



Last year, everything was dictated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In this newsletter, we shift gear and identify trending digital policy areas. We provide an overview of digital foreign policies and how development cooperation comes into play. You will also find a review of the most relevant development-related updates, and some of the challenges of elections in the digital age.



We share data on whether digital technologies could help solve the world's most pressing issues such as global poverty or climate change.



We look at which International Geneva actors were the most effective in social media outreach and online engagement in 2020.

E-COMMERCE

The global state of e-commerce in 2020.

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DIGITAL INCLUSION

Top 10 countries for digital inclusion

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IN FOCUS

2021: The Emergence of Digital Foreign Policy

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Digital take on development

Climate action

- Amid the lack of e-waste regulations, statistics show that Bangladesh generates 2.8 million tonnes of e-waste per year.[↗](#)
- The Filipino company Globe Telecom has set up over 100 e-waste collection points in the country.[↗](#)
- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations International Computing Centre (UNICC) announced collaboration to develop a digital meeting platform for climate change events.[↗](#)

Development

- Egypt's Benya Capital and the Congolese Post and Telecommunications Company signed an agreement to install 16,000 km of optical fiber across DR Congo.[↗](#)
- The European Union will allocate €82.5 million for six digital and space technology programmes in Africa.[↗](#)
- The International Trade Center's (ITC) report *Business and Policy Insights: Mapping E-Marketplaces in Africa* explores the potential of Africa's e-commerce landscape, and guides policymakers by targeting

and shaping their efforts on online marketplaces.[↗](#)

Digital health

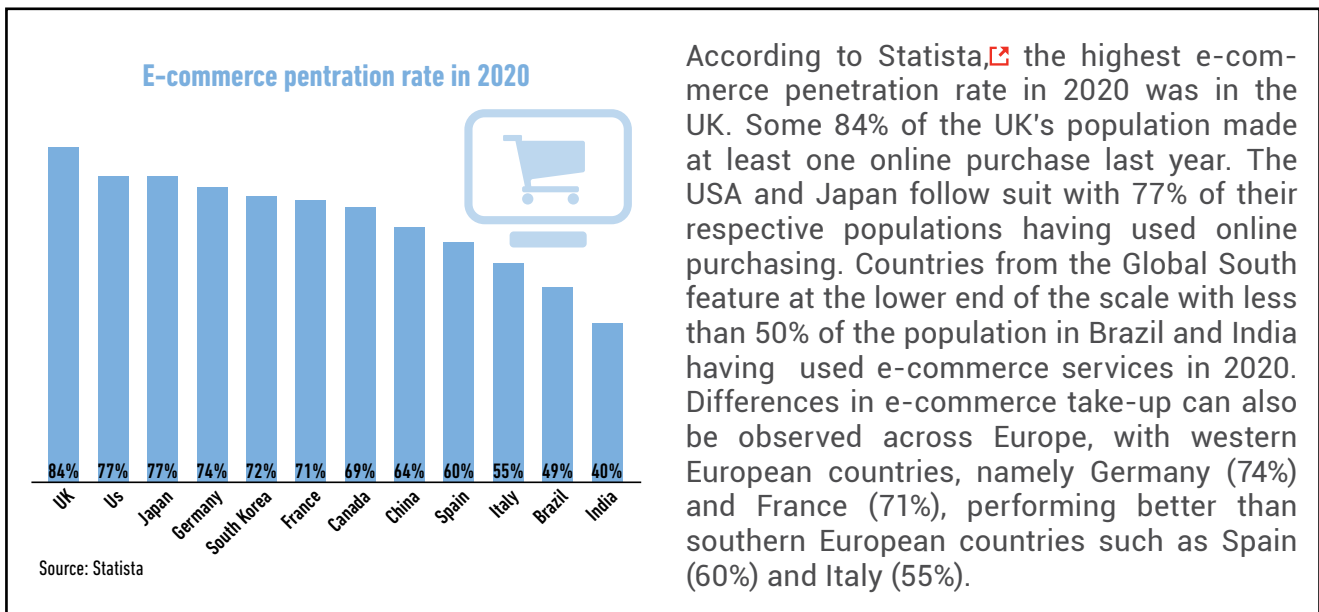
- Kenya has announced the launch of the Trusted Travel platform that allows for verification of COVID-19 test results.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) launched its online SMART Guidelines in order to speed up the application of recommended health interventions in the digital age.[↗](#)

E-governance

- The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched a five-year e-governance financing project estimated at US\$10.9 million in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[↗](#)
- The government of Benin plans to hire contractors to initiate its ePassport project.[↗](#)

Food security

- The German agricultural company BASF Digital Farming, together with VanderSat, is the first company to provide the agricultural sector with access to scalable, daily biomass satellite images.[↗](#)



According to Statista,[↗](#) the highest e-commerce penetration rate in 2020 was in the UK. Some 84% of the UK's population made at least one online purchase last year. The USA and Japan follow suit with 77% of their respective populations having used online purchasing. Countries from the Global South feature at the lower end of the scale with less than 50% of the population in Brazil and India having used e-commerce services in 2020. Differences in e-commerce take-up can also be observed across Europe, with western European countries, namely Germany (74%) and France (71%), performing better than southern European countries such as Spain (60%) and Italy (55%).



- Delhaize Serbia and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) launched the digital platform Plate by Plate to facilitate food donations. [↗](#)
- World Bank released a new report *What's Cooking: Digital Transformation of the Agrifood System* that addresses how digital technologies could help improve food systems and presents a roadmap for countries to boost their efforts on digital agriculture. [↗](#)

Gender equality

- The African Development Bank issued a grant of US\$320,000 to the West African Monetary Agency (WAMA) in order to mainstream gender in the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) core digital financial services regulatory frameworks. [↗](#)
- CNN has initiated a three-year digital project *As Equals* to tackle gender inequality issues including period poverty and online abuse in developing countries. [↗](#)

Humanitarian

- Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in collaboration with Microsoft and United Nations International

Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) launched a digital learning platform *Learning Passport* to facilitate access to education to displaced and refugee children. [↗](#)

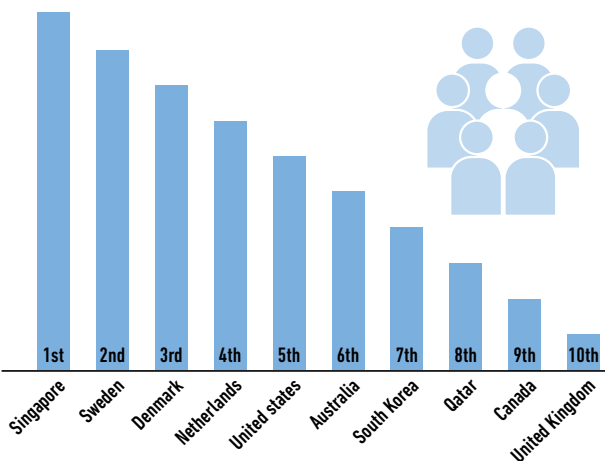
Migration

- The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Somalia has initiated a project that supports the deployment of 'telemedicine' in Somalia's health system for migrants and host communities. [↗](#)
- The German civil rights group Society for Civil Rights stated that the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees breached the right to privacy of thousands of asylum seekers by analysing their cell-phone data. [↗](#)
- Mixed Migration Center (MMC) has developed a portal '4Mi Interactive' containing data on refugee and migrants' experiences of COVID-19. [↗](#)

Water management

- The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), together with the IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, developed an open online course on programming for geospatial hydrology applications. [↗](#)

Top 10: Digital Inclusion



According to a Roland Berger [↗](#) study conducted in 82 countries, digital inclusion is highest in Singapore, followed by two Nordic countries – Sweden and Denmark. Basing itself on four variables, namely, accessibility, affordability, ability and attitude, the survey highlights that socio-economically disadvantaged individuals stand the greatest risk of digital exclusion. Regional breakdown as per the four categories shows that Europe, with a score of 78/100, ranks first in terms of digital inclusion. North America and the Asia-Pacific follow suit with 77 and 68 respectively. Digital inclusion is lowest in the Sub-Saharan African region where the overall score was estimated at 45.



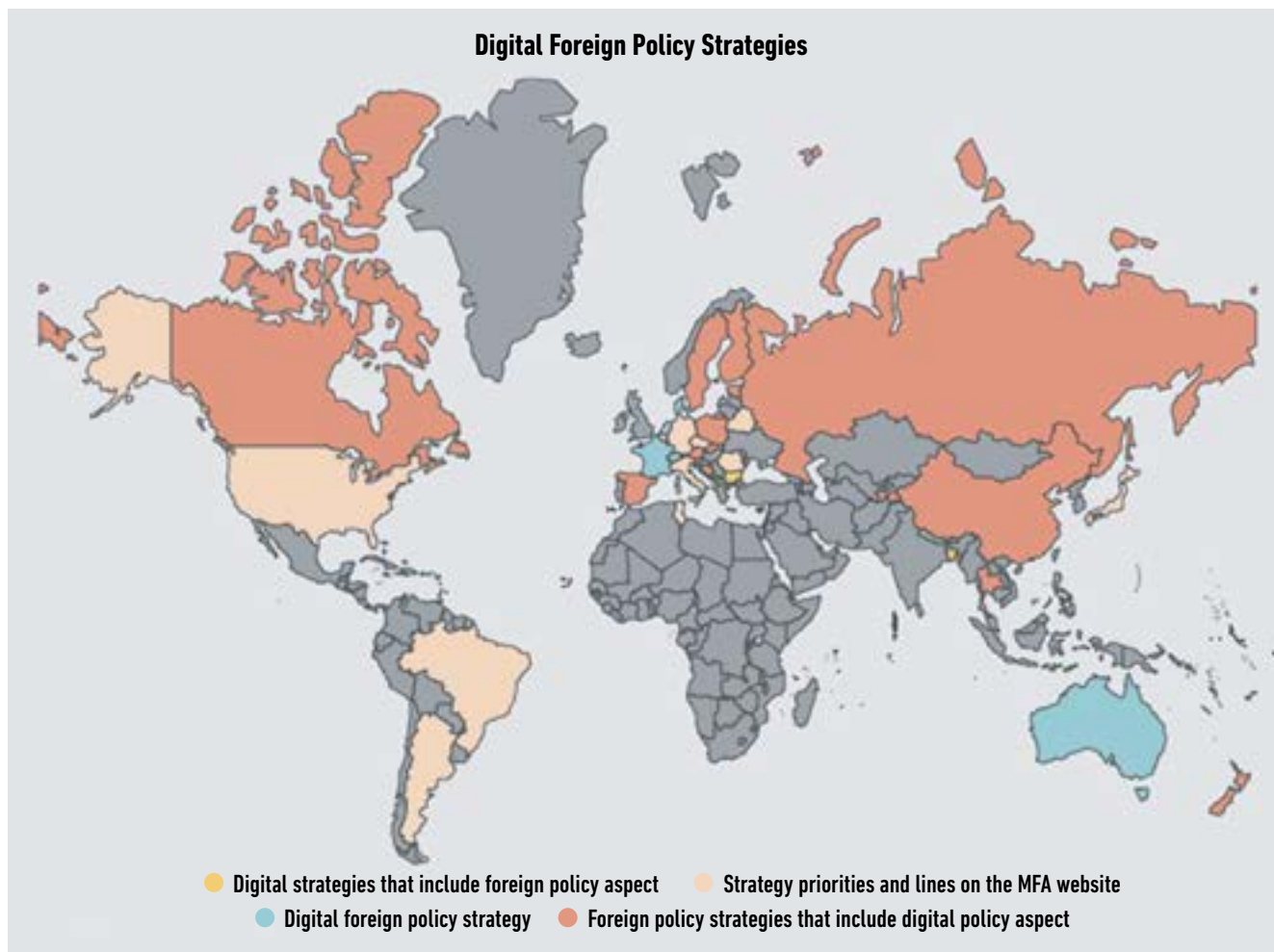
Digital foreign policy: Development cooperation on the agenda

The age of digitalisation requires innovation and change. Diplomacy and foreign policy are adapting and evolving to accommodate these new realities. Taking into consideration the emergence of foreign policy strategies dedicated to digital issues, 2021 promises to be the year where we will see digital foreign policy emerge fully.

While some countries included digital issues in the broader context of their foreign policy strategies, others have drafted comprehensive digital foreign policy strategies, i.e. strategic documents that set out a country's priorities and approaches to digital issues such as security, infrastructure, and trade. Development cooperation also features amongst

the topics tackled. To illustrate, 'digitalisation for development' is defined as one of the four priority areas in the Dutch *Digital Agenda for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*.¹ Norway's white paper titled *Digital Transformation and Development Policy*, built entirely around development, endorses the employment of user-centric digital tools which correspond to existing data-driven sustainable ecosystems and contexts.²

Despite not being specifically dedicated to development cooperation, the recently adopted Swiss *Digital Foreign Policy Strategy 2021–24* emphasises that new technologies can shape our future and drive sustainable development and

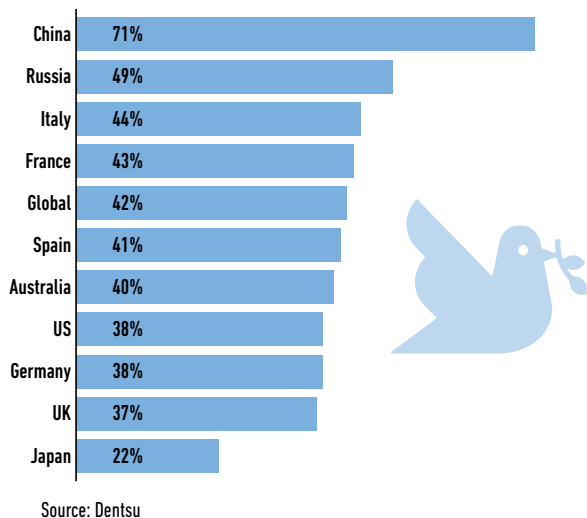




prosperity.¹ Along the same lines, the French digital foreign policy strategy highlights France's dedication to assist developing countries in acquiring universal access to digital services.²

To learn more about digital foreign policy³ and how development cooperation comes into play, please consult Diplo's policy brief 2021: *The Emergence of Digital Foreign Policy*.⁴

Percentage of individuals who think that tech can help solve global challenges



In 2018, the Digital Society Index⁵ assessed whether digital technologies could help solve the world's most pressing issues such as global poverty and climate change. Despite their potential use in monitoring progress on the sustainable development goals (SDGs), improving access to healthcare, or fighting food waste, 42% of the world's population thinks that digital technologies can serve as a game changer for combatting challenges. That said, according to the survey, Chinese nationals (71%) are the most optimistic when it comes to the benefits of digital technologies, followed by Russians (49%). Despite ranking fifth in terms of information and communications technology (ICT) adoption,⁶ Japanese citizens (22%) are the least optimistic when it comes to addressing socio-economic disadvantages, while the British (37%) are more optimistic.

6th Geneva Engage Awards

On 18 February 2021, the sixth edition of the Geneva Engage Awards¹ was organised in recognition of International Geneva actors and their social media outreach and online engagement. Launched in 2016, and delivered on the basis of a comparative analysis, the Awards explore how international organisations, non-governmental organisations and associations, and permanent representations to the UN in Geneva, perform on multiplatform activity, engaging content, and online growth, to name but a few.

Moving beyond social media presence, since 2020, the Awards have also been awarded to Geneva-based actors for their efforts in

conducting remote meetings in an effective and innovative way.

The winners of the 2020 Geneva Engages Awards are:

- **UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** in the International Organisations category
- **New Humanitarian** in the Non-Governmental Organisations and Non-Profit Organisations category
- **Delegation of the EU to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva** in the Permanent Representations category



Enabling e-governance through e-voting?

Last year, more than 70 presidential and parliamentary elections [took place worldwide](#). In 2021, voters are expected to 'take to the polls' in some 80 presidential and parliamentary elections across the globe.

The positive contributions of digital technology in voting are far from negligible. While they give a voice to marginalised groups and extend their reach to diasporas, there are also serious challenges that cannot be overlooked.

One of the main issues concerning digitalising elections is ensuring that technology remains opaque enough [for those attempting to disrupt the security of the election process](#) and sufficiently transparent for voters to foster trust.

According to Freedom House, between June 2018 and May 2020, digital interference during elections occurred in 28 out of 32 survey countries.

Despite being potentially beneficial in matching voters [with the best electoral candidates](#), artificial intelligence (AI) technologies can also be misused for generating deepfakes [and spreading disinformation](#). To illustrate, in Gabon, a coup attempt was triggered following a supposed deepfake video [suggesting the poor health of Gabonese President Ali Bongo](#).

Social media are also rife with disinformation during election time. In order to curb the spread of fake news, social networking companies are increasingly taking action. In the lead-up to the 2020 US presidential election, Twitter attached warning labels to posts – or deleted tweets entirely – while messaging apps WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger limited the number of messages which could be forwarded.

To find more information about elections in the digital age, please consult our dedicated [Elections in the Digital Age page](#).

