



Document CWG-SFP-4/INF-1

4 March 2022

English only

Note by the Secretariat

INFORMATION DOCUMENT ON THE TERMS INFORMATION SOCIETY AND DIGITAL SOCIETY

Summary

This document presents background information on the terms 'Information Society' and 'Digital Society', as requested by the CWG-SFP during its 3rd meeting.

Action required

The Council Working Group is invited to **note** this document.

References

Background Information on the terms 'Information Society' and 'Digital Society'

COUNCIL WORKING GROUP ON STRATEGIC AND FINANCIAL PLANS 2024-27

4th meeting of CWG-SFP

Definitions of the Digital Society

- Digital society definition in the UNDP Digital Strategy 2022-2025: **A society in which digital technologies are coiled with the physical and have become completely bound up with everyday life**
- What is Digital Society | IGI Global (igi-global.com)
 - a. A society in which everything runs on digital technology where paperless and electronic means are the norm. Learn more in: [Importance of Digital Literacy and Hindrance Brought About by Digital Divide](#)
 - b. Process of **evolution derived from the information society through the intensive use of technologies** and digital media where the internet positions itself as the information tool itself and whose decentralized set of networks form a union in access and transmission collaborative learning. Learn more in: [An Approximation in the Study of Communication Research](#): Digital Evolution and the Study of This Subject in Spanish Academic Journals
 - c. A modern, progressive society that is formed as a result of the adoption and integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) at home, work, education and recreation, and supported by advanced telecommunications and wireless connectivity systems and solutions. [Learn more in: Evaluation of Strategic Opportunities and Resulting Business Models for SMEs: Employing IoT in Their Data-Driven Ecosystems](#)
 - d. Refers to society in which digital technologies are widely used to respond to different individual, community and social challenges. [Learn more in: Ageing and Health in the Digital Society: Challenges and Opportunities](#)
 - e. The term signals to a society mainly marked by the monopoly and distribution of digital technologies. [Learn more in: Metamorphosis of Labour in Digital Societies: Platform Workers \(Deliveries\) and the Pandemic](#)
 - f. A society corresponding to the Digital Era in human history. This is an **ICT-dependent society**, where the creation, distribution, use, integration, and manipulation of information become the main economic, political, and cultural activities. [Learn more in: Linguistic Analysis of Science Teachers' Narratives Using AntConc Software](#)

Definition of the Digital Society (OECD)

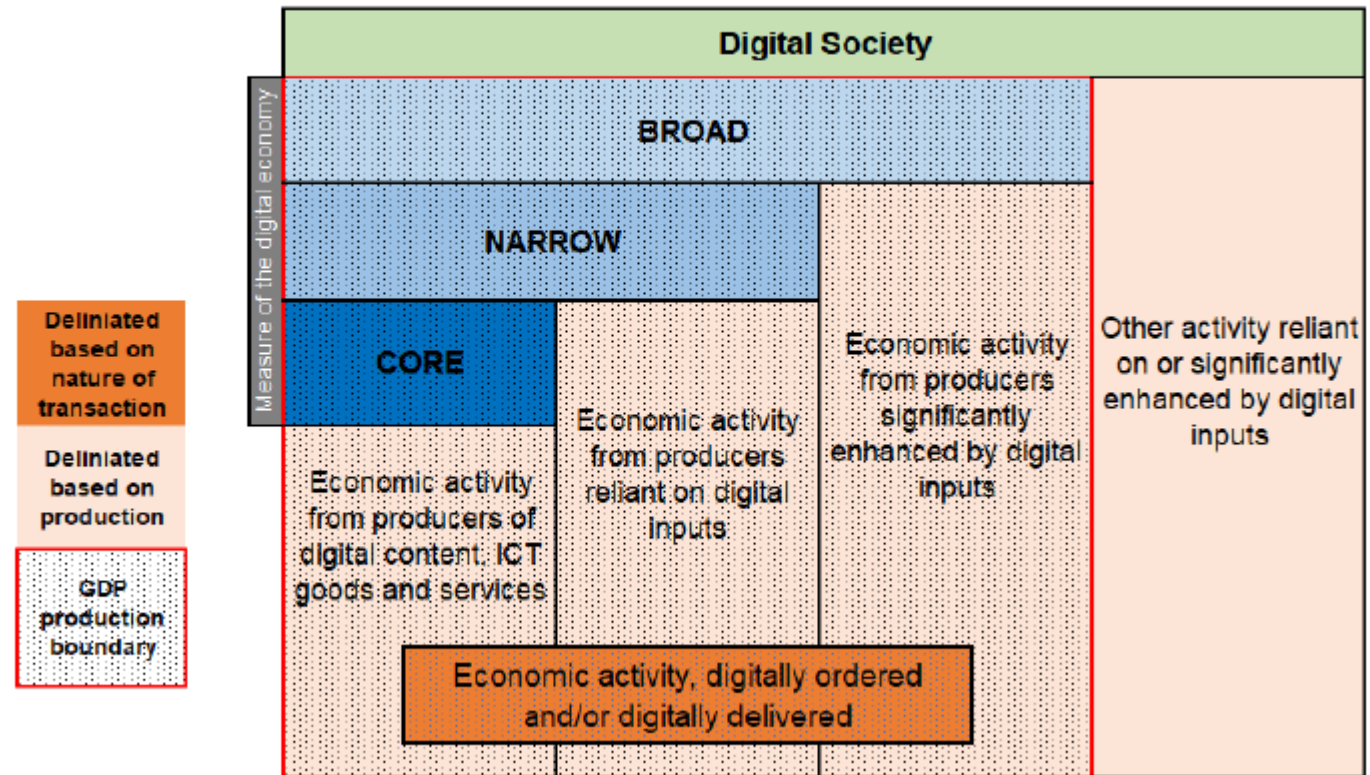
- The final measure of **Digital society** extends further than the Digital Economy and incorporates digitalised interactions and activities not included in the GDP production boundary, such as the use of free digital platforms (including free public digital platforms). While these interactions are not explicitly considered part of the Digital economy per se, this activity is important for effective digital policy by government

A ROADMAP TOWARD A COMMON FRAMEWORK
FOR MEASURING THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Report for the G20 Digital Economy Task Force

Source: OECD

Figure 2: Tiered definition of the Digital Economy



Definitions of the Information Society

- What is the Information Society? (**Source: World Summit on the Information Society negotiated website FAQ:** <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/basic/faqs.asp>)
The digital revolution in information and communication technologies has created the platform for a free flow of information, ideas and knowledge across the globe. This revolution has made a profound impression on the way the world functions. The Internet has become an important global resource, a resource that is critical to both the developed world as a business and social tool and the developing world as a passport to equitable participation, as well as economic, social and educational development. ***The purpose of the World Summit on the Information Society is to ensure that these benefits are accessible to all while promoting specific advantages in areas such as e-strategies, e-commerce, e-governance, e-health, education, literacy, cultural diversity, gender equality, sustainable development and environmental protection.*** At WSIS Geneva in December 2003, World leaders declared “***our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society***, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”
- The term information society and related concepts, such as information age and knowledge economy, describe a **social system greatly dependent on information technologies to produce and distribute all manner of goods and services**. In contrast to the industrial society, which relied on internal combustion engines to augment the physical labor of humans, the information society relies on computer technologies to augment mental labor. ([Encyclopedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_society))
- "Information society" is **a broad term used to describe the social, economic, technological, and cultural changes associated with the rapid development and widespread use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in modern nations societies**. Information societies are thought to differ from industrial societies because they treat information as a commodity, especially scientific and technical information; because they employ large numbers of "information workers" in their economies; because information and communication technologies and channels are prolific and are widely used; and because using those technologies and channels has given people a sense of "interconnectedness." ([Encyclopedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_society))
- A concept that responds to the **expansion and ubiquity of information**. The term has been in use since the 1970s, but has gained in popularity and is now widely used in social and political policy. Sustained and accelerated growth of media, of education provision and participation, as well as computer communications technologies has led many to posit that the attendant **information explosion distinguishes a new epoch**. The information society is one in which **information is the defining feature**, unlike the industrial society where steam power and fossil fuels were distinguishing elements. ([Information society - Oxford Reference](https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780190261092.001.0001/acref-9780190261092_0101))
- In an information society, development is achieved through the **production, exchange and adaptation of information** so as to improve the living standards and working conditions of all people. An information society is fundamentally, but not exclusively, **built on digital technology**. ([E ESCWA 30 7-EN.pdf](https://www.escwa.int/sites/default/files/2017/03/E_ESCWA_30_7-EN.pdf))

"Digital Society" in recent UN Resolutions, Documents, or UNGA events

No. of Document	Relevant sections <i>Note for "Information Society", excluding references to WSIS</i>
A/RES/74/229 <i>Globalization and interdependence: science, technology and innovation for sustainable development</i>	Recalling the importance of supporting the African Union's Agenda 2063, [...], and in this context noting the Declaration of Sharm el-Sheikh, adopted by the African Union in October 2019, which commits to work towards an integrated and inclusive Digital Society and Economy in Africa that improves the quality of life of Africa's citizens (Reference: "Digital Society and Economy, in the AU's 2019 Sharm-el-Sheikh Declaration, STC-CICT, 22-26 Oct. 2019)
A/RES/75/202 <i>Information and communications technologies for sustainable development</i>	33. Also recognizes that information and communications technologies present new opportunities and challenges and that there is a pressing need to address the major impediments that developing countries face in engaging with and accessing new technologies, such as an appropriate enabling environment, sufficient resources, infrastructure, education, capacity, investment and connectivity, as well as issues related to technology ownership, setting standards and technology flows, and in this regard urges all stakeholders to consider ensuring appropriate financing of digital development and adequate means of implementation, including strengthened capacity-building of developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, towards a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy

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"digital society"

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[Internet broadband for an inclusive digital society](#)

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[Internet broadband for an inclusive digital society : report of the Secretary-General](#)

[E/CN.16/2013/3](#) | [2013-03-25](#) | [Reports](#)

[multiple files](#)



[Synthesis report on the CSTD panels on technology development and capacity-building in a digital society : report / by the Secretary-General](#)

[E/CN.16/2003/2](#) | [2003-03-21](#) | [Reports](#)

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[Note verbale dated 10 October 2012 from the Office of the President of Sri Lanka addressed to the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific](#)

Transmits text of the outcome document of the Regional Expert Consultation on Connecting a Digital Society in Asia and the Pacific in order to Build Resilience, held in Colombo...

[E/ESCAP/CICT\(3\)/5](#) | [2012-10-23](#) | [Letters and Notes Verbales](#)

[multiple files](#)



[Intersessional Panel Meeting on Science, technology and innovation for sustainable cities and peri-urban communities ; Internet broadband for an inclusive digital society](#)

[E/CN.16/2013/CRP.1](#) | [2013-05-31](#) | [Draft Reports](#)

Examples of references to 'Information Society' in the UN system

- World Telecommunication and **Information Society** Day (WTISD) has been celebrated annually every 17 May since 1969 to mark the founding of ITU and the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention in 1865.
- **United Nations Group on the Information Society** endorsed by the CEB in April 2006 to coordinate substantive policy issues facing the United Nations system's implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) ([About UNGIS \(itu.int\)](#))

UNGA and ECOSOC Resolutions:

- Resolution [A/RES/55/2](#) (United Nations Millennium Declaration)
- Resolution [A/RES/56/183](#) (World Summit on the Information Society)
- Resolution [A/RES/70/1](#) (Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development)
- Resolution [A/RES/70/125](#) (Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society)
- Resolution [A/RES/75/202](#) (Information and communications technologies for sustainable development)
- Resolution [E/RES/2021/28](#) (Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society)
- ESCAP resolution 72/10

Governments:

- [UK Government House of Lords: Agenda for Action](#)
- [European Commission: Building the European information society for us all: Final policy report of the high-level expert group \(1997\)](#)
- [German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology: Information Society Germany \(2010\)](#)
- [Slovenia - Development Strategy for the Information Society 2020 \(2021\)](#)

World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Process:

- [UN and ITU Resolutions on WSIS](#)
- Outcome documents: [World Summit on the Information Society \(itu.int\)](#)
- [WSIS High-Level Event 2014 Policy Statements](#)
- [WSIS+10 Statement on the Implementation of the WSIS Outcomes](#)
- [WSIS+10 Vision for WSIS beyond 2015](#)
- [Final WSIS Target Review](#)
- [WSIS+10 Report: ITU's Ten Year Contribution to the WSIS Implementation and Follow-up \(2005-2014\)](#)
- [Towards Knowledge Societies : UNESCO](#)

Others:

- [UN ICT Task Force Series 8: The World Summit on the Information Society: Moving from the Past into the Future \(2005\)](#)
- [eEurope 2005: An Information Society for all \(2002\)](#)
- [Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development: The Global Information Society - a Statistical View \(2008\)](#)
- [OECD: Guide to Measuring the Information Society \(2011\)](#)
- [Digital Media & Society by Simon Lindgren \(2022\)](#)
- [The Information Society: An International Journal](#)

Examples of references to 'Digital Society' in the UN system

- [UN SG's Roadmap for Digital cooperation](#) – refers to an inclusive **Digital Economy and Society**
- UNGIS: [UNGIS Dialogue on the Role of Digitalization in the Decade of Action](#): Accelerating the achievement of the SDGs through better collaboration in the UN System (unctad.org)
- UNCTAD (2015) [Internet broadband for an inclusive digital society](#) (un.org)
- UNESCO report: [Digital society](#): gaps and challenges for digital inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean - UNESCO Digital Library (2017)
- Economic and Social Council: ([2001, substantive sess. : Geneva](#)): ...decides to choose, as the substantive theme for the inter-sessional period 2001-2003, the theme "Technology development and capacity-building for competitiveness in a **digital society**" > [Synthesis report on the CSTD panels on technology development and capacity-building in a digital society](#): report by the Secretary-General (un.org)
- UN-ESCAP: [E-resilience readiness for an inclusive digital society by 2030](#) | ESCAP (unescap.org)
- UNHABITAT - [Digital Cities Toolkit](#): The Programme promotes a **people-centered digital society** that puts the needs of the citizens and their digital rights first.
- UNDP / Digital Transformation: "UNDP must continue to both pursue our own digital transformation as well as support our partners in **building inclusive and ethical digital societies** ([link](#))"

MESSAGE FROM THE UNGIS CHAIR


During this global pandemic, the value of digital solutions has become even more evident, as online conferences, remote work, e-commerce and telemedicine are being used to keep society going. At the same time, we are being reminded of the huge divides that exist across countries in terms of the readiness to participate in ever more digitalized economies and societies.

The contributions to the *UNGIS Dialogue on the Role of Digitalization in the Decade of Action* express a shared view that digital technologies have been critical during the COVID-19 crisis and are essential to speed-up progress in delivering the 2030 Agenda. They show how digitalization affects a myriad of global concerns, such as those related to poverty and hunger, the future of work, global health, gender equality, economic development, access to education and climate change, to name but a few. The think pieces also highlight the importance of international cooperation in harnessing the potential of digitalization in an inclusive, resilient and sustainable way. This calls for a strengthening of the role of UNGIS in supporting and coordinating digital cooperation within the UN System.

Over the course of the Dialogue, UNGIS received contributions from 22 Heads of agencies. Between June and October 2020, all contributions were published online and promoted on social media by UNGIS and its participating agencies. During this period, the Dialogue received over five thousand web visits and about two hundred thousand social media views. On behalf of the Vice-Chairs, I would like to express my gratitude to all the Heads of the participating agencies for their insightful contributions.

New technologies have often spurred social and economic disruption, yet the current wave of technological changes under the "digital revolution" is unprecedented in terms of speed, scope and scale. The urgency of responding to COVID-19 presents us with a unique opportunity to unite in speeding up the development of a global **digital society**.

I encourage you to read the short think pieces collected in this publication as they stress in more detail the importance of finding suitable policy responses, more international collaboration, more policy dialogue and smarter partnerships in order to leverage digital technologies for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Mukhisa Kituyi

Secretary-General
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNGIS Chair 2020-21

ITU texts – references to 'digital society'

- ITU Strategic Plan 2020-2023 – Annex 1 to Res. 71, (rev. Dubai, 2018):
 - Goal 1 - Growth: Enable and foster access to and increased use of telecommunications/ICT in support of the **digital economy and society**
 - Goal 4 - Innovation: Enable innovation in telecommunications/ICT in support of the **digital transformation of society**
- PP Res. 137 (rev. Dubai, 2018) Deployment of future networks in developing countries
 - *Noting d) that promoting investment in broadband connectivity from a broad range of sectors can help achieve the full potential of these technologies and bring the world closer to the goal of an inclusive **digital society** accessible by all;*
- PP Res. 205 (Dubai, 2018) ITU's role in fostering telecommunication/information and communication technology-centric innovation to support the **digital economy and society**
- WTDC-17 Buenos Aires Action Plan:
 - Objective 4. Inclusive **digital society**: Foster the development and use of telecommunications/ICTs and applications to empower people and societies for sustainable development
 - Regional Initiatives: ASP2: Harnessing information and communication technologies to support the digital economy and an inclusive **digital society**

Regional Strategies and Visions

Africa

- [The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa \(2020-2030\) | African Union \(au.int\)](#) VISION: **An Integrated and inclusive digital society and economy** in Africa that improves the quality of life of Africa's citizens, strengthen the existing economic sector, enable its diversification and development, and ensure continental ownership with Africa as a producer and not only a consumer in the global economy (*Document includes 2 references to **Information Society** / 5 to **Digital Society***)

EU

- [Europe's 2030 Digital Decade](#): The EU will pursue a human-centric, sustainable **vision for digital society** throughout the digital decade to empower citizens and businesses
- **Digital Economy and Society** Index (DESI)
- The initiative 'eEurope', an **information society** for all' was launched in 1999 by the European Commission to bring the benefits of the information society to all Europeans

ASEAN

- [ASEAN-Digital-Masterplan-2025](#) Vision: The next five years could see the ASEAN region make giant strides towards becoming both a **digital economy and a digital society**. [...]

'Digital strategies' are in place around the world

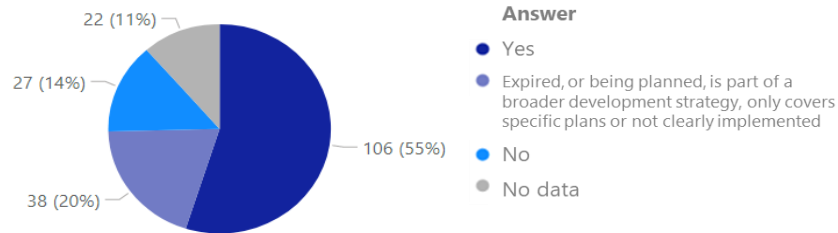
→ Out of 147 policy types, 106 refer to "digital", "e", "smart"

→ "Digital" is recognized in the master plans, therefore very high on the national agendas

→ Adoption of a Digital transformation strategy/plan or an overarching integrated digital policy is the trend

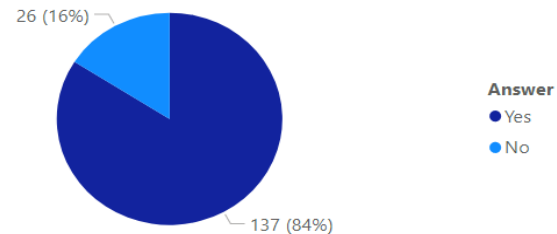
Is there an overarching digital strategy in place?

World, 2021



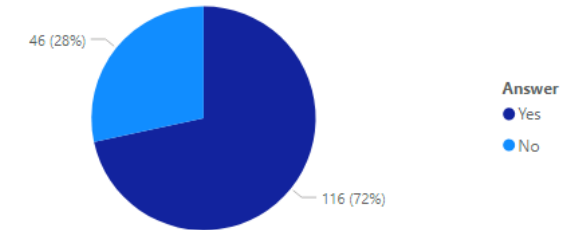
Has your country adopted an overall national development strategy, digital agenda or economic stimulus strategy including broadband?

World, 2020

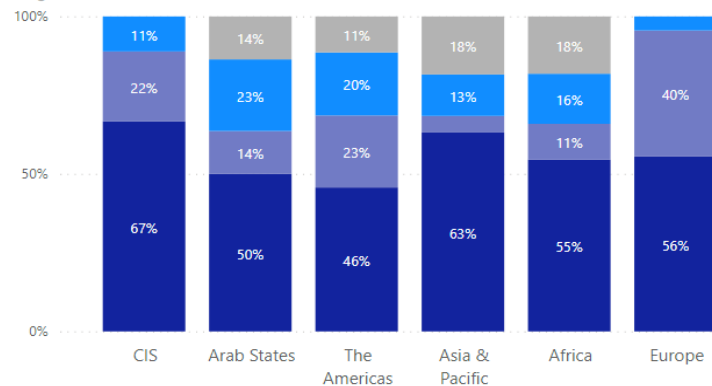


Has your country adopted a Digital transformation strategy/policy/plan or an overarching integrated digital policy (e.g., for infrastructure, market access, consumer use, job creation)?

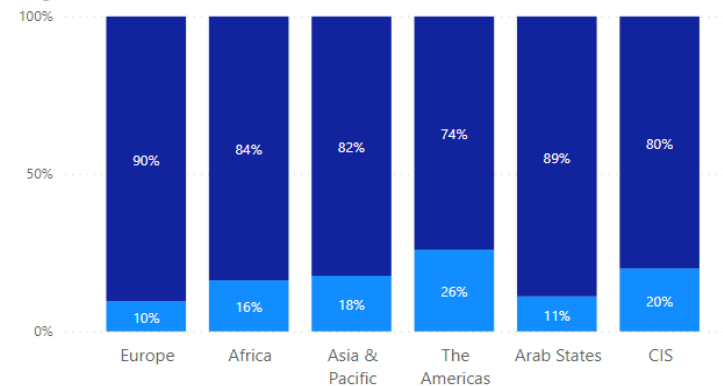
World, 2020



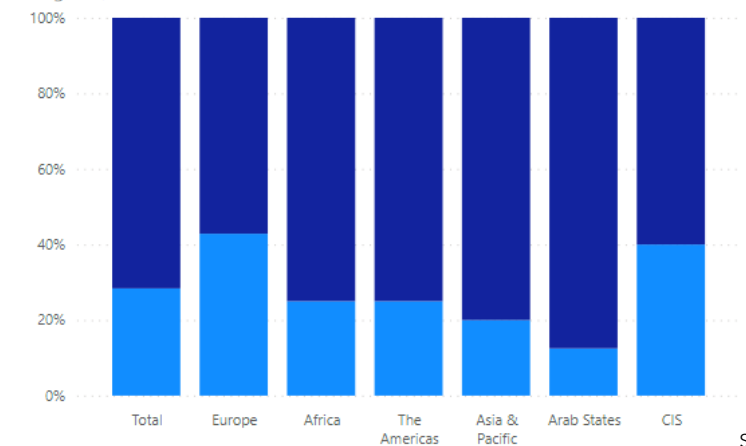
Regions, 2021



Regions, 2020



Regions, 2020



Source: ITU

'Digital Society' in other Organizations/Associations

- World Economic Forum
 - *Our Shared Digital Future* Building an Inclusive, Trustworthy and Sustainable **Digital Society** ([weforum.org](https://www.weforum.org))
- GSMA
 - **Digital Societies** [Report](#)
- IEEE
 - International Conference/Workshops on the **Digital Society**
- APC
 - Inside the **Digital Society**: [Digital divide or digital continuum?](#)