



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 June 2022

Original: English

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Committee on Information and Communications Technology,
Science, Technology and Innovation

Fourth session

Bangkok and online, 30 August–1 September 2022

Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

Action plan for implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, 2022–2026

Summary of the process for the development and main elements of the action plan for implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, 2022–2026

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At its third session, in August 2020, the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation recommended that the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) set up a drafting group as part of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee to develop an action plan for the next phase of implementation of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, for 2022–2026, for consideration and adoption by the Committee at its fourth session, in 2022.

The present document contains a summary of the actions taken and the progress achieved in implementing the Committee's recommendation. The action plan for implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, 2022–2026, which was adopted by the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee at its fifth session, held on 25 November 2021, contains 25 actions grouped under three pillars: connectivity for all; digital technologies and applications; and digital data. The Committee is invited to consider endorsing the action plan as a regional blueprint for facilitating the next phase of cooperative actions among members and associate members of ESCAP, as well as other stakeholders, for bridging the digital divide and for accelerating digital transformation in Asia and the Pacific.

* ESCAP/CICTSTI/2022/L.1.

I. Introduction

1. The Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative is a region-wide platform aimed at bridging the digital divide and accelerating digital transformation through regionally coordinated actions. At its third session, held on 19 and 20 August 2020, the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation recommended that the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) set up a drafting group as part of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee to develop an action plan for the next phase of implementation of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, for 2022–2026, for consideration and adoption by the Committee at its fourth session, in 2022.

2. The secretariat set up a drafting group chaired by the representative of Maldives; representatives of Mongolia and Tonga acted as Vice-Chairs. Two meetings of the drafting group were held, in May and September 2021, with the participation of 31 States members of ESCAP. The draft action plan that resulted from those meetings was subsequently adopted by the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee at its fifth session, on 25 November 2021. Also at its fifth session, the Steering Committee decided to submit the adopted document for endorsement by the Committee at its fourth session, in 2022.¹

II. Contribution to the fulfilment of regional and global digital commitments

3. At the global level, the action plan contributes to the implementation of the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations,² in which Heads of State and Government recognized that digital technologies had a potential to accelerate the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and resolved to ensure safe and affordable digital access for all. In that same declaration, they made 12 commitments, the seventh of which was to improve digital cooperation, and recognized that the United Nations could provide a platform for all stakeholders to participate in such deliberations.

4. In addition, the action plan was developed within the overall framework of the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Our Common Agenda”, which contains a reference to the commitment to improve digital cooperation.³ That commitment emphasizes the need to connect all people to the Internet, avoid Internet fragmentation, and protect data and digital commons. The action plan also contributes to promoting regional implementation of the action lines contained in the outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society.⁴

5. At the regional level, the action plan contributes to the implementation of ESCAP resolutions 75/7, 77/1 and 78/1, which were adopted in 2019, 2021 and 2022, respectively. In its resolution 75/7, ESCAP requested its

¹ The text of the action plan being submitted to the Committee is contained in an information document (ESCAP/CICTSTI/2022/INF/1).

² General Assembly resolution 75/1.

³ See A/75/982, para. 131.

⁴ For more information on the action lines, see www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/Content/Documents/wsis-sdg_matrix_document.pdf.

Executive Secretary to continue to support the ongoing activities on the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative; to support member States with policy advice, technical studies and capacity-building; and to encourage the participation of various stakeholders in the development of subregional plans for the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative. In its resolution 77/1, ESCAP recognized the importance of advancing connectivity for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific and that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had demonstrated the importance of promoting regional connectivity. It also acknowledged the catalytic role that digital technologies could play in reducing the impact of the pandemic on economies and people's well-being. In ESCAP resolution 78/1, members and associate members committed themselves to strengthening digital cooperation and expressed the intention to cooperate at all levels, including the ministerial level, in closing the digital connectivity divide, ensuring digital skills training, strengthening digital connectivity, addressing digital trust and security, and promoting an inclusive digital economy and society. In that regard, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative could be one of the useful regional platforms for the promotion of digital cooperation.

III. Principles and scope of the action plan for implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, 2022–2026

6. The action plan is aimed at promoting digital connectivity for all, digital technologies and applications, and digital data. It serves as a regional blueprint for facilitating the next phase of cooperative actions among members and associate members of ESCAP, as well as other stakeholders, for bridging the digital divide and accelerating digital transformation in Asia and the Pacific.

7. The development of the action plan was guided by four principles. The action plan should: (a) be action oriented; (b) promote ownership by ESCAP members and associate members; (c) promote the engagement of various stakeholders, including Governments, United Nations entities, regional organizations and civil society; and (d) support the implementation of regional and global digital mandates and agendas.

8. The action plan contains 25 actions grouped under three pillars:⁵ connectivity for all; digital technologies and applications; and digital data. The actions are interrelated and each one is linked to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and targets, as well as the relevant action lines contained in the outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society. Actions aimed at promoting cooperation among members and associate members, as well as other stakeholders, could take several forms, including joint studies on common digital opportunities and challenges, digital policy guidelines, common initiatives such as research, and capacity-building and awareness-raising events.

⁵ See ESCAP/CICTSTI/2022/INF/1, annex III.

IV. Operational framework

9. To help guide the implementation of the action plan, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee established three working groups (one for each pillar).⁶ The work of each working group is led by a bureau consisting of one Chair or two Co-Chairs and up to three Vice-Chairs. The table below shows the composition of the bureaux agreed to by the Steering Committee.

Bureaux of the working groups (2022–2026)

	<i>Working group 1 (Pillar 1: Connectivity for all)</i>	<i>Working group 2 (Pillar 2: Digital technologies and applications)</i>	<i>Working group 3 (Pillar 3: Digital data)</i>
Chairs	Armenia United States of America	India	Republic of Korea
Vice-Chairs	Sri Lanka Maldives Kazakhstan	Russian Federation Armenia	Armenia Sri Lanka

10. Each working group implements key actions of common interest to guide and monitor the implementation of the action plan as a whole. The Chairs encourage cooperation among members and associate members, as well as other stakeholders, and report on progress to the Steering Committee. The bureaux of the working groups will operate in line with the terms of reference⁷ of the Steering Committee for an initial period of three years, which may be extended for another two years until 2026, by when the action plan is expected to have been implemented.

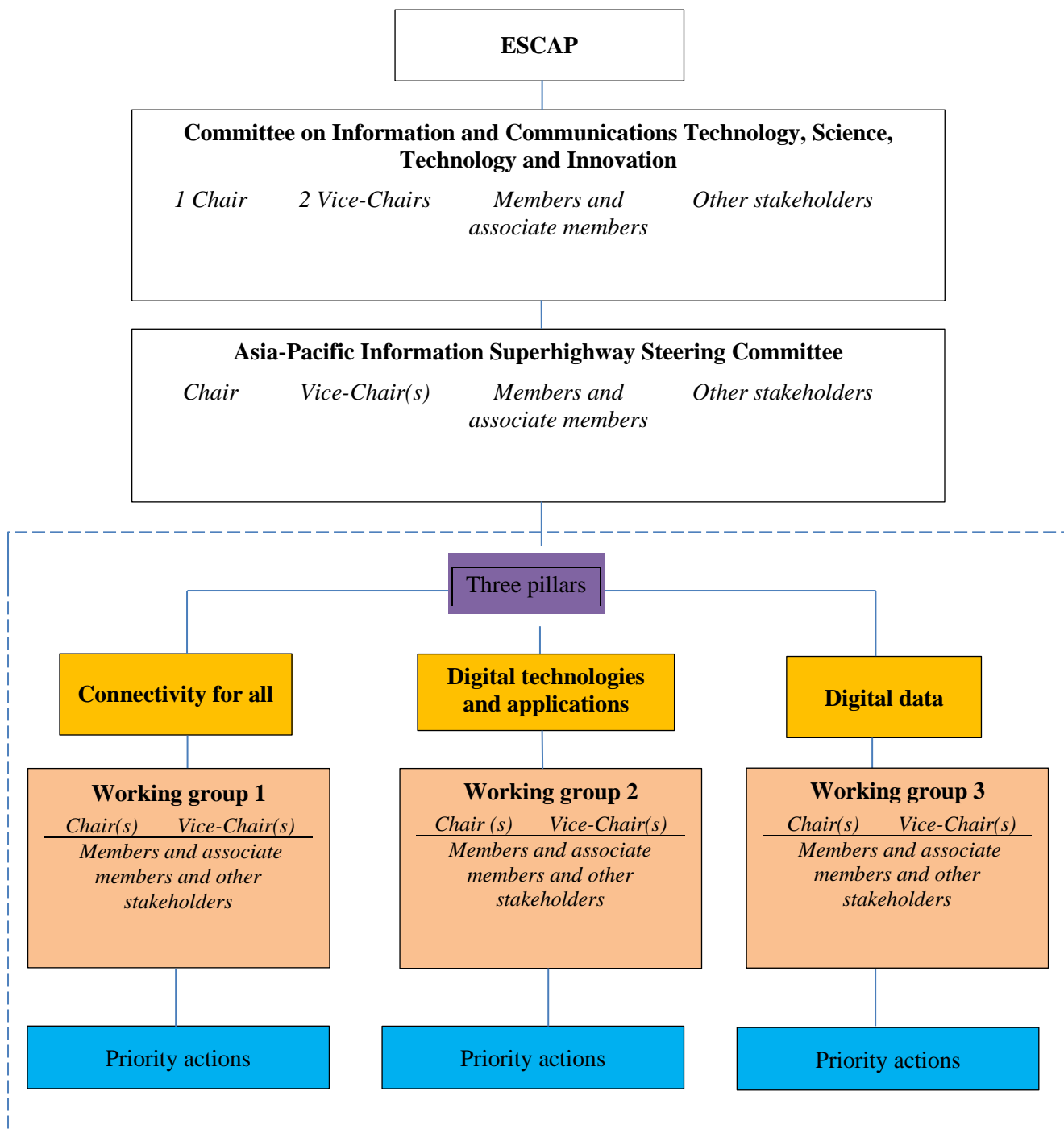
11. The working groups will report periodically to the Steering Committee on progress made under each pillar. The Chair of the Steering Committee will then submit a report, including key recommendations and decisions, to the Committee and ESCAP at their upcoming sessions (see figure).

12. At the end of the five-year implementation period (2022–2026), the governance structure and the terms of reference will be reviewed and assessed by the Steering Committee. Any recommendations arising from the review will be made to the Committee for consideration and adoption.

⁶ See www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/Outcome%20Document%20AP-IS%20SC-5%20FINAL_0.pdf.

⁷ See ESCAP/CICTSTI/2022/INF/1, annex IV.

Operational framework



V. Issues for consideration by the Committee

13. The Committee may wish:

(a) To express appreciation for the work done and the progress achieved by the drafting group, as well as by the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee, on the development of the action plan for implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, 2022–2026;

(b) To endorse the action plan and submit it as an input to the Asia-Pacific digital ministerial conference to be held on 9 and 10 November 2022 in Seoul and to ESCAP at its seventy-ninth session, to be held in 2023;

(c) To encourage members and associate members of ESCAP to continue to support the implementation of the action plan through financial and in-kind contributions;

(d) To encourage the active engagement and contributions of various stakeholders, including international organizations, businesses, non-governmental organizations, academia and think tanks, in the implementation of the action plan;

(e) To invite the secretariat to support members and associate members in implementing the action plan, including through evidence-based policy research and analysis, capacity-building and multi-stakeholder policy dialogues at the regional and subregional levels aimed at sharing information and reviewing the status of implementation.
