STUDY GUIDE

ECOSOC

Economic and Social Council

Universidad de Navarra | FACULTAD DE DERECHO

University of Navarra UNMUN Model United Nations

WELCOME TO UNMUN 2026!

Dear Delegates,

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at this year's Universidad de Navarra Model United Nations conference. My name is Txell Reguant, and I am currently a fourth-year student of International Relations and Law. Having participated in several conferences both as a delegate and now as a chair, I truly appreciate the dedication, curiosity, and diplomacy that each of you brings to this MUN.

My name is Isabella Rosales, and I serve as the vice president of this committee. I am more than happy to share this experience with you. I am from Nicaragua, a beautiful country in Central America, and I am a third-year student of International Relations. I am deeply passionate about diplomacy and international challenges. Therefore, I have debated my ideas since I was in high school. I consider myself trustworthy, creative, and friendly, so don't hesitate to reach out to me. I hope this introduction letter helps you get to know your chairs better and encourages you to look ahead with enthusiasm.

Mi nombre es Benjamin Recht Collie. It is my first time participating as a Secretary; therefore, I am not only nervous, but also very excited to be here. I hope the Study Guide helps you elaborate good arguments and that the debate is both dynamic and fruitful, but overall, very respectful.

ECOSOC holds a unique position within the United Nations system, bridging the gap between economic development, international cooperation, and humanitarian needs. It is a forum where complex global challenges meet practical solutions, and where collaboration across cultures and ideologies becomes essential. As delegates, your role is not only to defend national interests but also to engage constructively and think critically about how multilateral cooperation can advance the international community.

Our hope for this committee is that each of you approaches debate with respect, creativity, and an open mind. MUN is not only about drafting resolutions or winning arguments, but about learning, listening, and working towards compromise in a spirit of diplomacy. Remember that beyond the formalities of rules and procedures, what truly matters is the quality of dialogue and the willingness to understand different perspectives.

We eagerly look forward to witnessing your hard work, your negotiations, and the innovative solutions you will bring to the table. Let us make ECOSOC a space of serious debate, mutual respect, and unforgettable experiences, including gossip. Below you will find the main channel of contact for now that is the committee email. Don't hesitate to contact us.

Welcome once again, and best of luck in your preparations!

Sincerely,
Chairs of ECOSOC

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, established in 1945 with a vision to provide the international community with a dedicated space to address issues that affect people's daily lives. This includes poverty, inequality, education, health, sustainable development, and the pursuit of human dignity. Unlike more security-oriented bodies of the UN, ECOSOC is designed to look beyond war and peace to the deeper question of how societies can thrive, develop, and prosper together in an increasingly interconnected world.

At its heart, ECOSOC is a forum for cooperation. It brings together 54 elected member states, each serving three-year terms, to represent not only their national interests but also the collective aspirations of the global community. More than a debating chamber, ECOSOC is a link between governments, specialized UN agencies, and civil society. From coordinating the work of the World Health Organization (WHO) to facilitating the efforts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), ECOSOC embodies the spirit of bringing different actors to one table with one goal: building a more just and sustainable future.

But beyond its institutional structure, ECOSOC also embodies the conscience of the United Nations; it is where hard questions are asked. How do we bridge the gap between the wealthy and the poor? How do we ensure that technological progress benefits everyone rather than deepening divides? How do we balance immediate humanitarian needs with long-term development goals? These are not abstract issues but human realities that affect millions of lives around the world every day.

Consider, for a moment, the very foundations of human rights. It was under ECOSOC's purview that the Commission on Human Rights was established, which then drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This landmark document, adopted in 1948, didn't just emerge from a vacuum; it was the result of tireless work, passionate debate, and a profound commitment to human dignity, all facilitated by the structures ECOSOC put in place. This is a powerful testament to how ECOSOC's work, though often less visible than the Security Council's, has profoundly shaped the moral and legal landscape of our world, touching the lives of countless individuals by articulating the fundamental rights that belong to us all.

For us, as Model United Nations participants, ECOSOC provides a uniquely human platform. This is the committee where diplomacy often feels closest to reality: discussing not only treaties or military conflicts, but schools, hospitals, climate resilience, human rights, and the quality of daily life. It challenges delegates to think about the world not in terms of power alone, but in terms of responsibility, justice, and solidarity. Negotiations may become technical at times, but behind every statistic lies a story of a child who gains access to education, a family lifted out of poverty, or a community rebuilding after disaster.

ECOSOC is also forward-looking. It has become the main venue for reviewing progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In doing so, it asks member states to think collectively about the future: a future shaped not just by policy, but by courage, cooperation, and compromise.

In this committee, you, the delegates, will carry forward that responsibility. The debates you will have, the resolutions you will draft, and the compromises you will forge are not just exercises in procedure or rhetoric. They reflect a real-world mission: the belief that dialogue and cooperation can make a tangible difference in human lives.

Ultimately, ECOSOC is more than just a UN body. It is a reminder that international relations are not only about power or negotiation tactics, but about people, progress, and possibility. Entering this chamber means entering a space where empathy and diplomacy meet, and where your words and your diplomacy can inspire meaningful solutions.

Topic A.

Addressing the impact of external debt and austerity policies on the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights. Case study: Argentina

I. Introduction

The link between external debt, austerity, and the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights is no longer just a technical issue of budgets and repayments; it has become one of the central political and legal questions of our time.

Debt is usually discussed as a financial challenge, but its effects are felt most directly in people's everyday access to health care, education, jobs, and cultural life. When governments in the Global South take on heavy debt, repayment terms often push them toward cutting public spending. This raises a clear tension: do international financial obligations outweigh the duty, set out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to use all available resources to progressively realize these rights? Argentina illustrates this dilemma sharply.

Since the late 1970s, its economy has been caught in repeated cycles of borrowing, default, and restructuring. Much of the debt was first contracted under a military dictatorship, on terms that critics still describe as dubious. The crises of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s entrenched austerity as the "solution," with the IMF playing a central role in pushing for spending cuts and fiscal consolidation.

The 2018 standby agreement revived this debate yet again: is austerity a path to stability, or does it simply deepen exclusion and inequality? For ordinary people in Argentina, the answer has often been clear. Inflation erodes wages, social programs are pared back, and public services, such as but not limited to clinics, schools, public transportation…struggle to keep up with demand. These burdens fall heaviest on groups already facing disadvantage: low-income households, women, workers in the informal sector, and indigenous communities.

UN experts have repeatedly warned that such measures risk undermining basic rights such as food, housing, and education. At stake is not just Argentina's policy direction but a broader normative question: can debt obligations ever take precedence over human rights? And if international institutions shape these policies, should they also bear responsibility for their social consequences?

Argentina's case forces us to think beyond macroeconomics. It highlights the need to ask what justice and human dignity mean in a world where financial markets and human rights often pull in opposite directions. For policymakers, the challenge is to find alternatives that preserve fiscal credibility without sacrificing the protections promised under international law.

II. Key words/concepts

Vulture funds: Investment funds that buy distressed debt at a low price and seek full repayment through legal or aggressive means.

Debt condemnation: The cancellation or forgiveness of a country's debt, often by creditors or international institutions.

Debt restructuring: A process where a debtor negotiates new terms with creditors to make debt more manageable, such as extending deadlines or reducing interest.

Indirect taxes: Taxes levied on goods and services rather than income or profits (e.g., VAT, sales tax, excise duty).

Fiscal deficit and Fiscal imbalances:

- **Fiscal Deficit**: When a government's total spending exceeds its revenue (excluding borrowings).
- **Fiscal Imbalances**: Persistent mismatches between government revenue and expenditure, leading to economic instability.

Default: A country's failure to repay a debt or meet the legal obligations of a loan.

III. Background/Historical context

Fiscal policies have often been a way in which governments have implemented strong austerity measures, which end up having a deep effect on local populations, especially those who are more vulnerable to big shifts in the economy.

In countries located in Latin America, where almost 30% of the region's population lives under poverty, which represents a total of almost 187 million people, it is relevant to ask what effect such policies, which are often an attempt to fight external debt, have on the rights of its citizens.

Latin America, is home to some of the biggest numbers regarding wealth inequality, a problem which not only affects the access that citizens have to basic services, or the chance to freely and safely exercise their rights, but it also means, that in many countries, citizens that make the poorer segments of society, end up being affected by austerity measure via fiscal policies only by being net contributors rather than beneficiaries of the fiscal system.

As many of the policies implemented are not transparent enough, nor participatory, added to being predominantly regressive, they create an unequal tax structure weighted towards indirect taxes. In these cases, vulnerable communities, who constitute a weak majority in economic terms, end up acting as the backbone for such austerity measures, while also being the ones affected the most.

Moreover, Argentina's recent economic policies, which have in many cases been driven by an intention of solving the country's external debt, have led to a significant deterioration in social protection systems and living conditions. More specifically, there have been reductions in pensions for retirees, state budgets regarding health administration, public education, and social plans for people with disabilities.

In Argentina, the radical shift between a socially active, yet very inefficient state, regarding social welfare, to one that aims to cut most of its intervention, has exacerbated existing inequalities and created new vulnerabilities, particularly impacting informal workers, women, and children.

Although austerity measures in Argentina are not something new, they have indeed been intensified by the current government. Javier Milei's administration has made austerity measures one of the key topics of its presidential campaign. Furthermore, the government has justified austerity and budget cuts as a necessary evil to achieve fiscal balance, while reducing progressive taxes and increasing tax exemptions for large companies.

When it comes to discussing the issue of austerity measures and external debt, not only in Argentina, but also in countries of the Global South, the issue of "*vulture funds*" becomes relevant. For most countries in the global south, debt condemnation or debt restructuring has become one of the key ways to achieve the general well-being of their population, as well as a means to ensure the proper exercise of their citizens' most basic rights.

IV. Current Status of the Topic

External debt has been a mainstream political issue for the Global South for a very long time, and the positions countries take towards it, and subsequently towards the austerity measures that would be in place in order to pay up, tend to change along with the political shifts that take place. The reality is that external debt and the possible implementation of austerity measures are often used as a political tool, and have a huge weight on how local populations elect their government officials. The most common indicator of external debt is gross external debt, which measures the total debt a country owes to foreign creditors. Debtors can be the government, corporations, or citizens of that country.

Furthermore, it is estimated that more than 31% of the global public debt is owned by developing countries, while also being these countries (more specifically those in Latin America and the Caribbean) the ones who present a higher increase in debt-to-GDP ratio, while a region whose public debt exceeds more than 60% of its GDP. Moreover, it is no secret that global external debt is a burden to global prosperity; in fact, it is estimated that developing countries' debt has quadrupled in the last two decades to a record $11.4 trillion in 2023, equivalent to 99% of their export earnings.

> "***Debt distress*** *now looms over more than half of the 68 low-income countries eligible for the International Monetary Fund's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust – more than double the number in 2015.*"

Yet, external debt should not be categorized simply as a negative result, as it is a common tool for countries to get a fast economic input which, if used wisely, can lead to further economic growth, which ideally will put the country in a position not only to pay such debt, but also to perceive a profit from the activities that such input (for which the debt was necessary) has helped develop. But the problems caused by external debt are not as simple as just an investment that has not given the expected results, but usually as a result of various interrelated factors, such as corruption, political instability, weak institutions, etc.

In addition, one of the main costs of external debt is that governments, in an effort to prioritize debt repayments, tend to leave public services and investments unattended, which means that lower-income people (who tend to be the ones who depend on public infrastructure) pay the price. Unfounded schools, hospitals with no supplies, and a crumbling infrastructure end up being a common result.

Yet, because existing debt workout mechanisms are inefficient and costly, most governments avoid default at all costs – even if it means sacrificing development goals and climate action. As a result, countries will prioritize the payment of such debt but will neglect their internal development. In 2023, a historic 54 developing nations – nearly half of which are in Africa – dedicated at least 10% of their government funds to debt interest payments. Today, 3.3 billion people live in countries that spend more on debt payments than on health or education. Debt sustainability is closely linked to the issue of sustainable growth for developing countries in the medium/long-term future. Furthermore the actors involved and affected by the existence of external debt and the implementation of austerity measures are not only the countries that take the debt, nor the people of such country, but also institutions such as the borrowing entities (Governments or large corporations) lenders (such as banks, private investors, and international financial institutions), and international organizations (UN, World Bank, IMF, and BIS).

Regarding International organizations, their ideal role is to essentially try to ensure development and prevent the unethical use of resources. The IMF, for example, tends to help countries in three main ways: it helps absorb shocks, enabling countries to meet immediate financial needs and cushion economic distress. This was seen when the IMF brought timely financial support to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone to fight the 2015 Ebola outbreak.

It also catalyzes private-sector investments and additional financial support, signaling that underlying issues which led to the crisis can be resolved through reforms, which was visible during the IMF work on supporting former Soviet Union nations transition to market-based economies, or in the case of Ireland when during the 2010 recession the Irish government sought help from the IMF and the European Union, which together provided loans totaling €67.5 billion, which is equal to 40 percent of Ireland's economy. Thirdly, it also promotes prudent macroeconomic policies that support financial stability and growth, as could be seen in the Serbian experience, where the IMF helped the Balkanic country by implementing a three-year precautionary Stand-By Arrangement, approved in 2015, when Serbia's economy faced large fiscal imbalances and protracted structural challenges.

As for the World Bank, this institution has become notoriously involved in the issue of debt transparency. Through various research efforts, the World Bank has achieved key findings, particularly regarding the relationship between external debt and underdeveloped nations. Furthermore, it has been shown that in 2021, "*40 percent of low-income countries had not published any debt data over the previous two years*". Yet the situation improved in 2024, given that the number of countries that have not reported any data stands at less than 25 percent, and comprises mostly fragile and conflict-afflicted states. Even so, the World Bank warns about the surging problem of "*hidden debts,*" stating that "*Only one in four countries report loan-level information on newly contracted debt. Comprehensive sectoral coverage remains rare, and subnational borrowing, contingent liabilities, and state-owned enterprise debt are often excluded from official tabulations. As instruments grow more complex and liabilities shift beyond the central government, failure to expand debt coverage across the public sector will raise the risks of hidden debts.*"

In addition, the World Bank has warned about the problem with low-income nations turning towards unconventional, opaque debt instruments, including private placements, central bank swaps, collateralized loans, and overcollateralized repurchase agreements (repos), which can fall outside the scope of standard disclosure frameworks. This is a situation that restricts refinancing flexibility, while at the same time subordinating other creditors.

V. Main actors/Stakeholders

International money lending is a common and old practice. The motives of why countries attend to it are quite diverse, yet for the last century, the main stakeholders have not changed much when it comes to the lenders, while the countries that act as borrowers seem to be much more varied. For example, it may come as a surprise that one of the world's biggest rising economic superpowers, India, is one of the world's biggest debtors, with an astonishing 39 billion dollars in debt to the World Bank at the end of 2023. Moreover, India's outstanding balance with the WB is almost double that of the next biggest debtor, Indonesia, which owed the bank \$22.2bn. Pakistan and Bangladesh followed with just short of \$20bn and \$19.8bn, respectively.

In addition, one cannot understate the role that the United States plays in such issue, especially after Donald Trump took office. The US's surprising shift towards the application of protectionist measures has put an enormous question mark on international funding programs, debt condemnation policies, and general money lending projects, therefore solidifying the importance of institutions like the World Bank or the IMF towards the economies that compose the international global south. Furthermore, multilateral lenders like the WB have "become the central lifeline for LMICs amid a slowing of private lending" since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the WB's latest international debt report at the end of 2024.

Countries like Argentina have become a key piece of the global debt machinery. Not only do these countries have to allocate an enormous part of their yearly budget towards debt repayment, but also, debt means the holding back or straight-up limitation of state-sponsored social programs, which may affect housing, education or health institutions. Furthermore, the billions of dollars that countries like Argentina have, end up playing like an extremely powerful card on the international political board, as it constitutes an essential political asset, that powerful money lending institutions and nations may use to leverage their way in the debtors national policies, and impose their own interests in foreign land, and sometimes limiting developing nations economic, institutional and social autonomy.

VI. Case Study

Neither austerity measures nor the concept of external debt represents anything new for Argentina. The implementation of austerity measures at a vast national level in Argentina dates back all the way to the mid-20th century. For example, under the "*Plan de Racionalización y Austeridad Argentino*". Under such a plan, the Argentinian government aimed to accomplish a drastic reduction of public expenditure, an increase in efficiency and performance by the Public Administration, while also imposing rigid austerity measures on the Public Administration. The Argentinian general public is accustomed to these types of measures, which does not mean that the measures that have been taken by the current administration do not represent a burden for the average Argentinian.

Furthermore, at the beginning of 2025, the newly elected president, Javier Milei, announced to Congress the state budget for that year with a clear goal: to put a final stop to the chronic fiscal deficit that the country has been experiencing for the last decades. The "zero déficit" project that the government proposes is backed by the IMF, yet it faces severe opposition from the political groups contrary to the elected government.

Moreover, it is important to understand how delicate the situation in Argentina really is. During the last years, a drastic combination of austerity measures, deregulations, and the paralyzation of public programs has been deeply affecting the Argentinian middle and lower classes. In addition, there has been a decrease of 20,7% in the purchasing power of Argentinians.

When it comes to the issue of external debt, it is estimated that Argentina's external debt has increased to 278073.14 USD Million in the first quarter of 2025 from 277257.38 USD Million in the fourth quarter of 2024. Over half of Argentina's debt is in US dollars, which means that " *if Argentina's currency loses value, it becomes harder to pay what it owes. About a fifth of the debt must be paid back within a year, which puts pressure on the country's finances.*" Even though some aspects of the debt are composed of loans taken by the Central Bank and private companies, most of the debt belongs to the Government. Yet, the biggest issue with the Argentine external debt is the fact that Argentina is infamously known for being a bad payer and has repeatedly (over 9 times) declared itself in default, which means it declares itself unfit, or unwilling, to pay the debt.

When it comes to the country's relationship with the IMF, the country still has about $44 billion from a 2018 IMF loan. In April 2025, the IMF agreed to lend Argentina another $20 billion, but only if the government meets strict economic rules. These strict economic rules have had a harsh impact on the general well-being of the population, as they usually end up making basic services more expensive and, in many cases, just plain nonexistent. More specifically, there are records of over 60% cuts in economic subsidies (mostly those related to energy resources), almost 40% cuts when it comes to pensions, and more than 80% cuts in public infrastructure, as well as a 26% cut in public wages.

Topic B

Ensuring Equitable Access to Digital Public Infrastructure and Emerging Technologies for Inclusive, Sustainable Development

I. Introduction to the Topic

The global digital revolution is reshaping economies, societies, and governance, offering unprecedented opportunities for sustainable development. However, these opportunities are not distributed equally. Millions of people around the world still lack access to the internet, affordable devices, or the digital literacy skills needed to benefit from emerging technologies. The issue of ensuring equitable access to digital public infrastructure and emerging technologies revolves around making sure that digital systems such as broadband networks, digital ID platforms, and consistent payment systems are designed as public goods that reach all individuals, regardless of geography, income, gender, or ability (United Nations, 2020). The nature of this problem is both technical and political: while technology can accelerate inclusive growth, it can also exacerbate inequalities if access remains uneven. The main actors include governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, and marginalized populations.

Approximately 2.6 billion people remain offline, with the vast majority of them in low income and rural contexts; internet use and mobile ownership vary sharply by income level, gender and region. These gaps reflect multiple, interacting barriers: lack of reliable broadband and electricity, high connectivity costs relative to incomes, insufficient divide access, and deficits in digital literacy and trust. Affordability remains a major constraint in many countries despite improvements in price benchmarks, and women and marginalized groups consistently lag behind in use and skills.

The challenge of ensuring equitable access to DPI and emerging technologies is therefore technical, institutional and political. Technical aspects include last-mile connectivity, interoperable standards and secure platforms; institutional aspects cover legal framework for privacy, data governance, and consumer protection; political aspects involve public policy choices about financing, competition, and the balance between public oversight and private innovation (United Nations, 2020; UNDP, 2023). Because DPI can concentrate power (through control of identity or data), governance design matters: inclusive, rights-based, and participatory approaches are essential to reduce the risk of exclusion, surveillance, or vendor lock-in (UNDP, 2023).

Several major international initiatives now focus on DPI as a high-impact lever for the SDGs. The UN Secretary-General's *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* argued for coordinated action across governments, civil society, the private sector and technical communities to make digital transformation inclusive and safe (United Nations, 2020). Building on this, the UNDP–ITU High Impact Initiative on Digital Public Infrastructure aims to empower countries with people-centered, interoperable and sustainable DPI solutions and has mobilized significant financing and partnerships to assist up to 100 countries by 2030 (UNDP, 2023; ITU, 2023). These efforts underscore the emerging consensus that DPI must be both ***accessible*** and ***accountable*** if digital advances are to support inclusive, sustainable development.

This study guide examines the issue across several dimensions. First, it defines key terms and concepts (e.g., DPI, interoperability, digital literacy). Second, it situates the problem historically and presents the current global status using recent statistics on connectivity, affordability and inclusion. Third, it identifies the principal stakeholders, national governments, multilateral organizations, private technology providers, civil society, and marginalized communities, and explains their incentives and responsibilities. Fourth, it surveys case studies and policy options, emphasizing best practices for governance, financing, capacity building and environmental sustainability. Finally, it provides sources for further research so delegates can craft evidence-based policy proposals that preserve human rights, foster broad participation, and ensure that the digital transition supports the SDGs rather than deepening existing inequalities. (United Nations, 2020; UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2023; ITU, 2023).

II. Keywords / Concepts

1. **Digital Public Infrastructure**: foundational digital systems such as national ID platforms, interoperable payment systems, and secure data exchange frameworks (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023)

   These infrastructures are considered "public goods" when designed inclusively and transparently. Another essential concept is the digital divide, which highlights the disparities in access to technology between and within countries (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2022).

2. **Broadband networks**: high-speed, high-capacity communication systems that enable the simultaneous transmission of multiple data signals (like internet, phone, and video) over a wide range of frequencies.

3. **Digital ID systems**: use digital technology to establish, store, validate, and verify the identity of individuals, organizations, devices, or services, serving as a secure and convenient way to access online and sometimes offline services and prove who you are in the digital world**.**

4. **Digital governance:** a strategic framework that guides an organization's management of its digital assets, such as data, technology, and digital policies, to achieve its objectives. It involves establishing clear decision-making authority, accountability, and processes for an organization's digital presence and services to ensure transparency, efficiency, ethical responsibility, and compliance in the digital space.

III. Background / Historical Context

The development of digital public infrastructure (DPI) is closely tied to the rise of the internet, mobile technologies, and large-scale digitization of government services in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In the early 2000s, the global spread of mobile connectivity and the expansion of broadband created opportunities for states to deliver public services through digital platforms. Governments began to experiment with digital identification systems, e-governance portals, and national payment schemes as ways of extending access to financial services, education, health care, and welfare programs. (World Bank, 2022).

One of the most prominent early experiments was India's Aadhaar system, launched in 2009. Aadhaar, the world's largest biometric identification project, aimed to provide every resident with a unique digital identity to facilitate access to government subsidies, banking, and mobile services. By 2021, Aadhaar had registered more than 1.2 billion people, significantly reducing duplication in welfare programs and enabling faster service delivery (World Bank, 2021). However, it also exposed risks: reports of data breaches, privacy violations, and exclusion errors, raised serious questions about security, human rights, and accountability. (International Center for Law & Economics, 2022; Khera, 2019).

Outside of India, other states experimented with DPI. Estonia became a global model of e-governance through its *X-Road* interoperability platform, which allowed citizens secure, unified access to health, tax, and business services. African countries, particularly Kenya, pioneered digital financial infrastructure with M-Pesa, a mobile money system launched in 2007 that expanded financial inclusion for millions without access to traditional banks (World Bank, 2022). These diverse examples showed that DPI could be transformative but also that governance choices shaped outcomes dramatically.

As these national initiatives expanded, the global digital divide became more visible. High-income countries approached near universal internet penetration by the mid-2010s, while many low-income regions (particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa) continued to face major connectivity barriers. As of 2022, nearly three-quarters of people in high-income countries used mobile internet, compared to only one-quarter in low-income countries (World Bank, 2022; ITU, 2022). This unequal trajectory risked excluding billions from the benefits of digital transformation.

International organizations began integrating digital inclusion into the broader development agenda. The World Bank launched the Identification for Development (ID4D) initiative, which supports countries in building robust, inclusive, and privacy-respecting ID systems (World Bank, 2022). The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), meanwhile, provided benchmarks and global reporting on connectivity, affordability, and the digital divide. In 2020, the UN Secretary General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation marked a turning point, explicitly recognizing digital access and digital public goods as critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2020).

This historical trajectory highlights both progress and persistent challenges. Digital technologies have democratized access to essential services and enhanced transparency, but inequities in infrastructure, affordability, skills, and governance frameworks remain unresolved. Moreover, the risks of exclusion, surveillance, and data misuse continue to complicate the promise of DPI. These mixed results from early adopters and uneven global progress illustrate why equitable access to DPI remains one of the most pressing development issues today.

IV. Current Status of the Topic

Today, the global digital landscape stands at a critical juncture. While major advances in digital connectivity and infrastructure have been achieved over the past two decades, 2.6 billion people, roughly one-third of the global population remain offline, with the vast majority living in developing countries. (World Bank, 2025). This digital exclusion undermines the capacity of vulnerable populations to access essential services, participate in the digital economy, and benefit from emerging technologies.

In Africa for example, internet connectivity illustrates both progress and persistent inequities. Between 2019 and 2022, broadband access increased from 26% to 36%, reflecting investment in submarine cables, mobile broadband, and digital infrastructure (World Bank, 2023). However, this growth conceals stark divides: rural communities remain underserved compared to urban centers, and gender disparities are significant, with women nearly 20% less likely than men to use mobile internet in low and middle-income countries. (GSMA, 2022). Such divides mean that digital public infrastructure (DPI) projects, even when expanded nationally, often fail to reach those most marginalized.

Affordability also remains a structural barrier. According to ITU benchmarks, internet access should cost less than 2% of monthly gross national income (GNI) per capita to be considered affordable. Yet in many low-income countries, data costs are 3 to 5 times higher than this threshold, making access prohibitive despite growing availability of infrastructure. (ITU, 2022). This affordability crisis particularly impacts young people, women, and those in rural economies, effectively limiting their participation in the digital revolution.

At the same time, DPI initiatives are expanding rapidly across the globe. Governments are increasingly deploying digital ID systems, interoperable payment platforms, and e-governance portals to streamline access to health, education, welfare, and financial services. For instance, as mentioned before, India's Aadhaar continues to serve as a reference point for national ID systems, while Kenya's M-Pesa mobile payment system has been instrumental in boosting financial inclusion in East Africa. (World Bank, 2022). However, these systems are not without controversy. Concerns around data protection, surveillance, exclusion errors, and lack of transparency remain acute. Reports from civil society organizations highlight cases where marginalized populations are excluded from welfare programs due to digital verification failures. (Privacy International, 2022).

Recognizing these challenges, international actors have begun developing frameworks for safer and more inclusive DPI implementation. The Universal DPI Safeguards Framework, launched in 2023 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and partners, seeks to establish global guidelines on privacy, accountability, and inclusivity in digital systems. (UNDP, 2023). Nevertheless, the adoption and enforcement of such frameworks remain uneven across countries, reflecting variations in political will, institutional capacity, and legal systems.

Moreover, the sustainability of DPI is increasingly scrutinized in light of global environmental challenges. The expansion of digital infrastructure is contributing to rising energy demand, electronic waste, and resource extraction pressures, raising questions about whether current models of DPI align with the broader goals of sustainable development. (World Bank, 2022).

Without stronger commitments to renewable energy, circular economies, and green technology adoption, DPI risks exacerbating environmental harm even as it seeks to promote inclusion.

In summary, the current status of digital public infrastructure is defined by a paradox: while more countries are adopting and expanding DPI as a cornerstone of governance and economic growth, the persistence of connectivity gaps, affordability barriers, legal uncertainties, and environmental risks underscores the urgent need for equitable, sustainable approaches to digital transformation.

V. Main Actors / Stakeholders

1. **Developing countries** depend on their national governments to establish digital public infrastructure (DPI) through policy implementation and funding because these governments serve as the main authorities for public service delivery to citizens. The governments of developed nations face multiple obstacles when they attempt to use technology for economic growth and service enhancement because they lack sufficient funding and digital sovereignty, and technical capabilities.

2. The global digital environment receives substantial influence from **developed nations** because they provide official development assistance (ODA) and host leading technology companies. These nations establish worldwide data their technological solutions.

3. The United Nations system includes international and **intergovernmental organizations** such as UNDP and protection and cybersecurity standards through their influence while using their funding to support digital development initiatives across borders which promotes ITU which work to create worldwide standards and support international partnerships and deliver technical support. The organizations play seamless system connections between nations.

4. The **World Bank** together with the **International Monetary Fund** serve as primary financial backers in an essential role in making sure digital public infrastructure development follows Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and enables who provide technical support for developing world infrastructure development. The lending activities and strategic guidance of these institutions determine which digital transformation priorities national governments should focus on.

5. The private sector, together with **technology corporations** including Google and Microsoft and Huawei, control the majority of digital hardware and software and network infrastructure worldwide. The digital ecosystem depends on their commercial activities and technical standards, and business models for its creation and accessibility, thus requiring their partnership.

6. **Civil Society Organizations** together with Digital Rights Groups, including EFF and Access Now, function as public monitors who protect human rights and defend data privacy and freedom of expression, and digital inclusion. The organizations monitor both governments and corporations to protect citizens' basic rights from being compromised during digital infrastructure development.

7. The digital transition threatens to leave behind vulnerable and **marginalized communities,** which include rural residents and people with disabilities and elderly citizens, and women. The success of equitable access policies depends on their ability to deliver benefits to these specific communities that face the highest risk of digital exclusion.

VI. Case(s) of Study

This section is intended to showcase how states have managed the access to digital public infrastructure and emerging technologies for inclusive, sustainable development. First, Singapore's Smart Nation initiative, launched in 2014, represents one of the most ambitious examples of digital public infrastructure (DPI) in the world. The initiative was designed to transform the city-state into a fully digital society, integrating government services, business operations, and citizen engagement through a cohesive digital ecosystem. At the heart of the initiative is SingPass, the national digital identity platform, which allows residents secure access to a wide array of services, including tax submission, healthcare management, banking, and even voting in certain contexts. In parallel, Singapore has developed extensive sensor networks, data analytics systems, and interoperable platforms, enabling real-time management of urban infrastructure, traffic flow, and energy consumption. (Smart Nation Singapore, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

The Smart Nation initiative illustrates how DPI can enhance both efficiency and inclusiveness. For citizens, online services reduce the need to navigate bureaucratic processes physically, saving time and ensuring more transparent delivery of public services. Businesses benefit from streamlined administrative procedures and access to government data that supports innovation, research, and economic growth. The initiative also emphasizes public engagement, allowing citizens to provide feedback and participate in digital governance. However, Singapore's model also highlights the ongoing challenges inherent in DPI deployment. High reliance on centralized digital systems necessitates constant vigilance against cybersecurity threats, while ethical concerns surrounding data privacy and surveillance require robust legal frameworks and transparent governance practices. Furthermore, while the majority of Singaporeans are digitally literate, efforts are continuously needed to support the elderly and those less familiar with technology to prevent exclusion. The experience of Singapore underscores that even highly developed digital systems require continuous monitoring, policy refinement, and investment in digital literacy to ensure equitable access and sustainability.

Digital Economy for Africa (DE4A) Initiative

In contrast, the Digital Economy for Africa (DE4A) Initiative, spearheaded by the World Bank in partnership with the African Union, focuses on accelerating digital inclusion across a diverse and often under-resourced continent. DE4A aims to ensure that by 2030 every individual, business, and government entity in Africa is digitally connected, promoting broadband expansion, e-government platforms, mobile financial services, and digital skills development (World Bank, 2023). The initiative has already contributed to measurable progress in several countries: broadband coverage has increased significantly, mobile data costs have decreased in targeted regions, and governments are strengthening regulatory frameworks to support secure and interoperable digital services.

Despite these achievements, DE4A illustrates the structural and social challenges of digital transformation. Large segments of the population, particularly rural communities and women, remain under-connected, highlighting persistent inequalities in infrastructure, education, and socioeconomic status. For instance, women are estimated to be nearly 20% less likely than men to access mobile internet, reflecting systemic barriers to digital participation. (ITU, 2022).

Beyond connectivity, challenges include limited digital literacy, uneven deployment of infrastructure, and the need for locally relevant content that aligns with the languages and cultural contexts of diverse populations. DE4A also raises questions of environmental sustainability, as the expansion of digital infrastructure increases energy consumption and electronic waste, particularly in regions with limited regulatory oversight and recycling capabilities. (World Bank, 2022). The initiative demonstrates that while digital public infrastructure can be a catalyst for economic development and social inclusion, it must be paired with targeted policy interventions, capacity building, and sustainability measures to fully realize its potential.

VII. Important Support Material / References for Investigation

Delegates are strongly encouraged to consult a wide variety of sources to grasp the full complexity of ensuring equitable access to digital public infrastructure (DPI) and emerging technologies. A balanced mix of institutional reports, case studies, civil society analyses, and multimedia resources will allow for a deeper understanding of both the opportunities and risks tied to this issue.

The World Bank's Digital Development Overview provides a comprehensive assessment of global digital trends, examining issues such as connectivity gaps, affordability, and policy priorities. (World Bank, 2022). For regional perspectives, the Digital Economy for Africa (DE4A) reports are particularly valuable, as they track Africa's progress in building digital infrastructure and highlight barriers such as rural-urban divides and financial exclusion (World Bank, 2023).

At the international policy level, the United Nations' Roadmap for Digital Cooperation outlines global strategies to promote digital inclusion and cooperation across borders, while the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework, developed by UNDP and partners, offers practical guidelines to help countries design DPI systems that respect privacy, inclusion, and accountability. (United Nations, 2020; UNDP, 2023).

For case-specific analysis, the study *The Governance of Digital Public Infrastructure: Aadhaar* by the International Center for Law & Economics explores both the benefits and governance challenges of India's Aadhaar system, making it a critical reference for understanding the balance between efficiency and risk in digital ID programs. (International Center for Law & Economics, 2022). Complementing this, Privacy International's reports on Aadhaar and other digital ID systems examine the human rights dimensions of DPI, particularly concerns about surveillance, data misuse, and exclusion. (Privacy International, 2022).

For reliable quantitative data, the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Measuring Digital Development series provides the most up-to-date global statistics on connectivity, affordability, and digital divides. (ITU, 2022). Finally, to supplement written sources with expert perspectives, delegates are encouraged to watch recordings of the World Bank's Global Digital Summits, which bring together policymakers, scholars, and industry leaders to debate strategies for bridging the digital divide and implementing sustainable DPI solutions.

By engaging with these diverse resources, delegates will be able to develop a nuanced, evidence-based understanding of the issue, equipping them to craft policy proposals that address both the technical and ethical dimensions of equitable digital access.

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