



Measuring the Information Society



The **I**CT **D**evelopment **I**ndex

2009



International
Telecommunication
Union

I n t e r n a t i o n a l T e l e c o m m u n i c a t i o n U n i o n

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The ICT Development Index

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Foreword

It is my pleasure to present to you the latest edition of *Measuring the Information Society*, which features the new ITU **ICT Development Index**. The Index captures the level of advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in more than 150 countries worldwide and compares progress made between 2002 and 2007. Its main objective is to provide policy makers with a useful tool to benchmark and assess their information society developments and to monitor progress that has been made globally to close the digital divide.

The need to develop an ICT index was emphasized in the outcome documents of the two World Summits on the Information Society (WSIS). The Geneva Plan of Action calls for a realistic international performance evaluation and benchmarking through comparable statistical indicators, and the creation of a composite index. This was reiterated in the Tunis Agenda, which calls for periodic evaluation through indicators and benchmarking, and an assessment of the magnitude of the digital divide.

This publication has been produced in response to those calls and following the request from ITU members to develop a single ITU index to track the digital divide and to measure countries' progress towards becoming information societies.

The ICT Development Index takes into consideration, as much as possible, the many, and varied comments and suggestions provided by members and experts on the creation of the single index. While we are aware of the fact that we cannot do justice to everyone – in reality no composite index can fulfil this goal – we are confident that we have produced an index that will be useful to all member countries – those that are more ICT advanced as well as those that are still developing their ICT infrastructure and services. The index can be easily replicated by interested countries; it also allows to measure the magnitude of the global digital divide, and to monitor its evolution.

This Report examines global and regional ICT developments during the past five years based on the index results. They reveal that despite huge improvements that were made in the access and use of ICTs worldwide, large

disparities remain among countries. The top ranking economies are primarily high-income countries from the developed world, whereas the least developed countries rank towards the bottom of the index. Despite impressive growth in the uptake of mobile telephony in many countries, the magnitude of the digital divide remains almost unchanged. However, the divide is slightly closing between countries with very high and those with low ICT levels.

An important element in monitoring ICT developments is to examine the cost of ICT services. High tariffs are often a major barrier to ICT uptake, in particular among poor people. I am pleased to present to you our new ICT Price Basket, which combines fixed telephone, mobile cellular and fixed broadband tariffs into one measure and compares it across countries, not only in absolute values, but relative to countries' national incomes. The results show that fixed and mobile telephony is becoming more and more affordable worldwide; however, fixed broadband Internet is still out of reach – in terms of affordability – for the majority of the world's inhabitants. This is clearly one of the main policy challenges that need to be addressed in this sector in the years to come. We foresee to publish the new ICT Price Basket annually and therefore countries will be able to monitor global price developments over time.

The Report comes out at a time when the global economy is facing one of its greatest challenges in decades. We do not know yet how long the crisis will last or how profound its impact will be on future ICT developments. This will be revealed only in the next edition of *Measuring the Information Society*. But given the fact that ICTs are one of the most powerful engines of growth, that there has been strong and uninterrupted growth in most ICT services over the past few years and that the demand for ICTs from large developing countries is high, I am confident that ICTs will continue to spread and serve their purpose as critical development enablers.

It is my hope that this Report will be useful to policy makers, the ICT industry, market analysts and others who are monitoring global ICT developments. After all, it is evidence-based policy making that will have the greatest impact on countries' efforts to become inclusive information societies.



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Table of contents

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. ICT Market Overview	3
2.1 Fixed and mobile cellular telephony.....	3
2.2 Internet and broadband developments.....	4
2.3 Market outlook	6
2.4 From indicator to index	6
Chapter 3. The ITU ICT Development Index (IDI): background and methodology	9
3.1 Background to the creation of a single ITU ICT index	9
3.2 Concept and methodology of the IDI.....	12
Chapter 4. The ITU ICT Development Index (IDI): presentation and discussion of results.....	21
4.1 Overall IDI results	21
4.2 A closer look at the IDI sub-indices: ICT access, use and skills	34
4.3 IDI analysis by level of development and income	41
Chapter 5. Measuring the Digital Divide	45
5.1 Applying the IDI to measure the digital divide.....	45
5.2 Results of the digital divide analysis.....	46
Chapter 6. ICT Price Basket.....	51
6.1 Overview and main objectives	51
6.2 ICT Price Basket methodology.....	52
6.3 Results and analysis.....	55
Chapter 7. Conclusions.....	71
List of references	73
Explanatory notes.....	75
Annex 1: ICT Development Index (IDI) methodology.....	77
Annex 2: ICT Price Basket methodology.....	85
Annex 3: List of economies included in the IDI and the ICT Price Basket by region.....	89
Annex 4: Statistical tables of indicators used to compute the IDI.....	91
Annex 5: Statistical tables of tariffs used to compute the ICT Price Basket	97

Charts

2.1	Global ICT developments, 1998-2008	3
2.2	Mobile cellular growth and distribution.....	4
2.3	How many are online?	5
2.4	Fixed broadband subscribers by geographic region and by level of development	5
2.5	Mobile broadband subscriptions.....	6
4.1	IDI by geographic region (2002-2007).....	23
4.2	Top ten economies in IDI growth 2002-2007	26
4.3	Top ten economies in IDI rank change 2002-2007.....	30
4.4	Top ten countries on ICT access (2007)	35
4.5	Top ten countries in gains in the IDI access sub-index (2002-2007)	35
4.6	IDI access sub-index by geographic region (2007 and 2002).....	35
4.7	Top ten countries on the IDI use sub-index (2007).....	37
4.8	Top ten countries in gains in the IDI use sub-index (2002-2007)	37
4.9	IDI use sub-index by geographic region.....	39
4.10	Top ten countries on IDI skills sub-index (2007).....	39
4.11	Top ten countries in gains in the IDI skills sub-index (2002-2007)	39
4.12	IDI skills sub-index by geographic region (2007 and 2002).....	41
4.13	IDI by level of development (2002 and 2007).....	42
4.14	IDI sub-indices by level of development (2002-2007).....	43
4.15	IDI and GNI per capita (2007 and 2002).....	43
6.1	How much are they paying? ICT Price Basket by level of development (2008)	55
6.2	IDI and ICT Price Basket comparison	58

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