

**High-level thematic roundtable on:**

**Digital Inclusion**

**Tuesday, 23 April 2024, 14:30-15:30 hours**

**Background**

Digital inclusion, defined as “equitable, meaningful, and safe access to use, lead, and design of digital technologies, services, and associated opportunities for everyone, everywhere,”<sup>1</sup> plays a crucial role in honouring the pledge of leaving no one behind in the digital age and achieving the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the forthcoming Global Digital Compact.

Digital technology and innovation can open doors to increased access to information, education, skills development, employment, business opportunities, social protection, and health and financial services. However, digital technologies may also exacerbate existing inequalities and create new barriers for individuals, especially those belonging to marginalized communities. People in Asia and the Pacific experience exclusion from the digital space due to various factors such as gender, age, disability, geographic location, ethnicity, migration status, education and socio-economic status.

Over the past few years, Internet coverage in Asia and the Pacific has expanded significantly. In 2022, 98 per cent of the population in Asia and the Pacific were covered by a mobile or fixed network, with a relatively low urban-rural coverage gap. However, while the coverage gap affects only 2 per cent of the population in the region, the usage gap - the number of persons not using the Internet less those without access to a network - concerns 37 per cent of the population. Available data suggest that Internet usage is markedly skewed towards men, young populations, and available data also reveals a disability divide.

Against this backdrop, it is critical to ensure the inclusion of marginalized groups in the digital age to facilitate full and effective participation of all in socioeconomic, political and cultural life. Such inclusion can be achieved by ensuring meaningful connectivity and advancing inclusive technology development; strengthening the digital skills of marginalized groups and promoting their participation in science, technology, engineering and math education and careers; developing enabling ecosystems<sup>2</sup> that support the inclusion of marginalized groups in the digital age; and addressing online and technology-facilitated violence against marginalized groups and protecting their rights.

Stronger regional and subregional cooperation among various actors, including government agencies, civil society organizations and private sector entities can improve capacity-building, financing, investment

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology, “Definition of digital inclusion”, brief (Geneva, n.d.). Available at [https://www.un.org/techenvoy/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/general/Definition\\_Digital-Inclusion.pdf](https://www.un.org/techenvoy/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/general/Definition_Digital-Inclusion.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Governments and other stakeholders can develop such ecosystems by harnessing digitalization to enhance the coverage, efficiency and effectiveness of public employment services; digital labour platforms; support for micro, small and medium enterprises; and social protection programmes.

and technology transfer. Joint and concerted efforts are urgently needed to press ahead towards an open, free, secure and human-centred digital future that rests on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda.

### Objectives

This roundtable is expected to highlight promising approaches and initiatives for digital inclusion from the Asia-Pacific region and to discuss forward-looking policy recommendations. Governments and other stakeholders will develop more comprehensive understanding of the challenges related to inclusive digital transformation and will use such insights in strengthening the development of national digitalization strategies.

Tentative guiding questions:

- What are some important structural barriers to digital inclusion? What are some of the specific challenges faced by various marginalized groups in the digital age, including intersectionalities that need to be considered? [*Academic/ CSO – could take gender, age, disability focus*]
- What are some good examples of overcoming these barriers and accelerating progress towards universal and meaningful connectivity? What are some good practices and initiatives on promoting the effective participation of marginalized groups in digitalized societies? [*Private sector/ CSO, could have technology or financing focus, ie DAISY consortium, SCB Bank*]
- What are some important policy considerations to drive digital innovation forward with a human-centred and inclusive approach? What are some examples of policies that have supported the inclusion of marginalized groups in the digital age? [*2 policymakers, ie. Government of the Republic of Korea; Government from the CWE project who offered ICT training to women*]

### Suggested speakers

- Ms. Moon-Sil Choi, Vice President, Department of Digital Inclusion, National Information Society Agency (NIA), Republic of Korea
- Ms. Jin Yang, Vice President, Centre for International Knowledge on Development, China
- Mr. Zorikto Gomboin; Deputy Head; Laboratory of International Development, Standardization and Application of ICTs; Radio Research and Development Institute; Russian Federation
- Mr. Prasant Ranjan Verma, Accessibility Specialist, Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) Consortium, India
- Ms. Pitiporn Phanaphat, First Executive Vice President of Digital Products and Platforms Business, Siam Commercial Bank, Thailand

### Tentative programme

*Please provide a suggested format/programme for the roundtable.*

*Each roundtable would be maximum 60 minutes, with tentatively 45-50 minutes of roundtable discussion + 10-15 minutes of interaction (Q&A) with the audience.*