

Session 1: State of Digital Development and Trends – Challenges & Opportunities

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Regional Development Forum for Asia and the Pacific (RDF-ASP) 2026

Conrad Bangkok, 16-17 July 2026



ITU REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM

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ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

BANGKOK 2026

16–17 July
Bangkok, Thailand



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State of digital development and trends: Challenges and Opportunities

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State of digital development in Asia and the Pacific and beyond



2.2

**billion people
offline in the
world in 2025**

6.0

**billion people
online in the
world in 2025**

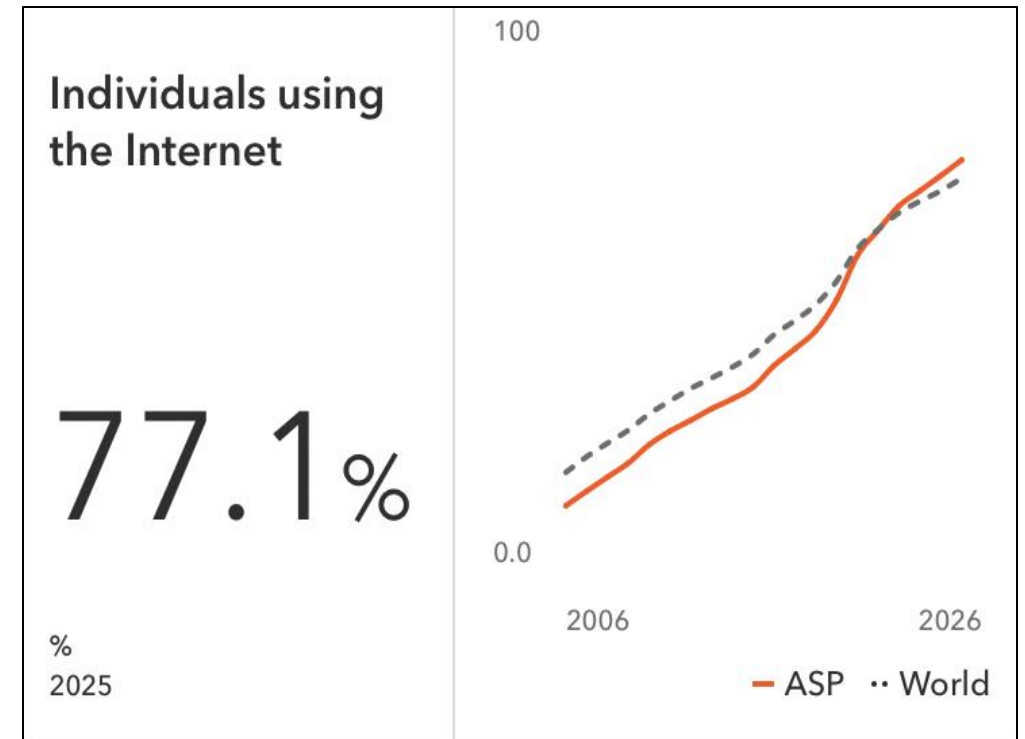
Source: ITU,
Facts and Figures 2025
www.itu.int/ff2025

Note: ITU estimates.
Being *online* means having used the Internet in the last three months.



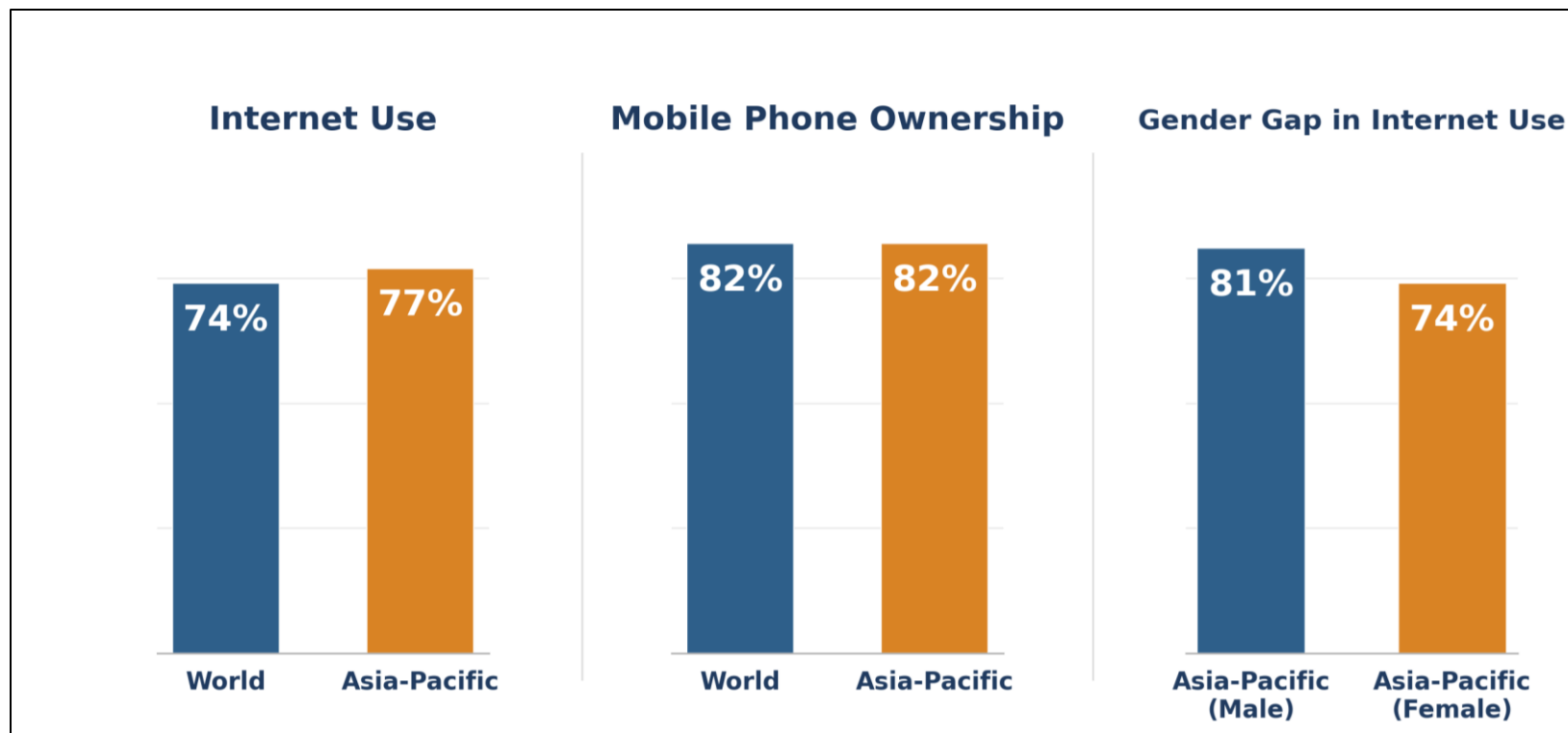
Asia and the Pacific: Overview

- Internet use has grown steadily, reaching 77% in 2025, up from just 30% in 2010.
- 4G coverage now reaches 96.8% of the population, helping bridge connectivity gaps, but some remote areas remain unserved.
- 5G networks expanded from 3% to 62% coverage between 2020 and 2024, outpacing global growth.
- The region's mobile broadband subscriptions (101 per 100 inhabitants) now exceed the global average, driving digital transformation.



Internet Use, Mobile Phone Ownership, and Gender Gap

Asia-Pacific vs. World, 2025

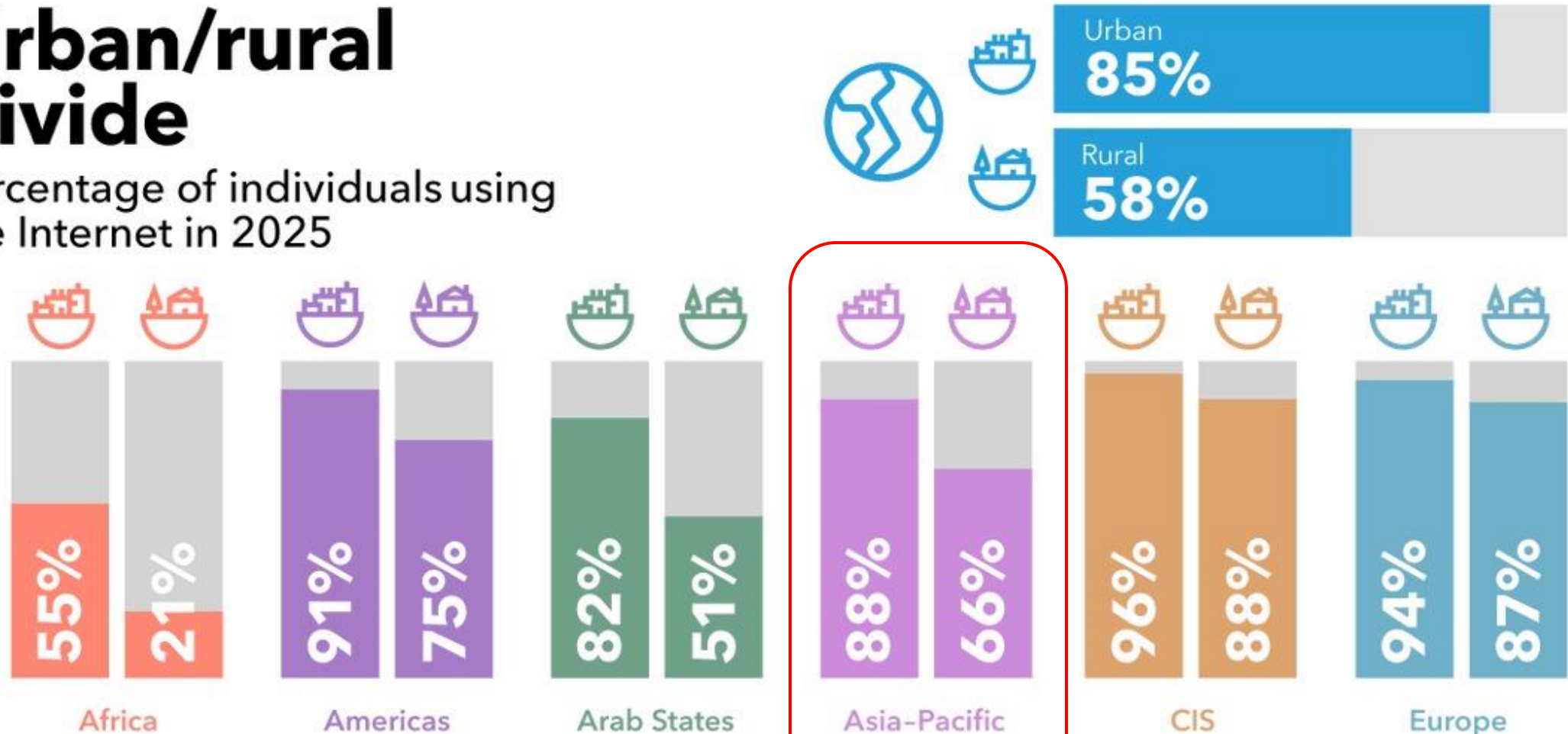


Source: ITU Facts and Figures, 2025

Availability

Urban/rural divide

Percentage of individuals using the Internet in 2025



Source: ITU, *Facts and Figures 2025*

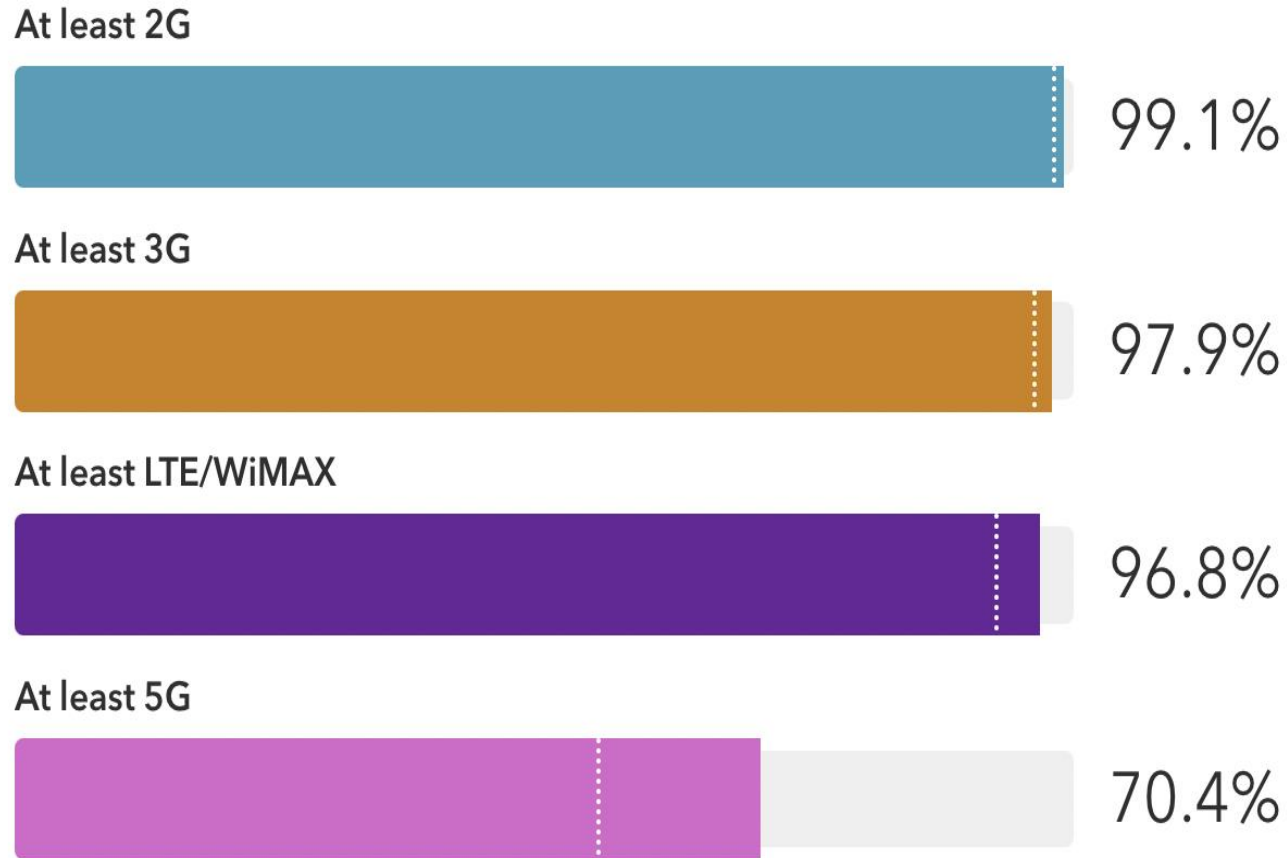
www.itu.int/ff2025

Note: ITU-D regions



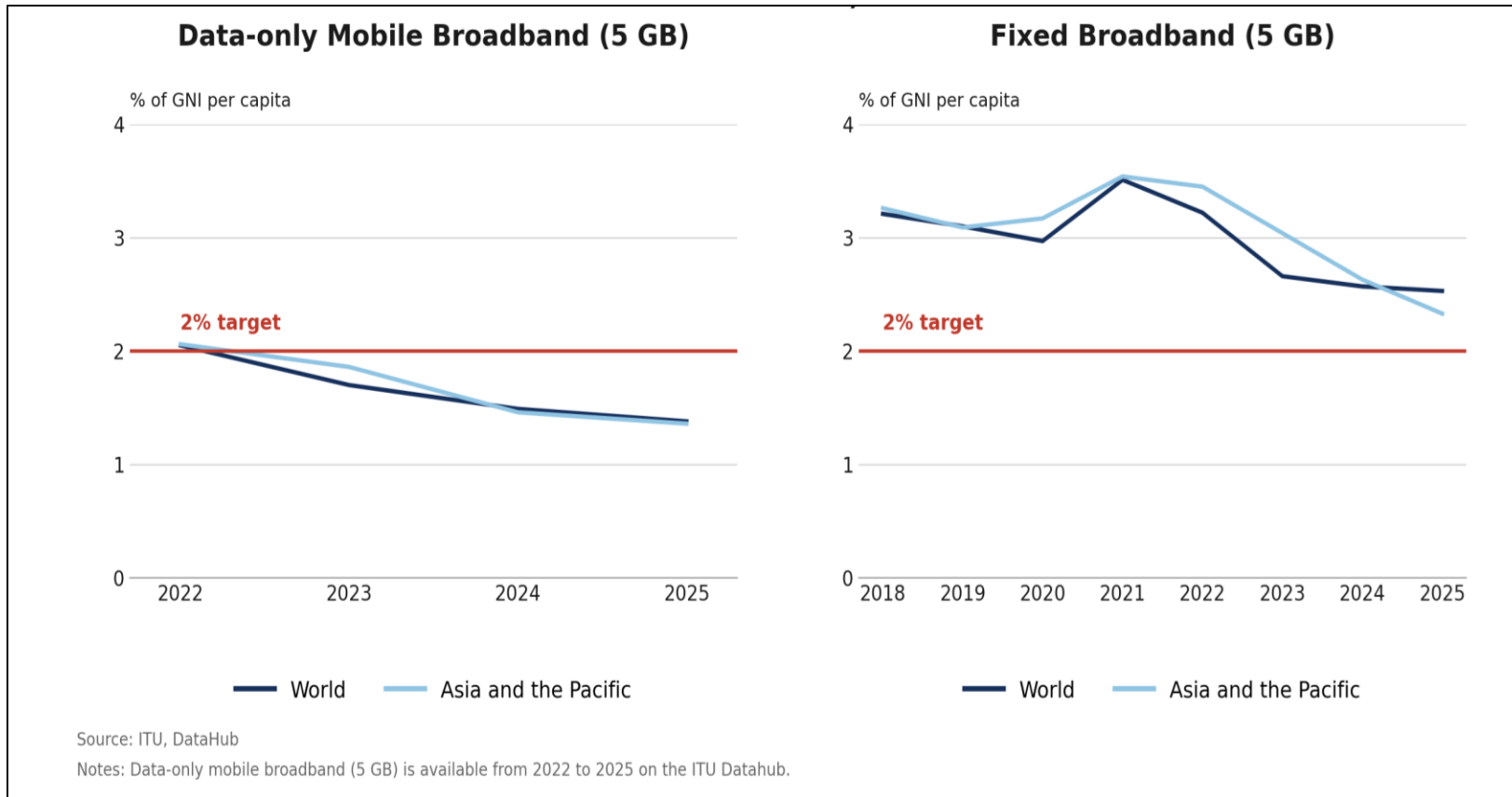
Availability

Population coverage by mobile network technology in Asia and the Pacific, 2025



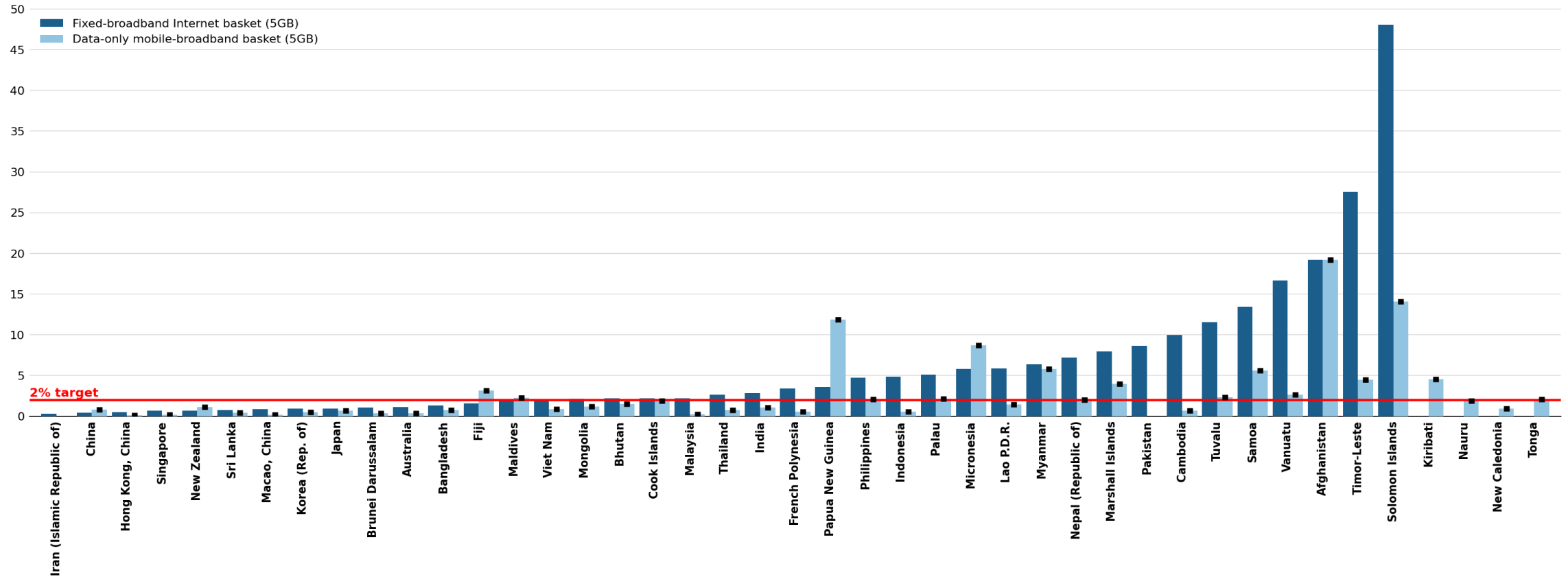
Affordability

Broadband basket prices as % of gross national income per capita, Asia-Pacific vs, World, 2018-2024



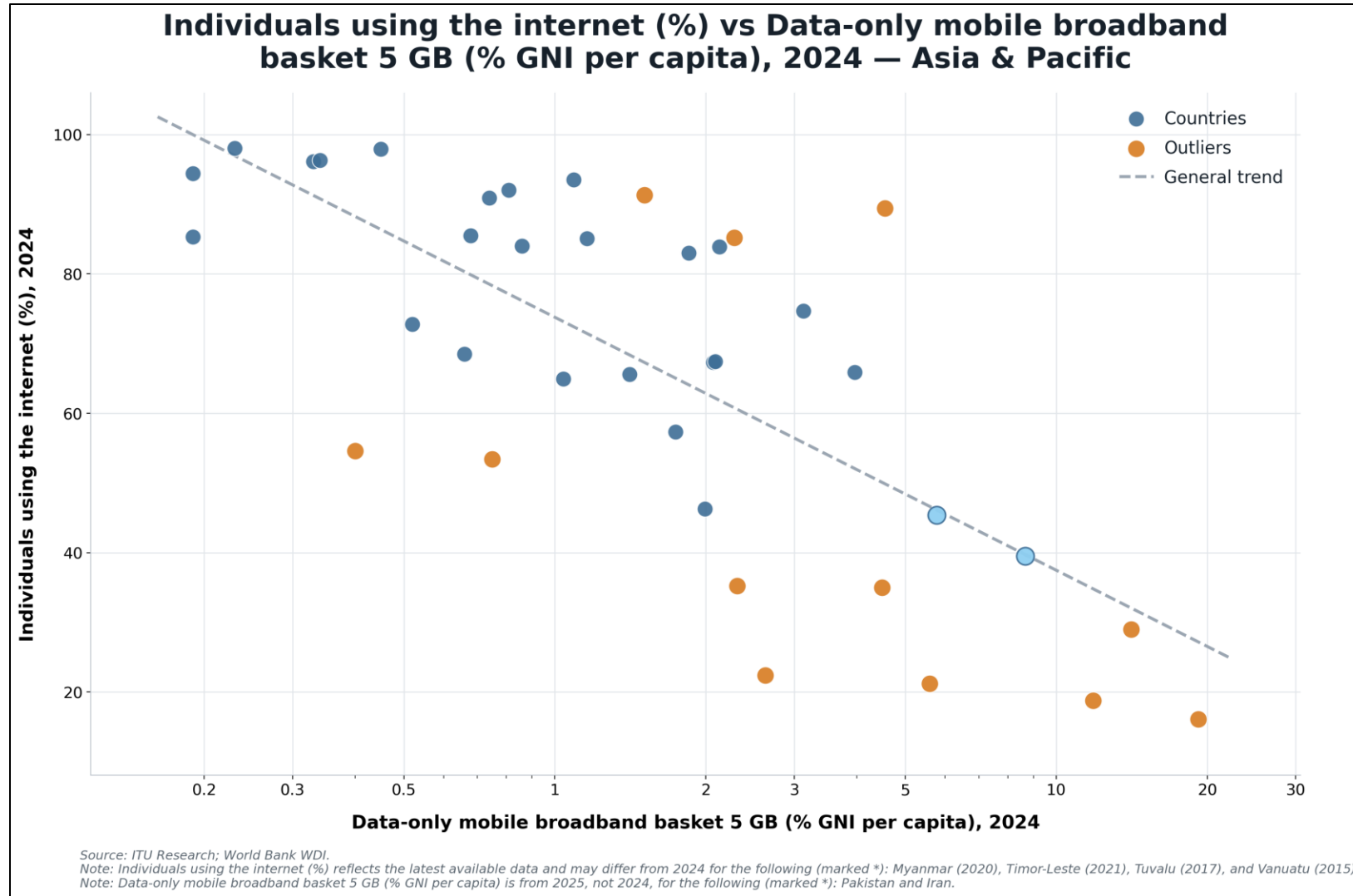
Affordability

Broadband basket prices as % of gross national income per capita, 2024 *Asia and the Pacific*



Source: ITU Data Hub, 2025

Individuals using the Internet vs Affordability in Asia and the Pacific



Correlation coefficient = -0.73

Negative correlation between Internet use and affordability-

As the cost of a 5 GB mobile broadband basket increases, the share of individuals using the Internet decreases.

Affordability matters-

Countries with cheaper broadband Internet tend to have higher Internet penetration.

Outliers exist— Many countries show unusually high or low Internet use. Potential other factors (infrastructure, policy, digital literacy, etc.) maybe driving the relationship.

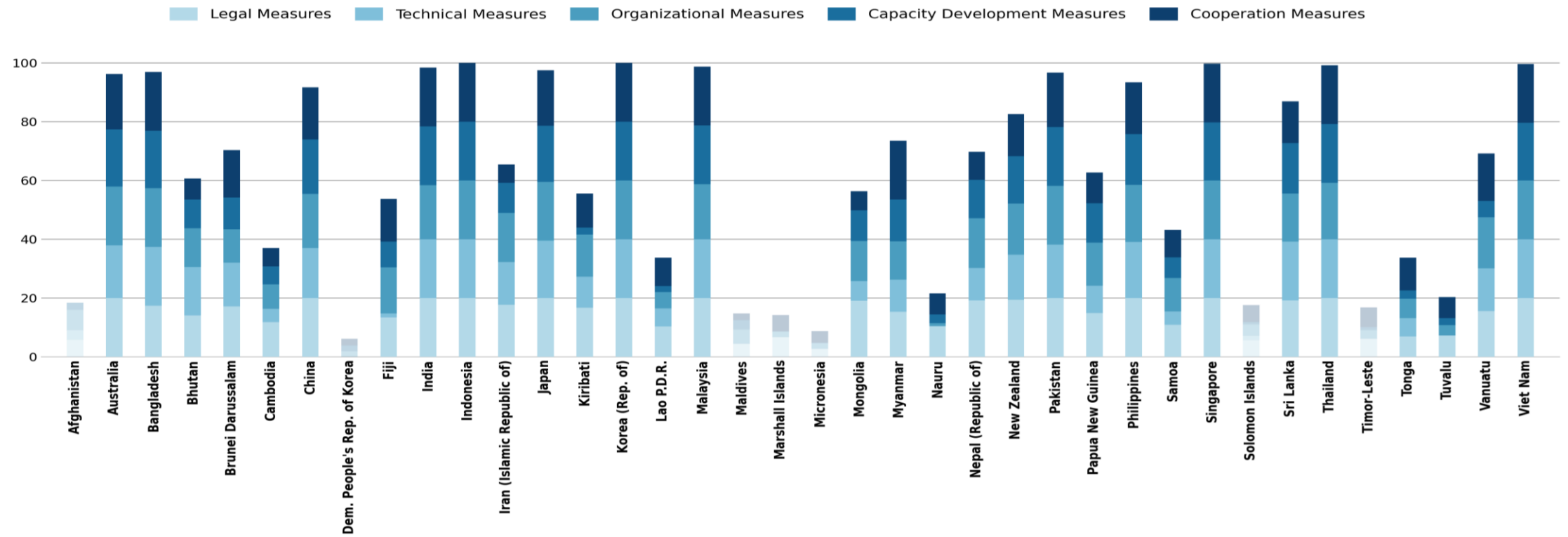
Regional inequality-

Affordability gaps risk widening the digital divide, especially for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

Correlation not causation!

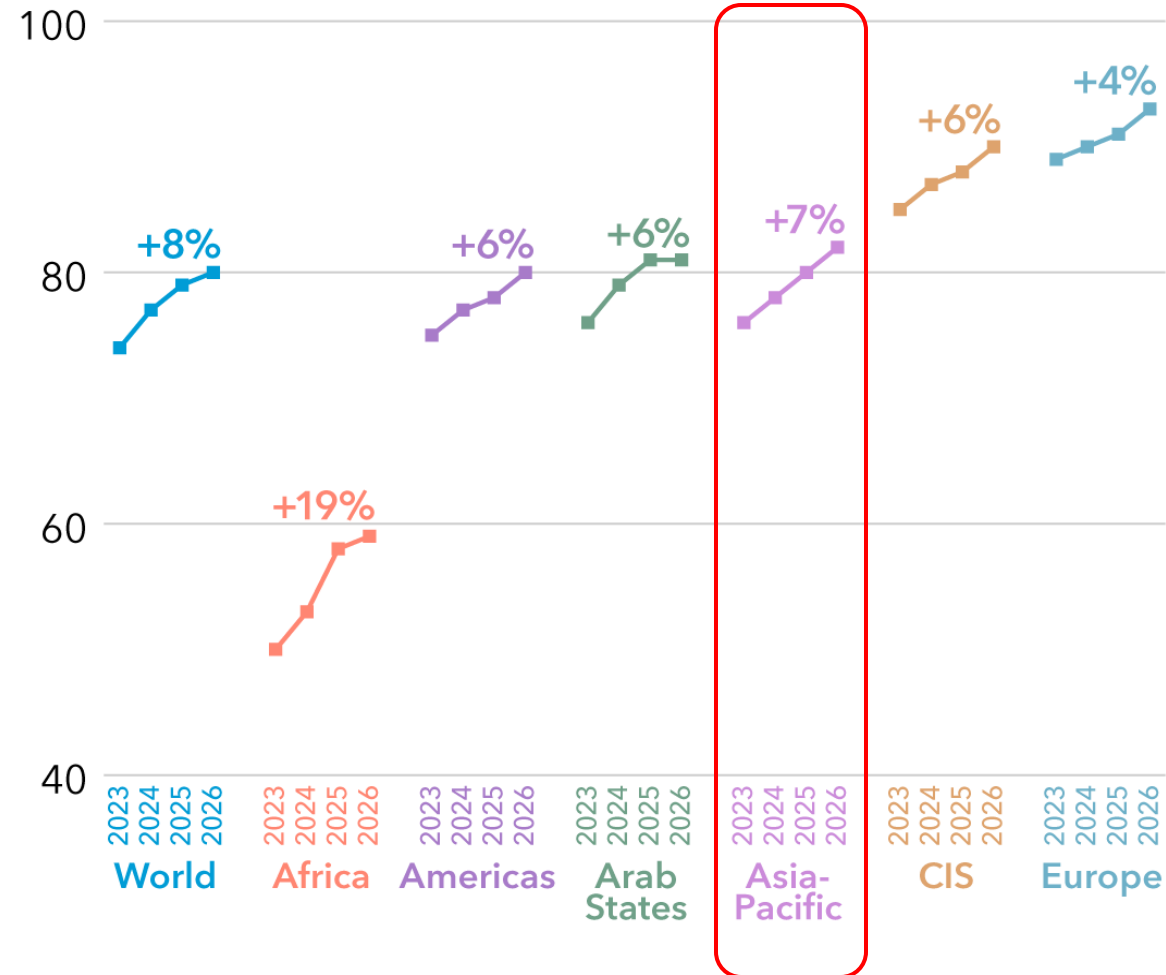
Cybersecurity

Global Cybersecurity Index scores by pillar and overall, 2024 *Asia and the Pacific*



ICT Development Index Trends

Average scores by ITU-D regions from 2023 to 2026, 0-100*

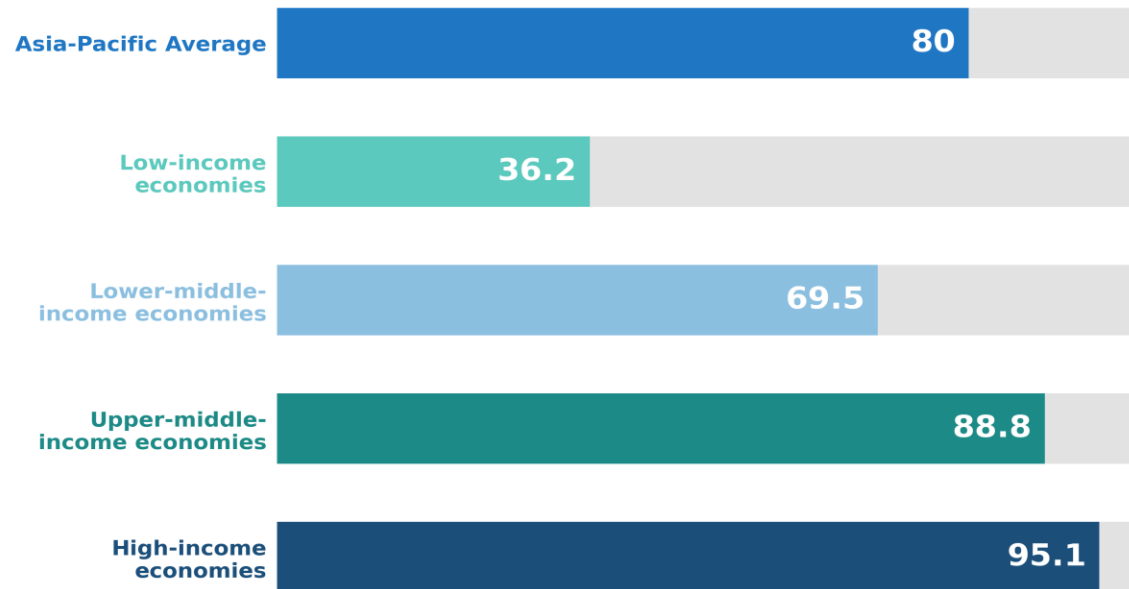


Source: ICT Development Index, 2026

ICT Development Index 2026 - Asia and the Pacific

Asia - Pacific ICT Development Index 2026

Average scores by income group, 0-100*

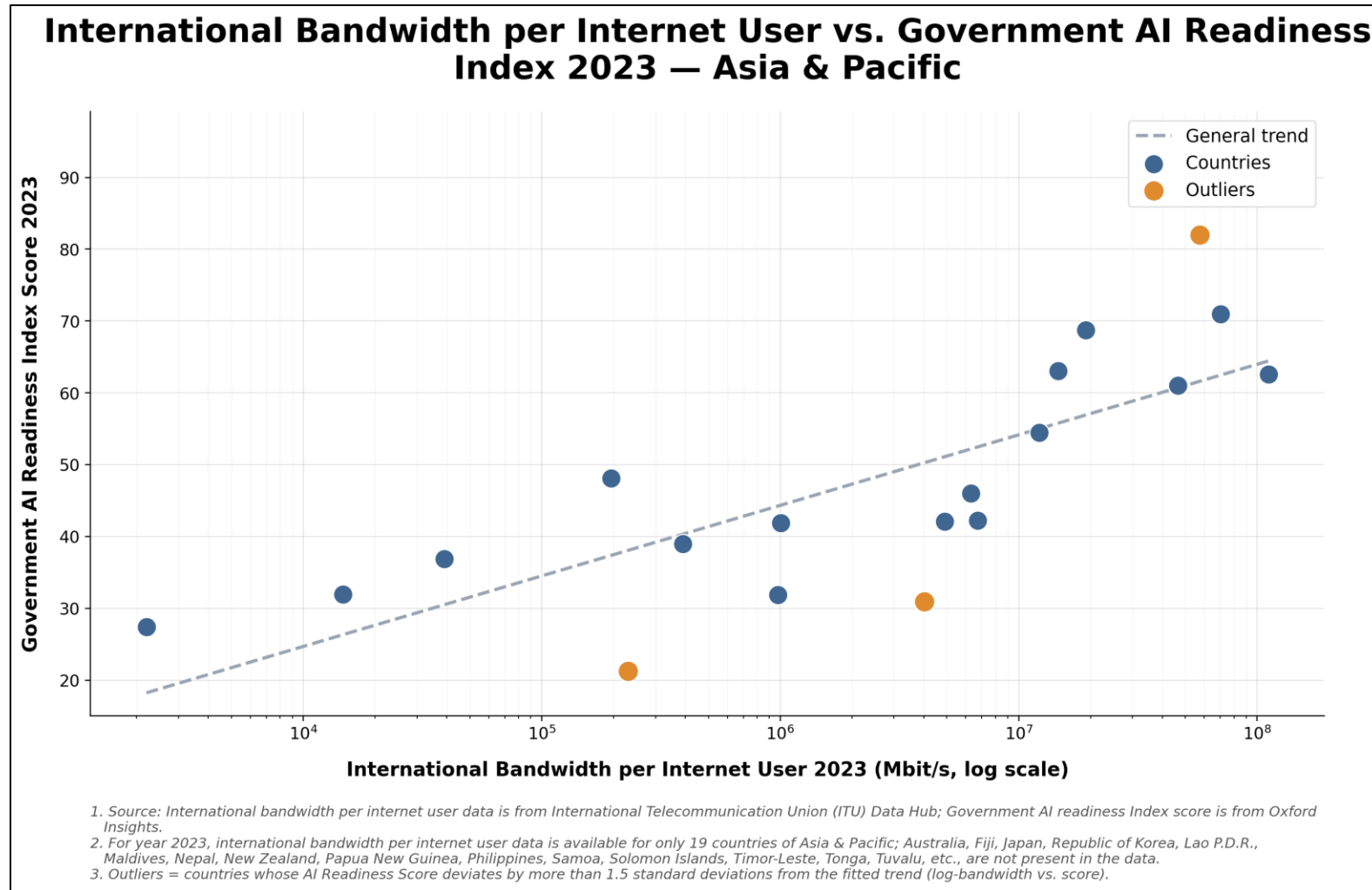


Source: ITU, ICT Development Index, (IDI) 2026

*Based on 31 Asia & the Pacific economies as per the ICT Development index, (IDI) 2026 (ITU publications); 100 corresponds to the best possible outcome.

Note: IDI Scores for these 31 Asia-Pacific countries were obtained from the above-mentioned index. The average score for each income group was calculated by the author.

International Bandwidth and AI Readiness in Asia and the Pacific



Positive Correlation-

Countries with higher International Bandwidth generally exhibit higher AI Readiness Score.

Digital Infrastructure

matters-Strong connectivity and bandwidth capacity are critical enablers of government AI preparedness.

Correlation not

causation! – Could be other factors driving the relationship (confounder) or reverse causality. There is also a need for more data.

Correlation coefficient = 0.78.

| Asia and the Pacific - A region of dichotomies

- While digital connectivity is growing, the gaps between countries remain wide.
- 5G is widespread in high-income countries but remains unavailable in 23 out of 41 economies.
- International bandwidth per Internet user varies greatly and the average is below the global average despite the region hosting some of the world's largest internet hub.
- Affordability: Cost of a basic mobile data plan ranges from 0.1% of GNI to 18.3% of GNI, a ratio of 183!
- The Pacific Islands (SIDS), face unique connectivity challenges, including high infrastructure costs, geographic isolation, and climate-related risks.
- AI risks widening the digital divide - AI is only as inclusive as the digital infrastructure that supports it.

AI and emerging technologies:

advancing unevenly in the Asia Pacific Region



INSTITUTION

A balanced approach

- Asia-Pacific's approach is diverse, driven by innovation
- National AI policy is developed but unevenly (2024–2025)
- Several LDCs and SIDS still lack national AI frameworks.



COMPUTE

data centers & chips needed for AI

- AI compute capacity across region is highly uneven, concentrated in advanced economies, with many developing countries relying on cloud access.
- AI data centers are unevenly distributed, concentrated in digitally advanced economies.



NETWORKS

Unevenly distributed

- 5G already carries a third of global mobile subscriptions
- 5G coverage expanded to 62% but concentrated in higher economies
- Coverage remains uneven across Asia and the Pacific, especially in SIDS.

AI readiness varies widely across the ASP region, with major gaps in policy, compute, infrastructure, and connectivity.

Asia-Pacific Regional Initiatives

ITU Regional Initiatives for the Asia and the Pacific 2026-2029



ITU Regional Initiatives for the Asia and the Pacific 2026-2029

ASP1

Addressing special needs of least developed countries, small island developing states, including Pacific island countries, and landlocked developing countries

ASP2

Harnessing telecommunications/ICTs to support inclusive and sustainable digital transformation

ASP3

Fostering development of infrastructure to enhance digital connectivity and connecting the unconnected

ASP4

Enabling an innovative and sustainable telecommunication/information and communication technology sector

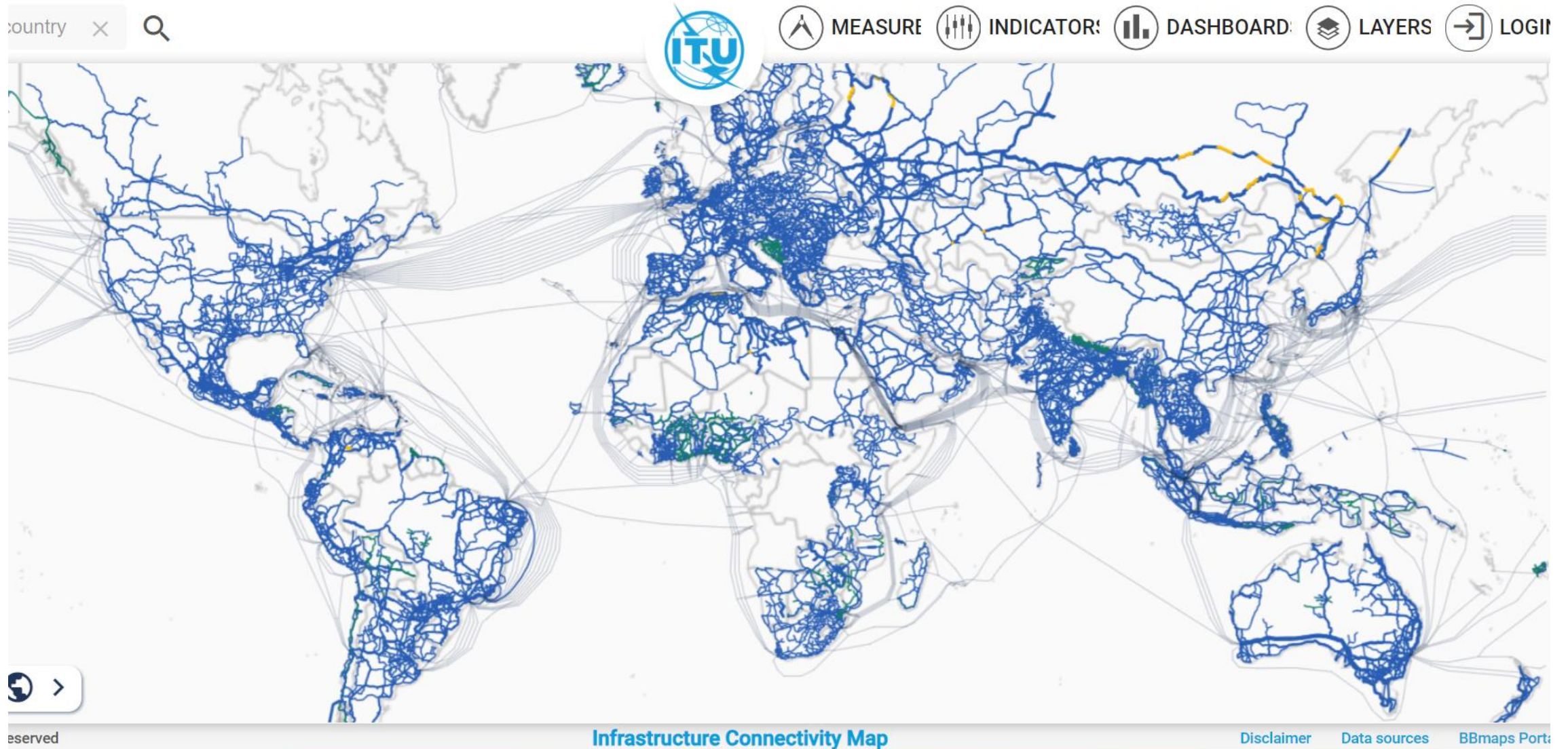
ASP5

Supporting a safe, secure and resilient telecommunication/information and communication technology environment

Learn more at
www.itu.int/asiapacific



ITU interactive transmission map



Source: <https://bbmaps.itu.int/bbmaps>

Network & Digital Infrastructure



Direct Country Assistances:

- Country assistance on spectrum pricing, NTFAs, spectrum roadmaps, SMS4DC (Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, RMI-ongoing, Nauru, Palau)
- Assessment of resilience gaps in National Digital infrastructure
- GIGA school connectivity mapping (Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Philippines, Fiji)
- Analog to Digital TV roadmaps and relevant policies (Cambodia, Fiji)



Capacity development:

- BB networks mapping (Indonesia, Malaysia)
- Spectrum management and RF monitoring Technical staff skills update (Brunei, Indonesia, MCMC)
- Industry Session on NTN and TN convergence (S.E Asia done, planned for South Asia)



Support to other Bureaus:

- BR on RRS, WRC, Region 3 APT meetings etc. (RRS-ASP 2026 in Mongolia)
- GS: WTPF 26 focal point for space connectivity



Partnerships:

- AIBD, ITLLDC, CAICT, MIC Japan, DITRDCA, WB



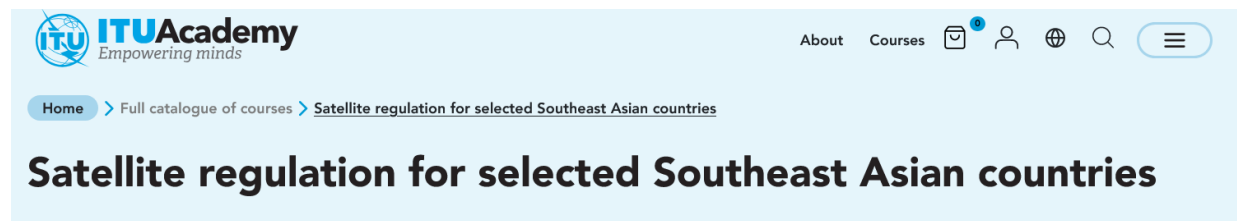
National
Spectrum
Management

Broadcasting

Connectivity
Planning and
Mapping

Resilience of
Digital
networks

Space and
international
Connectivity



Emergency Telecommunication

Services and Activities:

01

Direct Country assistances NETP: **Kiribati, Marshall Islands (done), Bangladesh, Pakistan (ongoing)**, and **PNG** request received.

02

- Sub-regional study on common CBS Pacific Feasibility (**12 Pacific SIDs**)
- Information sessions on CAP and CBS: **Sri Lanka Maldives**

03

Pre-positioning of disaster response equipment in the region
Pre-positioning of telecommunication equipment with AHA center



Partnerships and resource mobilization

MIC Japan, SIDA, CREWS, GCF, CTCN.



NETP workshop (Marshall Islands, 2026)



Regional Resilient ICT Infra. Event (Japan, 2025)

Information
session on CAP
and Cell
Broadcast
(Maldives, 2026)



Communication:

Dedicated ASP [webpage](#) for activities on
EW dissemination and communication)

EW4All roadmaps developed and published for
Cambodia, Maldives, Lao P.D.R., Bangladesh,
Samoa; Kiribati, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Nepa
- being finalized

Circular economy and e-waste

Creating a Circular Economy for Electronics and Electricals in **Thailand and Mongolia**

Supported by **DITRD CSA (2024 – 2026)**

- Recommendations for a regulatory framework for the governance of e-waste management under extended producer responsibility (EPR).
- In-depth consultations and engagement sessions with public and private stakeholders.

> Dedicated project [webpage](#)

Management of Post-consumer Electrical and Electronic Equipment in **Indonesia**

Supported by **FCDO (2024 – ongoing)**

- Technical assistance on e-waste policy development
- Capacity building for policymakers

> Dedicated project [webpage](#)

International Exchange Initiative on Regulating E-waste and Engaging Tech Companies

Supported by **APC Colombia (2025 – 2026)**

- Organisation of a study tour to India for technical knowledge exchange 9 to 13 February 2026, in New Delhi.
- Project participating countries – South Africa, Colombia, Nigeria, Malaysia, Dominican Republic, India

> Dedicated project [webpage](#)

UPCOMING

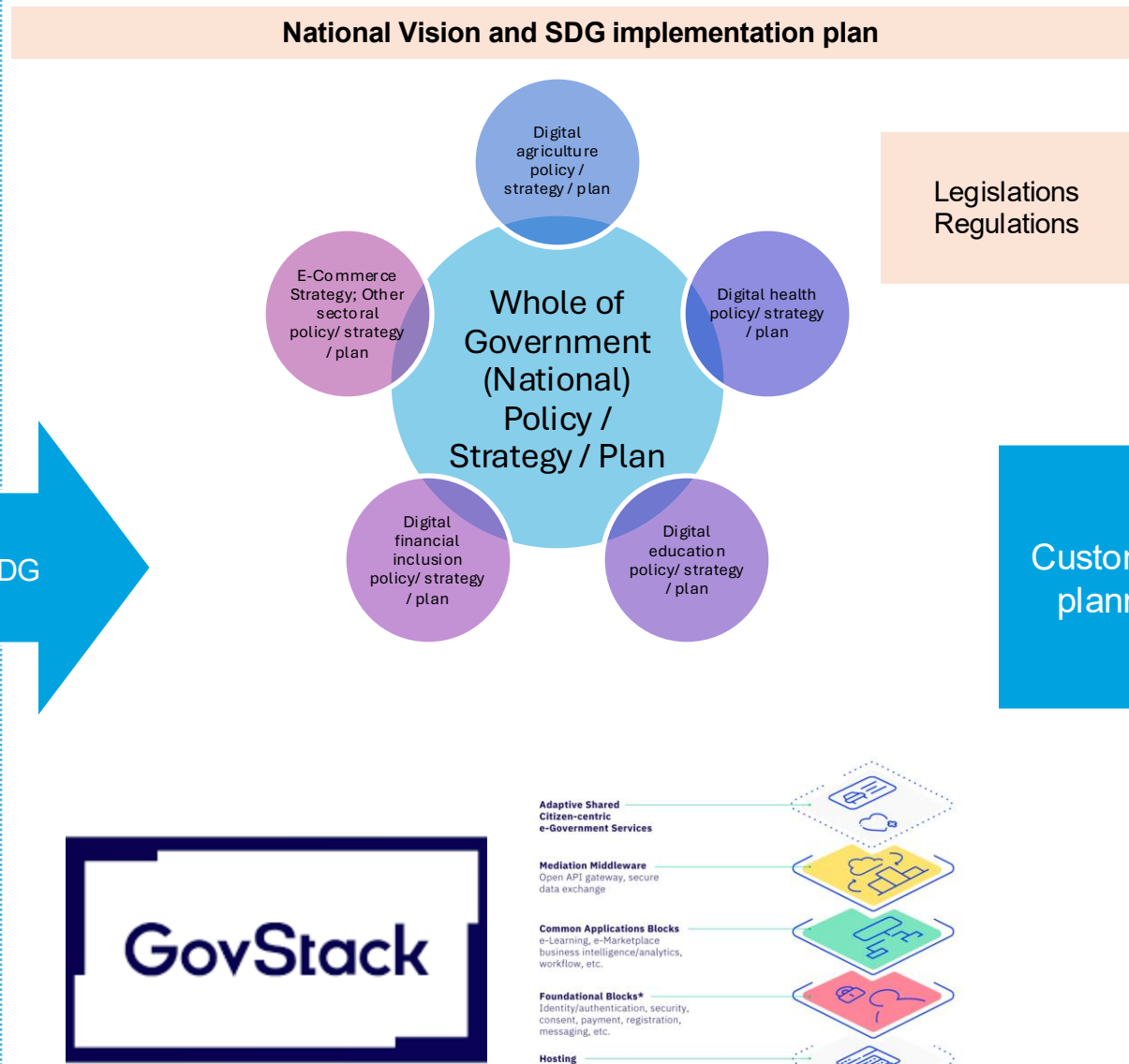
Creating a Circular Economy for Electronics in the **Pacific**

Supported by **DITRD CSA (2026 – 2029)**

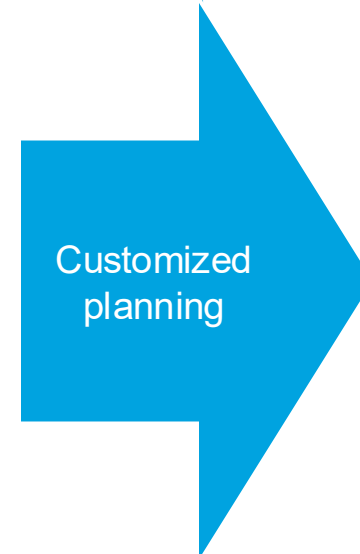
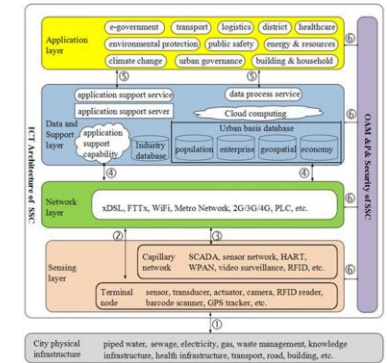
- Establishing a strong foundation for effective e-waste management in Pacific Island Countries.
- Beneficiary countries: Pacific Island Countries (with a focus on Naoero, Tuvalu, Fiji & PNG)



Whole-of-government approach for digital development



Smart city



Smart village



Smart Islands



Smart Islands in the Pacific – Projects and Programmes

COUNTRY	Nauru	FSM	RMI	Kiribati	Pakistan	Palau	Tonga	Vanuatu	Samoa	PNG	Fiji
Location	Nauru	Tanoas Island	Jabwor-Jaluit,	Tamana	Gokina Sambriyal Swabi	Babeldaob	Ovaka and Hunga	South Malekula	Manono-Tai	Maprik	Rotuma
Government partners	DoC, Nauru	DTC&I	MOFAT, MOTCIT, RMI	MICT, Kiribati, CCK, Kiribati	MoITT USF	MPH, Palau	MEIDE CCTonga	OGCIO, Vanuatu	MCIT, Samoa	DICT and NICTA, PNG	MoC, Fiji
Funding sources	Joint SDG Fund	Joint SDG Fund	Joint SDG Fund	Joint SDG Fund	Huawei ITU	Joint SDG Fund	Joint SDG Fund	Joint SDG Fund, Government of Australia (DITRDCA), ITU, UNCDF, ADB	Joint SDG Fund, Gov. of Australia (DITRDCA), Government of Japan (MIC), ITU, FAO	ADB, ITU	Joint SDG Fund, Asian Development Bank (ADB), ITU

Further details available at <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/ICT-Applications/Pages/Initiatives/ASP/Smart-Islands/Smart-Islands-Initiative.aspx>

Smart Villages and Smart Islands - Asia-Pacific

Empowered **7,000+** community members with digital literacy & skills across 11 Asia-Pacific countries (2020-2025)

Smart Villages in Pakistan



Gokina



Sambriyal



Swabi



Community skills development in
South Malekula, Vanuatu



Community skills development in
Manono-Tai, Samoa



Community skills development in
Babeldaob, Palau



Resource center in Maprik, PNG



Digital hub in Hunga, Tonga



Digital hub in Tonoas, FSM



Digital hub in Jabwor-Jalluit, RMI



Digital hub in Rotuma, Fiji



Digital hub in Tamana, Kiribati



Digital Hub in Nauru

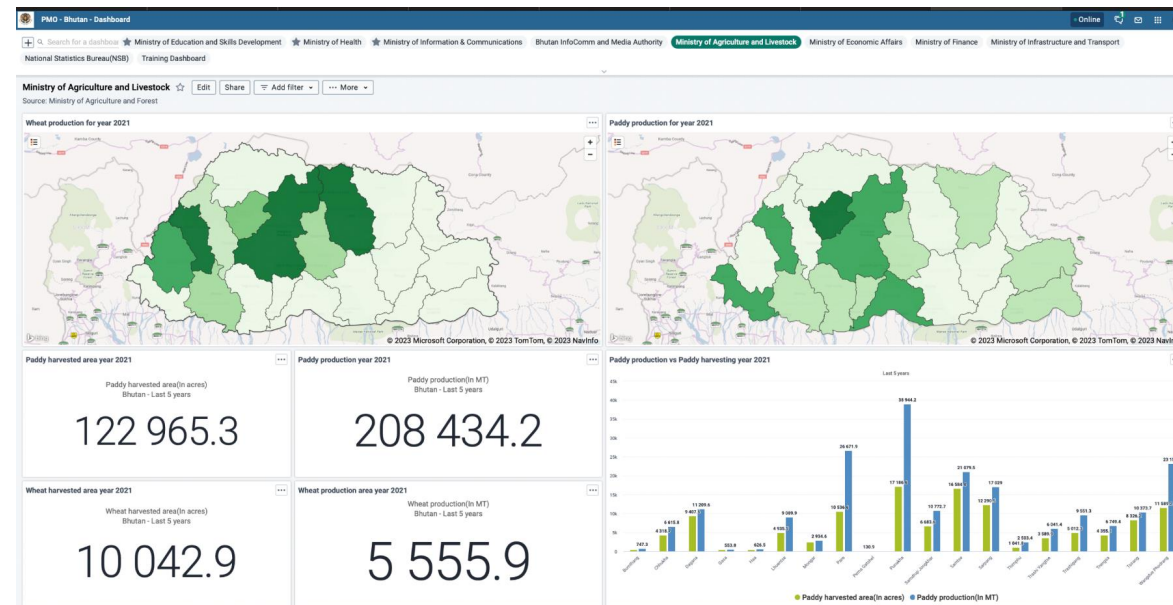
Whole of Government Digital Transformation and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

160+ participants-built capacity (by mid-2026) to realize digital government transformation adopting whole-of-government approach. **(1500+** since 2023)

- Country assistances (Bhutan, Fiji, Kiribati, Mongolia, Samoa, Tuvalu).
- Multi-country trainings
 - **Designing interoperable digital government services in South Asia** (Open Group, BIMSTEC),
 - **Study Tour and Co-creation Workshop on Digital ID for the Pacific Island States** in New Delhi
- Facilitate Whole of Government decision making through PMO Dashboard (ongoing - Lao PDR)

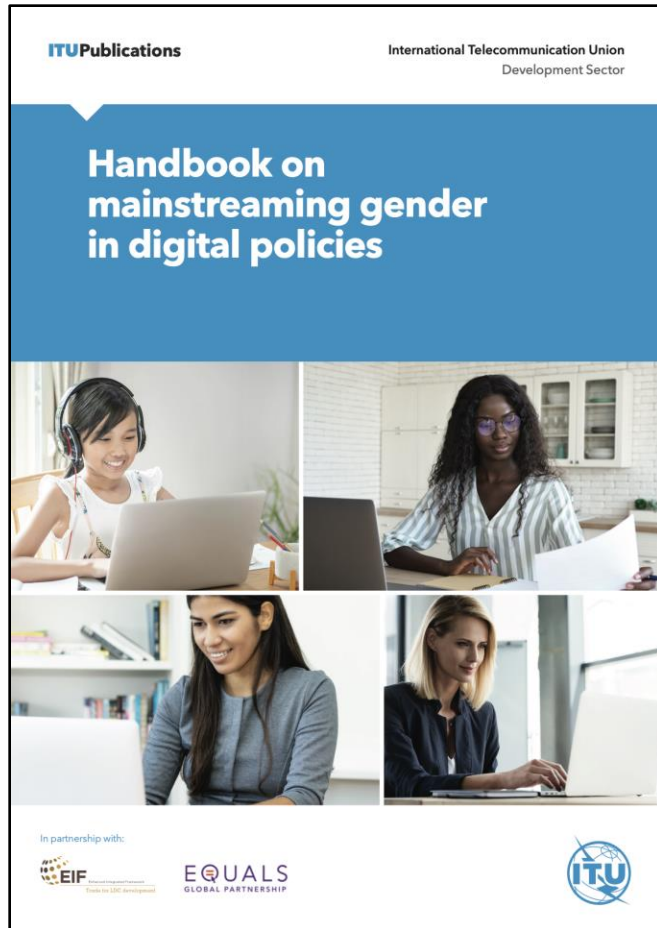
Projects (Ongoing):

- Accelerating Digital Transformation in Asia-Pacific – Phase II; Implementation of national digital transformation strategies in Asia and the Pacific (ITU-DITRDCSA)



Upcoming
ITU Academy online training on Designing interoperable digital government services in South-East Asia, 14 - 31 Aug 2026 (with Open Group)

Digital inclusion: Gender



**ITU Handbook on
mainstreaming gender in digital policies**

Available now at:

<https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-hdb-gender-2023-01/>



Network of Women in ITU-D

Visit the website at
itu.int/NOW4WTDC



EQUALS Global Partnerships

Visit the website at
equalsintech.org

ITU's role in providing capacity building and technical assistance



Areas of intervention	Incident Response	Cybersecurity Strategy	Cybersecurity Inclusion	Data and Advocacy
Areas of developing impact	CIRTs	NCS Development	Child Online Protection	GCI
	CyberDrills	Action Plan Development	Women in Cyber	Global Partnerships
	Guides and Frameworks	Benchmarking	Youth for Cyber	Reports

Cybersecurity and Child Online Protection

CyberDrills & Capacity Building



Bilateral cybersecurity trainings in Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand

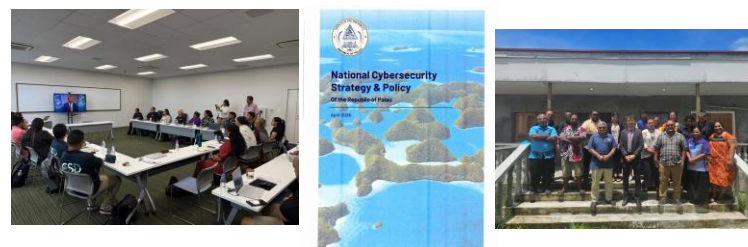


Technical Assistance (CIRTs, NCS)

CIRT Assessments in Maldives, Mongolia, Nauru, Palau



NCS Assistance to Nauru & Palau



Child Online Protection

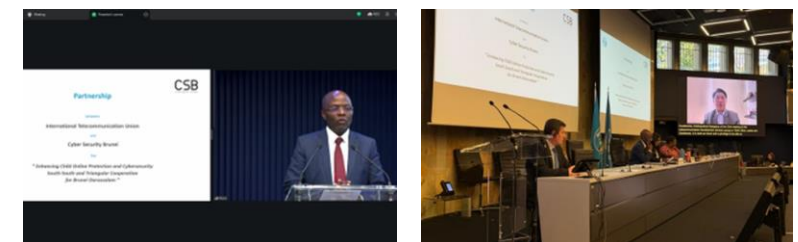
National COP Strategy assistance to Nauru & Palau



COP Training of Trainers for Educators in Maldives & Samoa



New project with Cyber Security Brunei



Thank You



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