [UN DESA Capacity development website](#). We hope that learners will engage with our content and find inspiration to apply the insights gained in their local contexts.”

What future developments can we expect from UN DESA Digital Learning?

“Digital technologies are crucial to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is an abundance of knowledge available on many websites, learning platforms and repositories and we need to try to curate knowledge in a way that it is easily accessible and digestible for our partners and stakeholders. Knowledge-sharing is a superpower because we all have so much to learn from each other. For the time being, a

lot of knowledge sharing happens unidirectional. In the next few years, we want to make sure we are equally able to learn from the knowledge generated by our stakeholders while we share the expertise that is available in UN DESA. The [Digital Learning Center](#) is just a starting point – it is a portal that welcomes you to engage with the Department’s thematic courses and free learning products and hopefully inspire more in-depth training that can be requested through our [website](#). I hope that the platform and content we offer will evolve through the feedback we receive from our stakeholders and national partners. Ultimately, our goal is to support human connectedness for mutual learning as a basis for co-creating better development policies.”

For more information: [UN DESA’s Capacity Development Programme Management Office](#)



THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



Meet UN DESA’s new Under-Secretary-General Mr. Li Junhua

After five years of dedicated service to UN DESA and the international community, Liu Zhenmin hands over the baton to a new Under-Secretary-General at the end of the summer. On 30 August, the United Nations welcomes Li Junhua

to lead UN DESA’s work promoting sustainable development for all. Here are 4 things you need to know about Mr. Li and his role heading UN DESA.

1. Brings a vision on multilateral collaboration, benefiting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

UN DESA’s new Under-Secretary-General Mr. Li joins the organization with perspectives and visions on fostering multilateral economic and social cooperation. He is committed to engage with all parties to further implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to serve UN Member States.

2. Extensive portfolio at UN DESA to serve people and planet

As Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Li guides the UN Secretariat’s support for the follow-up processes of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. He also oversees the substantive services to many intergovernmental processes. In addition, Mr. Li oversees UN DESA’s policy analysis and capacity development work and also serves as the Convenor of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. He also advises the UN Secretary-General on all development-related issues, including climate change, internet governance, and financing for development.

3. Experienced diplomat on the world stage

Mr. Li brings extensive experience to UN DESA, having contributed to numerous meetings of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United

Nations General Assembly and Security Council, as well as other multilateral meetings including the G20, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM), and BRICS etc.

Before joining the Department, he was the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China to Italy and San Marino. Prior to this, he was the Director General of the Department of International Organizations and Conferences, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China (2013-2019).

4. International career began at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Li began his career at the Foreign Affairs Ministry in 1985. Since then, he has served in various capacities, including as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China to Myanmar (2010-2012), Deputy Director General of the Department of International Organizations and Conferences (2008-2010), Minister Counselor (Political), Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations (2003-2008), Division Director and Counselor in charge of UN General Assembly and Security Council Affairs (2001-2003), Second and First Secretary, Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nation (1997-2001). Third and Second Secretary, the Department of International Organizations and Conferences (1992-1997) and Assistant to the Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of China to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok (1986-1992).

Mr. Li has a Master’s in International Public Policy, School of Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University.

Learn more about the new Under-Secretary-General Mr. Li on UN DESA’s website [here](#).



**HOW EQUAL IS OUR
WORLD?**





Crisis in education for SDGs: The long-term impact of COVID-19 and the digital transformation

By Eun Mee Kim, President of Ewha Womans University

The promise of the Agenda 2030 to “leave no one behind” has never been so critical as it is now. The COVID-19 pandemic has left such a serious gap in education and gender inequality that reaching the SDGs by 2030 may be just a dream, unless we act now. The goals set forth in the SDGs and, in particular, SDG4, “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” must be put back on track. Children suffered when the schools were closed. Even though children were at home being cared for by their parents and participate in on-line classes, many were left out of this opportunity for various reasons including lack of access to proper on-line hardware and software.

Inequality in education increased during the pandemic. This is not difficult to imagine as children from well-off families had access to the full support systems, while many were left out in the Global South, and for some in the Global North as well. Furthermore, many children, including pre-school toddlers, missed out on school meals, which are sometimes their only meal of the day.

The multiple consequences of the pandemic have left many children behind. And, unfortunately, although we are hopeful that the pandemic will be under control soon, the short-term impact will have life-long implications for children. Malnutrition during the pivotal years of early childhood leads to stunting and other life-long health issues. Distance learning, even under the best conditions, has left crucial social interaction and peer relations lost during the children’s development. Also, parents have lost jobs and income, and in some cases, their lives, causing many to fall into poverty.

I am also very concerned about the digital divide which was apparent even before COVID-19 hit the world. The pandemic has accelerated the paradigm shift in education driven by the digital transformation. The critical need for better on-line education hardware and software including IT connection is apparent, yet much of the Global South remains woefully ill-prepared and the gap with the Global North has become wider. Internet connectivity has become even less affordable now due to the decreased income in many countries, particularly in the Global South.

The brain drain of ICT professionals from the Global South to the Global North has exacerbated the digital divide. The need for good-quality higher education in the Global South should no longer be considered a luxury. Higher education and research and development in the Global South should become a major priority if we are to achieve the

2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Sustainable and long-term development and retention of skills for the digital transformation must start in earnest in the Global South.

Finally, we have witnessed rising gender inequality around the world. Women were left behind again with the pandemic. They were performing the bulk of household duties while the world stopped: they were the primary caretakers of children and the elderly during lockdown, they were forced to quit their jobs at a much higher rate than their male counterparts, and their professional productivity suffered. Thus, gender inequality, an important component of inequality that must be addressed to achieve the 2030 Agenda, should be addressed as a priority now. The digital transformation and the greater significance of the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields for the future has become even more evident with the pandemic. And unfortunately, women and girls' access to STEM education, training and jobs were already very low, and the pandemic has exacerbated and accelerated this trend.

We must take stock of the short-term pandemic-era challenges and address them. However, even more important is how to mitigate and turn back the clock for long-term and possibly permanent damages caused by the pandemic to children, women and men. The SDGs serve as a guidepost. Now, it is even more critical to use the goals as the navigation targets of what we must do as we are seeing the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel. We need to act now.

Calls for Action:

- (1) Reaffirm SDG4 for inclusive and equitable quality education.
- (2) Reemphasize the importance of integrating SDG4 with other SDGs including SDG5 (gender equality), and SDG10 (reduced inequalities).
- (3) Ensure that education in science and technology for digital transformation is provided inclusively and equitably around the world with special attention to the Global South with SDG17 (partnerships for the goals).
- (4) Ensure that the short-term impact of COVID-19 does not turn into permanent inequalities.

** The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*



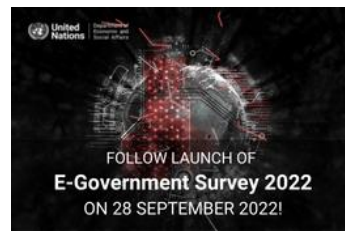
SDG 4 IN NUMBERS



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