AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

THE EXPERT REPORT

The digital divide as a driver of human rights violations

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Introduction

Before moving directly to the topic of this report, it is necessary to define the concept of "digital divide". The digital divide is limitation of the opportunities of a social group due to the lack of access to modern means of communication. It is obvious that if people do not have reliable information, inequality and violations are inevitable. It is needless to say that modern world tends to face digital divide causing non-observance of basic human rights. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when society was forced to rely on modern technology for completing daily routine tasks such as maintaining communication with one another, keeping in touch with learning process, working from home, and many others, the challenge to bridge the digital gap grew rapidly. The less developed a country is, the less is its respect for human rights. All these factors determine the significance of the issue under consideration. We must do everything possible to find the solution to this big challenge.

Chapter 1

On the global level, additional factors such as per capita gross domestic product, international trade volume, degree of democratization, deregulation of the telecommunications market, density of communication infrastructure, and investments in research and development also influence Internet diffusion. Thus, industrial societies are more prone to implement new technologies than less-developed countries. What is more, factors such as low literacy and income levels, geographical restrictions, lack of motivation to use technology, lack of physical access to technology, and digital illiteracy contribute to the digital divide. First and foremost, digital divide influences incredibly the ability to educate. If we consider African countries, slavery and colonialism helped in creating digital inequality. Usually, the more technologies a country has, the more abilities to learn it provides to people. Secondly, it is needless to say how digital divide influences people's minds about their political regimes. It's

much easier to implement authoritarian politics when citizens are lacking technologies and thus information. Obviously, that is the strongest mean of violating people's rights as when they have no idea about their rights, they will not be able to realise that they have been violated. The brightest example here is Norh Korea. There is no tool existing that would let us control all the crimes against humanity if there is no ability to hear from the offended ones.

Chapter 2

What steps UN takes in order to defeat digital divide and thus human rights violations? The first thing to be mentioned is surely UN's charter. The first chapter says that UN's aim is to keep worldwide peace and safety. It is needless to say how strongly this part connects to the topic of digital divide as it can influence people's safety and even peace around the world. UN charter is no doubt essential, but this particular topic is more narrowly focused than overall world safety and peace. That is why, other UN's steps in order to bridging the divide should be stated.

Second thing after UN's charter is UN's articles on different topics and issues. As a rule, such articles not only shine a light on the problem, but also represent certain actions being taken to fight the problem. Therefore, UN's articles are helpful when there is need for understanding the UN's activities on a specific issue, which exists in the question of technological division. To start with, the UN's article called 'The evolving digital divide' should be mentioned as it can be understood from its name that it is strongly connected to the topic and may give reliable and useful information. Article says that in order to lower the digital gap, for more than a decade 'Broadband Commission' has been working towards around-the-world connectivity. 'Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development' itself is a public-private partnership that fosters digital cooperation and achieves aims for universal connectivity. Surely, this organisation has a lot to do with the mentioned above topic. It was established in 2010 by other huge organisations such as UNESCO, ITU and some presidents. The Broadband Commission acts as a UN advocacy engine for the implementation of the UNSG's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. What is more

UNDP has also been working on extending connectivity to remote areas for many years. Due to this we can see early growth of thew number of internet users.

As it was mentioned before, the topic of digital divide has no doubt been up-to-date, however it started to draw attention in 2020, during the pandemic of COVID-19. In the UN's article called 'Bridging Asia-Pacific 'digital divide' vital to realize tech benefits' information on the connectivity between COVID-19 and technological inequality can be found. The article states that nearly 50 percent of people in Asia and Pacific region have no internet connectivity. That is huge problem because in conditions like this, it is impossible to fully control the statistics of the disease. The Universal Declaration of Human rights in paragraph 25, article 25 states that every human has an equal right to get medical help, that would be enough to provide one's healthy life. Surely, with no internet connection and no control of ill people, there is no ability to keep a human being's rights not violated. Here, internet is an essential and irreplaceable tool that protects and provides for human rights. The UN body had also been

holding high-level regional conversations with the countries of Asia and Pacific in order to share relevant knowledge which would have helped states to bridge the digital inequality. UN also stated that more investments are required to help those who have no internet connection. Surely, it is very useful and essential as it is unreal to apply a policy with no budget. This example represent perfectly that UN's will towards universal connectivity is strong enough.

One more issue in the sphere of digital divide is again connected to COVID-19 and that is education – one more relevant human right. UN's article that raises this issue is 'Globally, 1 in 3 children missed out on remote learning when COVID-19 shuttered schools'. Taking a look at this numbers, represented by UN, it can seem unreal, but that is a sad reality we are living in today. In sub-Saharan Africa half of student did not manage to study online, so they did not get an opportunity to learn because of digital divide. Especially, when talking about access to gadgets, marginal and poor countries become the leaders among numbers of those children, who did not get an opportunity to learn because they do not have any tools for it, such gadgets and

internet itself. Here, the UN passes out a good recommendation to the states, that draws attention to this bid issue. UN recommends the states to incorporate compensatory learning for lost instructional time into school continuity and reopening plans and that is a prolific commentary, that would help these children, so that their basic rights are not violated.

What is more, one thing that aims at bridging digital divide is 'UN Technology Facilitation Mechanism'. TFM itself is an online platform which supports states in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by their 2030. Obviously, reaching sustainable development requires universal internet connectivity. Because connectivity itself protects human rights from violation. It is needless to say that when human rights are violated, there is no sustainable development possible.

All in all, UN aims to take care of the left behind people, to develop policies and expand programmes that prioritize inclusion. UN shows its' interest in bridging the digital divide between states, so that any individual would be able to live a complete, equal life without violations.

Chapter 3

Fortunately, the UN is not the only one concerned about digital inequality. Digital divide can be an issue in different many ways, so obviously ways of preventing technological inequality are not only UN's subjects of interest.

To start with, very popular now SpaceX's Starlink and Amazon have started a campaign together aiming at lowering technological divide by sending thousands of satellites into orbit to fill internet dark spots around the whole world. This generous act will play a huge role in providing universal connectivity. Because we can surely provide the gadgets, pass out laws and do other things, but all is not taken into account when the problematic area simply has no satellites for providing internet connection. It can happen due to many different reasons, however that is still the biggest obstruction when bridging technological divide. What is more, when two enormous corporations, such as Amazon and Space X care enough of digital poverty, they are not only providing for protection of human rights

and sustainable development, but also give a good example for the states. As we all know, governments are the ones who can help largely to prevent mentioned above division.

That is why, some governments also create programmes that would help the issue. India is a great example here as it passed out a 'Digital India Program' that is supposed not only to cover the whole country with internet connection, but also to create digital services for education, healthcare banking and governance. That is a good example as here, India takes care of the most relevant parts. First step is to give internet connection to everyone. And secondly, to provide digital services on the basis of universal internet connection among the country. This policy is very practical and useful. Hopefully, it would help with bridging digital divide, as the population of India is very huge.

Finally, there is an organisation called 'IEEE – Connecting the Unconnected' which makes an enormous amount of work in order to lower the impact of digital divide by funding and more. As it was mentioned earlier, no policy or project can work without good funding.

IEEE have created the Connecting the Unconnected Challenge, that is looking for an extremely needed thing – providers that would be able to cooperate with the IEEE by providing internet to the unconnected states.

Last but not least, there are a lot of other concerned organizations other than the UN and that gives hope that one day, it would be possible to say that digital divide had been eliminated. Every year, the number of organizations and governments involved in the issue of technological inequality is growing. And these are no doubt forward-looking statistics.

Conclusion

All things considered; it is now possible to realise in how many ways digital poverty can violate peoples' rights. It may take away from one person an ability to learn or an ability to get proper healthcare. At the same time, individuals basically cannot learn about their basic rights and live all their life being violated. However, not only UN, but states and other organizations started to take care of the problem. And that is giving hope that yearly, less and less

people are violated in their rights. Hopefully, more and more actors will get involved in the issue as it is beneficial for everyone, even for the economy. It is needless to say what a big role internet market plays nowadays, so providing internet to the remote areas would also increase the number of economical actors and markets. And it is even interconnected with the issue as the more developed and wide international economy we have, the more opportunities for the connection of unconnected individuals we get.

To recapitulate, digital divide is no doubt a challenge to respect of human rights. But UN and ither actors are doing their best in order to lower the impact of technological gap on people's life. Hopefully, one day, there would be no digital gap disturbing from providing basic human rights.

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