Committee: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Topic: Addressing Digital Inequality and Its Impact on Access to Education and Economic Opportunities

Student Officer: Christos Zisimos

Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Christos Zisimos and I am a 10th grader in Politropi Private School in Athens. It is my utmost honour to serve as Deputy President in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in this year's Deutsche Schule Thessaloniki Model United Nations conference.

This year's conference will be extremely special for me since it will be my first ever chairing experience. It is my honor to welcome you to this year's conference and committee with the aim to engage in a delightful yet notably demanding debate as well as to have a great time together in this MUN experience.

This year's agenda of the ECOSOC committee is quite interesting with very crucial and major debatable issues that have to be addressed in this year's committee for a better future for all. The topic of this study guide is Addressing Digital Inequality and its Impact on Access to Education and Economic Opportunities.This study guide will provide essential information regarding this topic to make it comprehensive. Lastly, the bibliography provided should be quite useful for your further research.

Please feel free to ask me any further questions about the topic via my email address; zisimoschristos@gmail.com.

Kind Regards,

Christos Zisimos

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Digital inequality is one of the main issues in today's world due to the evolution of technology. To be more specific, the issue of digital inequality is the unequal access to technology and different education and economic opportunities.The situation some years ago was unappealing because it was thought that this was merely a basic access gap between more economically developed countries (MEDCs) and less economically developed countries (LEDCs). Currently the situation of digital divide has significantly improved because more and more people started using the internet and learnt its proper use, so many governments treated digital inclusion as a priority policy. However, there are still a few gaps that need to be bridged in terms of broadband availability, affordability and in the educational system which will be further explained later in the study guide. Furthermore, digital inequality has a considerable impact on different sectors, mainly education and the economy. This impact on education has struck down less economically developed countries (LEDCs) due to the lack of information and device access causing poor participation in class and lacking the required knowledge in terms of their academic career.For instance the ITU reported that approximately 2.6 billion people remained offline in 2023.Internet use was also very down in less economically developed countries (LEDCs) were only 27% of their population was online,compared with 93% in more economically developed countries (MEDCs).These numbers show the scale of the digital divide,specifically in less economically developed countries (LEDCs) and other low-income and rural communities [ITU reports][1]. On the other hand, this also greatly affects their future economic opportunities, by restricting access to online job listings, remote work, digital banking, training, and business tools. People without reliable internet or devices are more likely to miss out on higher-paying jobs and growth opportunities. In contrast, those with sufficient digital access can build skills, apply for work more efficiently, and be actively involved in the modern economy. Evidently, the most affected social classes are workers, rural communities, low income households and citizens of less economically developed countries (LEDCs). Finally digital inequality harms education, healthcare and access to public services. Its effects depend on social conditions such as income, education, location, age and digital skills. It does not directly cause crime, but poverty and social exclusion may increase crime indirectly. In addition, digital inequality can make it more difficult for people to access important information and communicate with others. Therefore, reducing digital inequality is important for creating equal opportunities in education, employment and society. Furthermore, improving access to technology can help people become more independent and participate more actively in their communities. Governments can help reduce this

[1] "Affordability of ICT Services." *Facts and Figures 2023*, www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2023/10/10/ff23.

problem by improving broadband availability, lowering the cost of internet services and providing digital education for people who lack the necessary skills [World Bank][2].

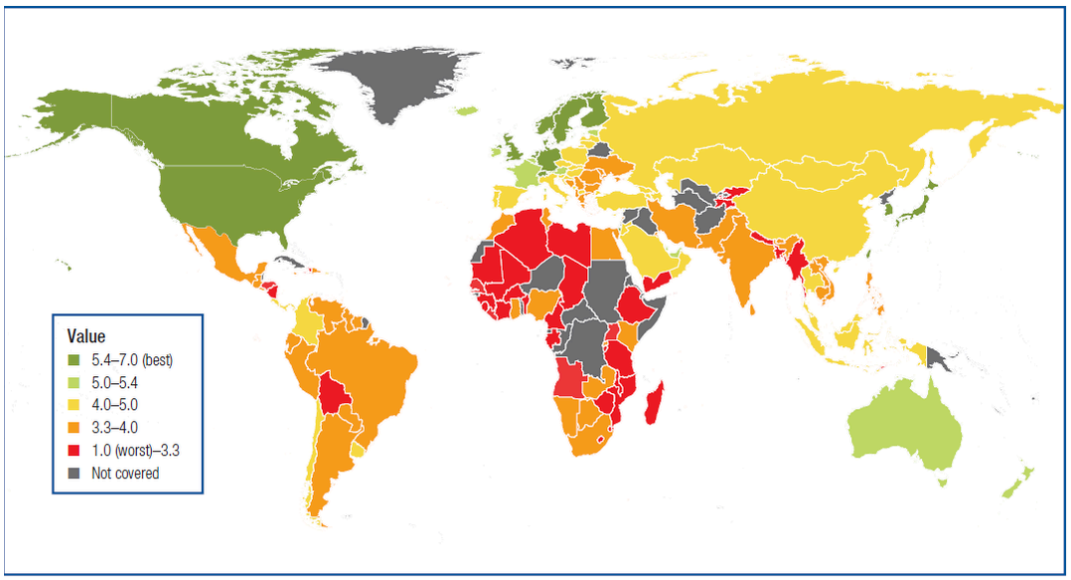


Figure 1: Networked Readiness Index Map [GITR][3].

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Broadband Access

"Broadband is a high-speed internet connection that facilitates fast data transmission, enhancing access to digital content and communication services across various sectors." [EURLEX][4]

Digital Divide

"Digital divide refers to the gap between people who have meaningful access to digital technology and those who don't." [OECD][5]

Digital Inclusion

[2] "The Unfinished Digital Revolution: Expanding Internet Access." *Atlas of Global Development*, data360.worldbank.org/en/atlas/internet-access/.

[3] *Reasons for Digital Divide - the Great Digital Divide Project*, thegreatdigitaldivideproject.weebly.com/reasons-for-digital-divide.html.

[4] "Broadband Internet Access: The Territorial Divide." *EUR-Lex*, Publications Office of the European Union, 24 Sept. 2006, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/broadband-internet-access-the-territorial-divide.html

[5] "Digital Divides." *OECD*, https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/digital-divides.html. Accessed 10 Oct. 2026.

"Digital inclusion is the effort to ensure that all individuals, regardless of location or background, have equitable access to technology and the necessary skills to use it meaningfully." [European Commission][6]

Digital Inequality

"Digital inequality refers to the disparities in knowledge and ability to use digital and information technology based on different demographics, socioeconomic backgrounds, and information technology experience and competencies." [UN][7]

Economic Opportunity

"Economic Opportunity is the availability of chances for individuals to improve their financial well-being." [EBSCO][8]

The Network Society

"'The network society' refers most broadly to a changing social structure whose primary mode of organization is social and media networks. This article begins by considering three communication traditions that describe 'the network society' by emphasizing mediated and nonmedicated social ties. Then, it further marks the broad contours of thought on 'the network society' through a close reading of two foundational texts: Jan van Dijk's *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media* and Manuel Castell's three-volume *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*." [MIT][9]

Universal services

"'Universal services' means the minimum set of services of specified quality which is available to all users regardless of their geographical location and, in the light of specific national conditions, at an affordable price as may be defined under regulations made under this Act." [EURLEX][10]

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[6] "Digital Inclusion." *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*, European Commission, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-inclusion. Accessed 10 Oct. 2026

[7] "Digital Inclusion." United Nations, https://www.un.org/digital-emerging-technologies/content/digital-inclusion. Accessed 10 Oct. 2026.

[8] "Economic Opportunities." EBSCO Research Starters, EBSCO Information Services, https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/economics/economic-opportunities/. Accessed 10 Oct. 2026.

[9] Catarina Cardoso et al., "The Network Society Moves in Mysterious Ways: 25 Years of *The Network Society*," *Quantitative Science Studies*, https://doi.org/10.1162/qss*a*00366.

[10] "Universal Service." *EUR-Lex*, Publications Office of the European Union, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/universal-service.html. Accessed 10 Oct. 2026.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Concepts like digital divide started appearing before even the internet was invented in the 1970s by the United States of America. [Britannica][11] To be more specific, there were debates about universal services with the purpose of ensuring that all populations of less economically developed countries (LEDCs) could use telegrams, telephone systems and postals and not being technologically unaware. Moving on, after the emergence of computers in the 1980s the debate was about who was able to afford and access them. The disparities were mainly between richer and poorer nations but even in genres as men were reported to have more access to technological devices than women, even though their contribution to such advancements was equally significant. [UM][12].

The need to address the issue in a more formal way emerged in the 1990s, when the use of the Internet became widespread. Hence, the term 'digital divide' was introduced to describe the gap between those who could access digital platforms and technological equipment and those who did not. [University of Twente][13] This gap was clearly depicted by the US, who published a series of 'Falling through the Net', an in-depth analysis that recorded technological differences in terms of income, race and location in the years 1995, 1998 and 1999. [Kevin Bulger][14]

This research was the stepping stone for the issue to be further investigated. At the end of the decade, the first-level divide was mainly superficial and differentiated those who had a computer and internet access from those who did not. [UT][15] However, as the internet was becoming even more widespread a second-level divide was more than necessary. This referred to the differences in the ways that people used the internet, the benefits and the purposes for its use (educational, professional). [NCB][16] All this information available to scholars gave rise to the introduction of another term, 'the network society', which clearly depicted the inequalities between those who had access to technology and those who did not. [UT][17] By the beginning of the 21st century, it had become evident that those who were technologically illiterate or simply did not have access to such devices, had less opportunities for development. The International Policy

[11] *Internet | Description, History, Uses, & Facts | Britannica*, www.britannica.com/technology/Internet.
[12] *A Look Back: Telework and the Digital Divide | U-M LSA Center for Social Solutions*, lsa.umich.edu/social-solutions/news-events/news/digests/a-look-back/a-look-back--telework-and-the-digital-divide.html.
[13] *The Digital Divide - an Introduction*, www.utwente.nl/en/centrefordigitalinclusion/Blog/02-Digitale_Kloof/.
[14] *A Brief History of the Digital Divide | Digital Arts Service Corps*, digitalartscorps.org/node/717.
[15] *The Digital Divide - an Introduction*, www.utwente.nl/en/centrefordigitalinclusion/Blog/02-Digitale_Kloof/.
[16] *Understanding Digital Inequality: A Theoretical Kaleidoscope - PMC*, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10034872/.
[17] *The Digital Divide - an Introduction*, www.utwente.nl/en/centrefordigitalinclusion/Blog/02-Digitale_Kloof/.

needed to shift focus and try to address the issue. International efforts have focused on expanding internet access,improving digital literacy and making technology more affordable. Reducing the digital divide would promote economic development and social inclusion,while helping disadvantaged groups access education, employment, healthcare and public services.

After numerous efforts to solve the issue, the deeply rooted problem still remained and became visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic showcased the significance of digital divide in the majority of social classes, especially in vulnerable learners, such as the elderly.For example countries have been more affected by digital inequality like Sudan.To be more specific digital divide has worsened socioeconomic impacts of conflicts and poverty in the country by constraining access to online education,employment,financial services humanitarian guidance.High costs,weak infrastructure,limited digital literacy,gender inequality network interruptions particularly affect women,remote communities, refugees and internally displaced people.As a result many Sudanese people are marginalized for economic opportunities and crucial services,reinforcing existing social inequalities. [ECOI][18]

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Angola

Angola supports reducing digital inequality by expanding internet access, digital skills and more affordable connectivity, because it sees digital access as important for education and economic growth. The main goal is to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas so more students can learn online and more people can use digital tools for work, business and financial services. [AR][19]

China

China is one of the countries that has developed rapidly in the field of technology and uses digital inequality as a strategic tool for self-development, social stability and modernization. Their approach gives priority to its infrastructure and is state-led towards big investment opportunities in fiber, mobile networks and 5G, especially in rural and remote areas with the purpose of digital access becoming a public service and

[18] Review, Forced Migration, and Wala Mohammed. "The Digital Exclusion of Refugees and Idps in Sudan." *European Country of Origin Information Network*, 1 May 2024, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2114426.html.

[19] *Angola National Report 2026*, www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/doha_angola_reporting_2026_march_17.pdf.

revitalization of these areas [China-Cee institute][20]. Internationally, China also supports digital development in many other states through the Digital Silk Road providing infrastructure and technological collaboration and especially in countries that are being developed.But on the one hand this may help bridge digital inequality,while on the other hand it may also increase reliance on Chinese technology and raise awareness about privacy,surveillance and state sovereignty [Kevin Hernandez][21].

India

India is facing many problems with the digital divide both in terms of inclusivity and growth. Due to these issues, the Indian government created a framework combining digital infrastructure, public services and skills programs which are under the framework 'Digital India'. For example, BaharatNet is a program which connects detached regions and many rural villages with optical fiber, with efforts from Community services centers and public Wi-Fi access for struggling households. On top of that, India gave lots of attention to digital literacy by implementing the "Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan" (PMGDSA) program, which trained 6.39 crore individuals. This was one of the world's biggest ventures for digital literacy. The program finished as a whole on 31 st March 2024 [The Comprehensive Modular Survey: Telecom 2025 (CMS) by the NSS][22]

United States of America (USA)

The USA played a vital role in the issue at hand. To be more specific, the USA has had access to fast speed internet for many years, which was not only essential for work but also for everyday life. As aforementioned, the 'Falling Through the Net' reports by the US, documented the racial and financial differences and their effect on the use of technology. Apart from that, in 1996 the Telecommunications Act and Universal Services Fund decided to establish a framework to support digital inclusion and ensure that low income communities, schools and libraries and healthcare facilities have access to broadband connections and technological tools. [Report on Americans' Access to Technology Tools][23]. However, there have been large inconsistencies with its quality, in rural and tribal areas. Therefore, the issue to close the digital divide among all nations by

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[20] *The Global Digital Divide's Self-Reinforcing Mechanism and China's Solution – China-Cee Institute*, china-cee.eu/2025/10/10/the-global-digital-divides-self-reinforcing-mechanism-and-chinas-solution/.

[21] *Emerging Issues Report Kevin Hernandez Institute of Development Studies*, assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c866463e5274a2a51ac0b67/Hernandez_Chinese_Belt_and_Road_Digital_-_final.pdf.

[22] *Peering into India's Digital Divide*, www.insightsonindia.com/2025/07/09/peering-into-indias-digital-divide/.

[23] *Falling through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion*, www.ntia.gov/sites/default/files/data/fttn00/falling.htm.

investing in infrastructure and in affordability programs still remains a priority in the country.

European Union (EU)

The European Union acknowledges the urge to address digital divide both at a regional and at a social level. It directly affects education, career opportunities, access to healthcare facilities and promotes inclusion in matters that concern democratic societies. Their approach encompasses a framework that involves the "Digital Compass" and "Europe's Digital Decade" aiming at establishing universal broadband connection and 5G coverage, advancing the levels of digital skills among EU citizens and workers,promoting inclusivity for the elderly, the disabled and generally the disadvantaged and lastly utilizing digital tools to ameliorate public services and social protection mechanisms. [EP][24] Furthermore, the EU members are constantly emphasizing the issue of inequalities created by digitalization against those with poor digital skills, the elderly, the disabled and those who reside in rural areas and have different economic development. Their policy to address the issue mainly focuses on implementing broadband and digital infrastructure projects to encourage the development of the regions and remote areas. Additionally, there are programs that boost skills for workers and young people and promote inclusion in public services and in sectors such as health and education. Finally, the EU's initiative EU4Digital was an innovative one since it highlighted the need to decrease digital divides on the EU's borders and neighboring areas and the importance of cross-border cooperation. This project showcased that regional areas should not be neglected since their people can actively contribute to public matters and development if they are given equal opportunities. Summing up, inclusivity, economic competitiveness and progress through equal rights and opportunities to citizens are the key elements of the EU's stance. [IE][25]

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

The International Telecommunication Union, being a specialized agency of the United Nations, believes that the problem of digital divide is not only due to the lack of internet access but also due to digital inclusion. It also states that in any case of age, income,location or gender,one should have the ability to use digital technology with a meaning,it emphasizes that affordability,accessibility and digital skills must be contained in the system from the start. The ITU also focuses on helping more vulnerable communities like the elderly,people with disabilities ,people that live in industrial and

[24] *Textos Aprovados - FOSSO Digital: Disparidades Sociais Causadas Pela Digitalização - Terça-Feira, 13 de Dezembro de 2022*, www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0438_PT.html.

[25] *Bridging the Digital Divide a Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform*, www.interregeurope.eu/sites/default/files/2025-08/Policy%20brief%20on%20bridging%20the%20digital%20divide.pdf.

rural areas and even women with the aim to not leave anyone behind in technology. [ITU][26]

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

10th December, 1948	Adoption of the universal declaration of human rights recognising the right of education. Education declared a universal human right, a foundational moral norm that set the standard that learning belongs to everyone.
8th September, 2000	Adoption of the Millennium development goals turned the right into measurable schooling targets — effective for funding and political will, though narrow on quality and equity.
25th September, 2015	Adoption of the Sustainable development goals. Widened the promise to quality, inclusive, lifelong learning and brought digital access into the education agenda for the first time.
12th July, 2018	Countries continue investing in digital infrastructure and digital literacy programs.Access is growing, but skills and meaningful use still lag — a shift from crisis response to lasting, structural inclusion.

[26] *Towards an Inclusive Digital Society*, www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Digital-Inclusion/Pages/about.aspx.

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)

The International covenant on Economic,Social and Cultural rights was adopted on 16th December 1966 by the United Nations General Assembly,this entered into force after 10 years on 3rd January 1976.This treaty might be one of the most important ever for human rights.To be more specific it protects a variety of rights like,the right to work,the rights of education,the right to health and the right of living somewhere acceptable [UN][27]. This treaty is quite relevant to the unequal access of technology,devices and internet can limit them into not enjoying the rights that were previously mentioned [UN][28].

Sustainable Development Goals (2015)

The 2015 sustainable development goals (SDG) are a UN roadmap for global progress.To be more specific SDG 4 aims to provide equal access to quality education and essential life and work skills.Also SDG 8 promotes sustainable economic growth and fair employment opportunities for everyone and SDG 9 supports sustainable tourism by promoting better transport,stronger internet access,and ecofriendly technology in tourist destinations. Finally SDG 10 mentions making sure that tourism benefits all people,including local communities and those who face disadvantages. [UN][29]

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights says that everyone has the opportunity and right of education.To be more specific that primary school must be free and mandatory,specialized and professional education should be made publicly available and tertiary education should be accessible to everyone regardless of their values. [UN][30] That article had the core aim to develop human personality,promote respect and honor human rights,freedoms,values and friendship among everyone.Lastly this article gives parents the opportunity to select what education they want to provide to their children and it's especially relevant to digital inequality because without the needed skills and devices students can not fulfill and enjoy their right of education. [UN][31]

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[27] *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights | Ohchr*, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights.

[28] *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights | Ohchr*, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights.

[29] "The 17 Goals | Sustainable Development." *United Nations*, sdgs.un.org/goals.

[30] *Artículo 26: Derecho a La Educación | Noticias ONU*, news.un.org/es/story/2018/12/1447521.

[31] *Artículo 26: Derecho a La Educación | Noticias ONU*, news.un.org/es/story/2018/12/1447521.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Digital India Programme

Digital India is a flagship programme of the Government of India, launched on July 1, 2015, by Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi with the vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.This project is improving daily all citizens lives in many ways like employment opportunities,expansion of digital economy and digital delivery services . [Government of India][32]

European Union Digital Education Plan

The European Commission is aiming to modernise education and training by funding research and innovation and promoting digital technologies used for learning.That's why they created the European Union's education action plan (2021-2027),this plan has the strategy to make education and training more equitable,accessible and compatible for the digital age.It has two specific objectives the first one being:establishing a high-performing digital education system with resilient infrastructure,interconnection,digital tools and improving the digital skills of everyone and especially students and teachers.But the main reason why this plan has been taken into action is because its objective is to mitigate digital inequality by facilitating students with limited access to education,remote communities and people with disabilities while stimulating cooperation and the dissemination of effective practices between EU member states [EC][33].

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Broadband Availability

One impactful solution to this problem is to enhance broadband availability. To be more specifically, all governments can invest in high-speed internet systems and especially in remote and underserved communities, while also making broadband provisions more budget friendly for unprivileged households.Public-private collaboration, local digital networks, subsidies and shared infrastructures policies can help extend access and limit costs, by ensuring that all people have low-cost and secure internet access. Finally broadband availability enhances opportunities for education, employment, healthcare and admission to public services.

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[32] "About US - Digital India: Leading the Transformation in India for Ease of Living and Digital Economy: Meity, Government of India." *Digital India | Leading the Transformation in India for Ease of Living and Digital Economy | MeitY, Government of India*, 9 Dec. 2025, www.digitalindia.gov.in/about-us/.

[33] "Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027." *European Education Area*, education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/actions.

Affordability

Another very important solution to digital inequality is advancing the affordability of digital technology. Governmental bodies and institutions can offer economic support,reduced-cost devices,open-access education tools and affordable mobile data plan for low-income households. This is quite vital due to many people may have access to digital services in theory but still be incompetent to use them if the devices and data are too expensive. Lastly lowering these expenses would assist disadvantaged students,workers and households into contributing more fairly in education,healthcare,employment and public life.

Education System

Educational modernisation shall be considered another impactful step in the global efforts to mitigate digital inequality. An educational system that secures digital and technological literacy is the primary means of equalisation of knowledge and usage capacity related to technological tools for all students. Through a UN affiliated investment program, providing funding for technological accessibility to students, according to each nation’s economic status and budgetary constraints, could become a feasible concept. Coordinating an educational investment program that guarantees access to digital means for all students could be an effective global effort for bridging the literacy gap provoked by digital inequality. Through such a program the international community could ensure that young citizens around the world, regardless of geographical, financial or geopolitical factors, have an equal access pathway to the numerous considerable educational and progressively professional benefits that digital literacy and technological accessibility have to offer.

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