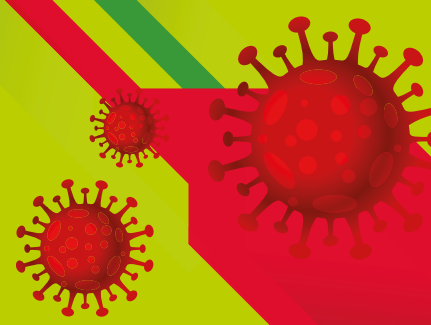




Digital Divide Widening as Coronavirus Spread Intensifies



As coronavirus continues to dominate the world agenda, many countries, businesses and organisations have been compelled to transition to digital economy. Digital economy, which is defined as an economy that focuses on digital technologies supported by the web and other digital communication technologies, is increasingly being adopted as a safe and efficient means of facilitating transactions during this period of the pandemic. This has additionally provided the opportunity to have an in-depth look at the digital gap between countries and societies.

Download: [The COVID-19 Crisis: Accentuating the Need to Bridge Digital Divides](#)

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Expectedly, changes in behaviour are likely to have lasting effects when the economy starts to pick up in what is likely to be the post-pandemic period. However, not everyone is ready to embrace a more digitized existence. A new analysis from UNCTAD, maps the changing digital landscape since the last major global calamity, the 2008/09 financial crisis. It looks at how a digitally enabled world is working for some, but not all, equally.

According to the analysis, the coronavirus crisis has accelerated the uptake of digital solutions, tools, and services, speeding up the global transition towards a digital economy.

However, it has also exposed the wide chasm between the connected and the unconnected, revealing just how far behind many are on digital uptake.

“Inequalities in digital readiness hamper the ability of large parts of the world to take advantage of technologies that help us cope with the coronavirus pandemic by staying at home,” said UNCTAD's technology and logistics director, Shamika Sirimanne.

“This situation has significant development implications that cannot be ignored. We need to ensure that we do not leave those who are less digitally equipped even further behind in a post-coronavirus world.”

Even as the analysis provides snapshots of how technology is being used as a critical tool in maintaining business and life continuity, measures to limit physical interaction and in effect, contain the coronavirus pandemic have seen more businesses and governments move their operations and services online.

Digital platforms are also thriving as consumers seek entertainment, shopping opportunities and new ways of connecting during the crisis.

“There are incredible positives emerging that show the potential of a digitally transformed world,” observes Ms. Sirimanne.

Additionally, digitalization is allowing telemedicine, telework and online education to proliferate. Notably, there has been a leap in teleworking and online conferencing, amplifying the demand for online conferencing software such as Microsoft Teams, Skype, Cisco's Webex and Zoom, the analysis says.

According to [Microsoft](#), the number of people using its software for online collaboration climbed nearly 40% in a week while in China, the use of digital work applications from WeChat, Tencent and Ding, took off at the end of January when lockdown measures started to take effect.

As the world moves to take stock of more data on the expansion of the virus, it is the hope of every nation that information exchanges for research will provide a lasting solution to this divide whose effect has the capacity to move some countries far ahead, and many countries, far behind.