The seventh issue of the *Digital Watch SDC Newsletter* is out. Organised for the ninth time since its establishment in 2013, the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) passed in the shadow of Covid-19. Go to page 5 to find out how tech featured in the discussion. This quarter we also provide updates on upcoming events of interest.

In this issue, we include a round-up of top news on development, e-governance, and humanitarian action.

We also share data on the usage and ownership of cryptocurrencies worldwide in 2020.

APEC

Which countries are most at risk of automation?

THE STATE OF 5G IN 2021

Find out where investments have been made and where it has been launched.

INTERNET SHUTDOWNS

A costly affair.

The different faces of automation

Humanitarian
- The Somali Cash Consortium, funded by the European Union, has launched a cash transfer programme estimated at USD$ 7.67 million to assist more than 115,000 vulnerable Somalis.
- A study by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy finds that poor access to the internet and technology hinders the quality of humanitarian learning.

Migration
- The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and Vodafone Foundation have extended their Instant Network Schools (INS) programme in Mozambique to more than 34,000 refugee students.

Development
- Telecommunications operator Orange and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH have established a new Orange Digital Centre in Bamako to promote innovation and development of digital skills.
- The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Facebook announce cooperation on online child safety as part of UNICEF's efforts to combat violence against children.

Top 5 APEC countries most at risk of automation

1st Pakistan

2nd Bangladesh
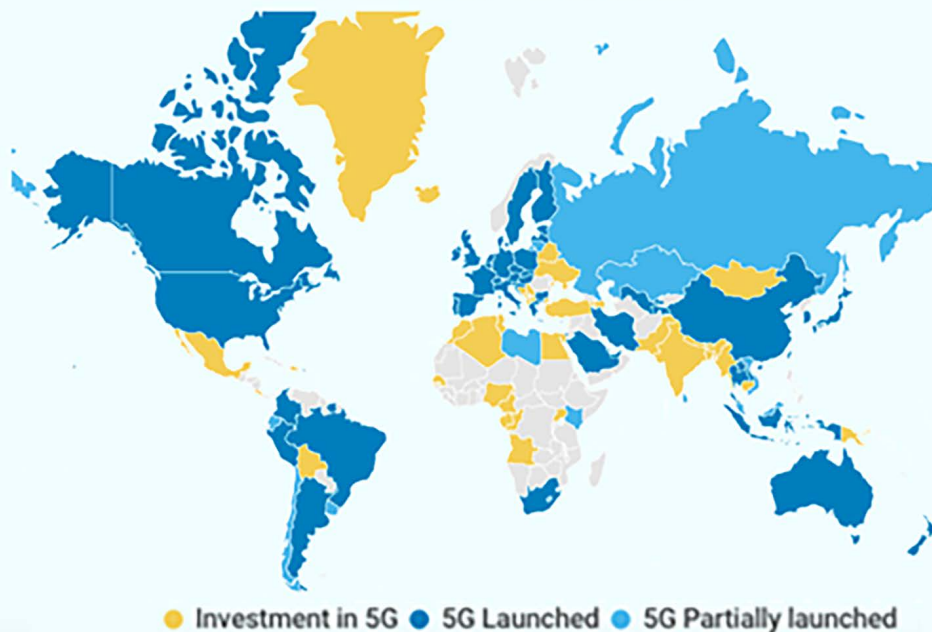
3rd Indonesia

4th Myanmar

5th India

A Deloitte report titled 'The future of work is now: Is APEC ready?' has concluded that Pakistan is most at risk of automation in the Asia-Pacific region, primarily due to weak research and development (R&D) investments on the transition to the digital era, high poverty rate, and low education. Bangladesh comes in second place.

Amongst the reasons why it is at risk of automation, Deloitte mentions low internet usage and poor digital literacy levels. Indonesia ranks third among the APEC countries. Like Pakistan, it also faces low R&D spendings, low education level, and absence of necessary skills among its population to cope with labour market displacement brought about by automation. Important employment rates in agriculture, manufacturing, and construction industries, all of which are at risk of automation, are part of the explanation for why India holds 5th place. Singapore is the least exposed to the risk of automation in the region, while Australia is most prepared for the changes caused by digital transformation.

The state of 5G in 2021

● Investment in 5G ● 5G Launched ● 5G Partially launched

The mapping conducted by GSA finds that as of June 2021, 5G has been launched in 58 countries worldwide, with North America and Europe taking the lead in terms of regional deployment. The technology has been partially deployed in a number of other countries, such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Chile, and Ecuador. Studies show that by the end of 2021, there will be some half a billion users of 5G networks.

South Korea was the first country to roll out 5G in 2019, ahead of the USA and China. In Africa, 5G is available in South Africa, and partially in Libya and Kenya. Investments in 5G are being made in over 30 different countries including Morocco, Mongolia, and the Western Balkans.

- The GSMA and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) tackle e-commerce policy priorities in Central Africa in their latest report.
- Ericsson report forecasts 5G subscriptions to reach 7% of Sub-Saharan Africa population by 2026.

Gender equality
- The UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) has released a practical guide on how to empower women in the digital economy and reduce the digital financial gender divide.
- The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2021 finds that some 112 million women in low- and middle-income countries started using mobile internet in 2020.
- In its latest report, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) tackles the barriers and opportunities for Jordanian and Lebanese women for engaging in the digital economy.
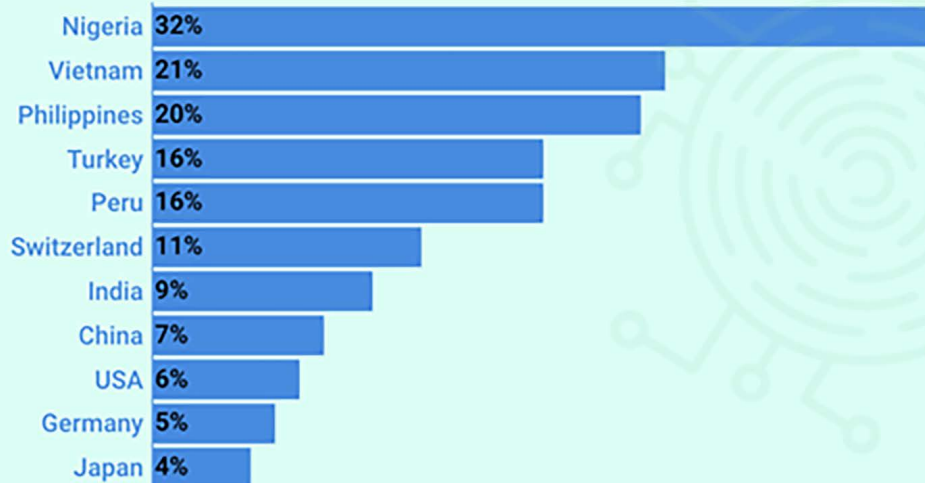
Environment
- The World Health Organization (WHO) tackles the impact of e-waste on child health in a report titled 'Children and digital dumpsites'.
- Despite high levels of energy consumption, UN experts stated that cryptocurrencies can contribute to sustainable development and greening of the economy.

Food security
- The Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, together with the country's provider of digital payments infrastructure 'e-Finance', have launched the 'Agri Egypt' digital agricultural network.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the African Union Commission (AUC) have completed the first-ever digital mapping of land use in Africa.

Usage and ownership of cryptocurrencies worldwide in 2020

Country	Percentage
Nigeria	32%
Vietnam	21%
Philippines	20%
Turkey	16%
Peru	16%
Switzerland	11%
India	9%
China	7%
USA	6%
Germany	5%
Japan	4%

Whereas much debate has been lately dedicated to the pollution generated by the mining of cryptocurrencies, a survey conducted by Statista found that bitcoin was the most commonly used cryptocurrency in Nigeria in 2020. More precisely, 32% of the surveyed respondents in the largest African economy said they use or own cryptocurrency. One of the reasons why cryptocurrencies are so popular amongst Nigerians is the high costs of traditional money transfers.

Vietnam and the Philippines come in second (21%) and third (20%) places respectively. Like in Nigeria, the high fees associated with cross-border payments explain the frequent use of cryptocurrencies amongst the two Southeast Asian countries. Turkey and Peru with 16% each hold the fourth place, whereas Switzerland ranks 5th (11%) in terms of usage and ownership of cryptocurrencies and as such is the highest-ranked country in Europe. According to the survey, the lowest usage and ownership rate (4%) is in Japan.

- Microsoft's 4Afrika Initiative and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) have launched the Digital Transformation Initiative for the Agri-Food Sector that will provide digital tools and training to small-scale farmers and businesses across Africa.

E-governance
- Nigeria's federal government has concluded an agreement with the Republic of Korea estimated at US$ 13 million on the digitalisation of public and other government services.
- Senegal announces intention to move all government data and digital platforms to a China-sponsored national data centre.

Digital health
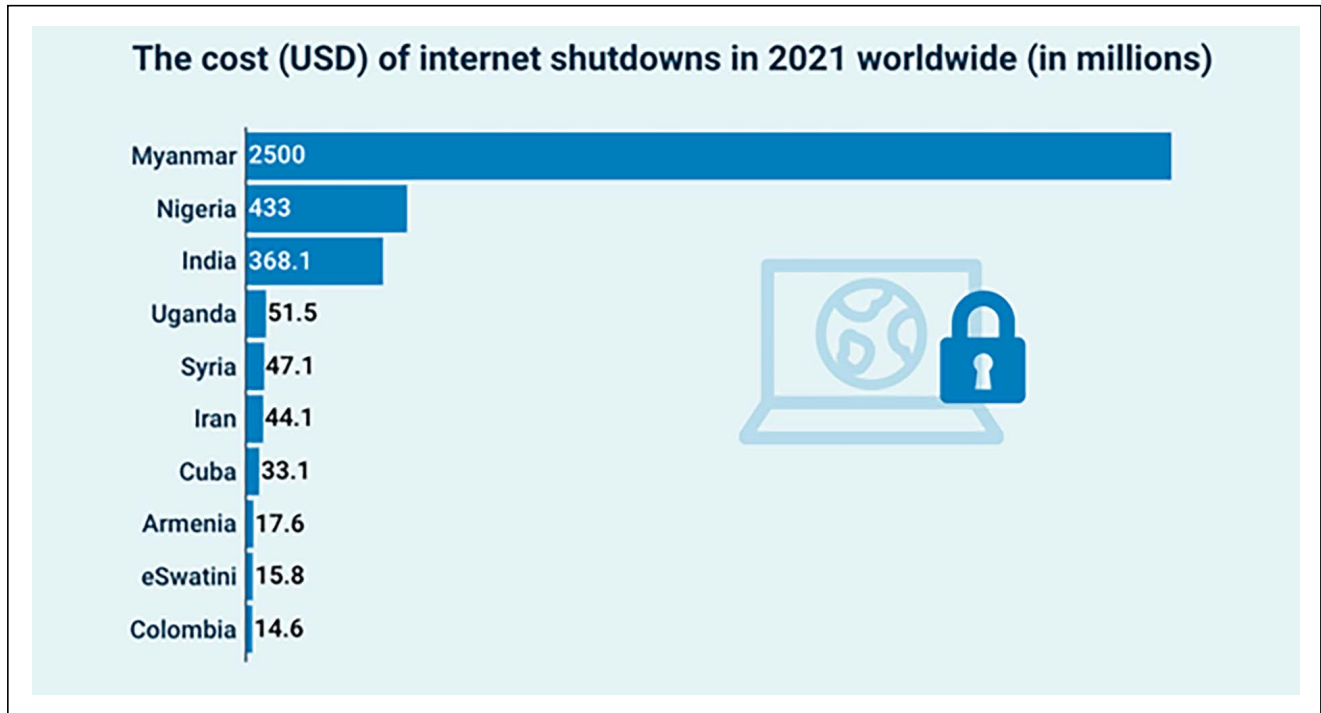- WHO donates more than US$ 90,000 of its worth in IT equipment to the Eritrea Ministry of Health.
- WHO will help North Macedonia digitalise early warning systems to detect, report, and manage public health events.

Water management
- The United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works has held a hearing to examine potential cybersecurity threats related to the US water infrastructure.
- Iranian mobile internet users experienced connection disruptions amid water shortage protests.

The economic impact of internet shutdowns

The cost (USD) of internet shutdowns in 2021 worldwide (in millions)

Country	Cost
Myanmar	2500
Nigeria	433
India	368.1
Uganda	51.5
Syria	47.1
Iran	44.1
Cuba	33.1
Armenia	17.6
eSwatini	15.8
Colombia	14.6

Often defined as intentional partial or total disruptions of the internet or electronic communications, internet shutdowns are exploited by regimes to suppress dissent or impede communications during times of unrest. While the non-financial cost is measured in terms of human rights violations and obstruction of democratic processes and political stability, internet restrictions also cause a significant burden for the economy.

The results published by Top 10 VPN for 2021 reveal that internet shutdowns were most costly for Myanmar, amounting to US$ 2.5 billion. The average duration of an internet outage is estimated at 5,710 hours and is said to have so far affected 22 million people. The second infamous place is held by Nigeria with more than 100 million people being offline for more than 1,600 hours, causing a loss of US$ 433 million. India ranks third with a financial loss equivalent to US$ 368 million and some 17 million internet users being affected. For the remaining countries, the economic costs were significantly lower, but some 20 million people were nonetheless concerned.

In addition to Iran, recent reports of internet disruptions have been made in Zambia and Nigeria.

HLPF: In the shadow of Covid-19

Between 6 and 15 July, the 2021 edition of the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was held. Dedicated to the recovery from Covid-19, it comes as no surprise that 89 sessions addressed explicitly (featured terms Covid-19, pandemic, and health crisis in the title) the coronavirus. This represents an increase of 16% compared to the number of sessions tackling the pandemic last year (77). Covid-19 was discussed from the perspective of financial recovery, societal
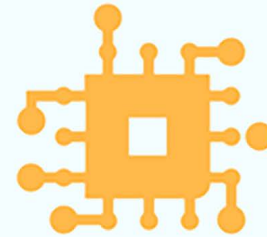
UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

A total of 329 high-level meetings, side-events, VNR labs...

89 sessions on COVID-19

18 events on digital transformation

inequality, indigenous people, to name but a few, thus marking a shift in focus from the so-called decade of action to post-pandemic resilience.

When it comes to digital transformation, the number of meetings convened on this topic increased slightly in comparison to last year, moving from 16 sessions in 2020 to 18 in 2021. Like in the previous years, data was the most prominent issue discussed in a variety of contexts ranging from vaccine passports and privacy to data partnerships and investments in development data. Other digital topics addressed include the interplay between the circular economy and digital technologies, as well as the digitalisation of knowledge platforms.

Other traditional topics that featured prominently on the agenda are environmental challenges. A total of 42 sessions was dedicated to ocean health, climate resilience, and carbon neutrality.

Events of interest

September promises to be a busy month. On the 7th, Diplo will be hosting the **'Digital (and) Diplomacy: What Are We Actually Talking About?'** online event. Marking the 25th anniversary of the publication 'Information Technology and Diplomacy in a Changing Environment', written by Diplo's Director Dr Jovan Kurbalija, the conference will also discuss the different meanings of the term digital and will try to identify the differences and commonalities of viewpoints. *You can register for the event here.*

In terms of global gatherings, **the 76th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA)** will commence on 14 September whereas the first high-level general debate is set for 21 September. Stay tuned for our yearly analysis of the UNGA statements.

Lastly, at the end of the month, we will be continuing our historical journey on diplomacy and technology by tackling the invention of telephony and wireless communications.

Geneva Internet Platform
DigitalWatch

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

DiPLO
www.diplomacy.edu