

Summary Report

ESCAP–UN DESA Capacity-Building Workshop on Digital Data Governance

12–13 June 2025, UNCC Bangkok, Thailand

Conference Room 4 (CR-4)

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Introduction

The ESCAP–UN DESA Capacity-Building Workshop on Digital Data Governance was held in person at the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) in Bangkok, Thailand, from 12 to 13 June 2025. Co-organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the workshop aimed to enhance institutional capacities of government officials in the Asia-Pacific region on digital data governance and e-government, aligned with the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (APIS) Action Plan 2022–2026. The workshop featured high-level opening remarks, expert presentations, country case studies, interactive group exercises, and discussions on regional collaboration frameworks, particularly in the context of APIS and the UN DESA data governance initiative.

Day 1

Session 1: Opening

Professor Wisit Wisitsora-at, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society of Thailand, delivered welcoming remarks. He emphasized the growing importance of data governance in the digital and AI era, highlighting the need for strong infrastructure, legal frameworks, and data-sharing mechanisms. He noted that data is no longer just "the new oil" but "oxygen" in the age of AI. He underscored the importance of national AI strategies and readiness in connection with data governance.

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, Director, ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD), ESCAP, welcomed participants and emphasized Thailand's leadership in the digital transformation agenda. She emphasized the importance of a trusted data infrastructure in the AI era, referring to data as "oxygen" rather than "oil." Ms. Bonapace highlighted persisting digital divides in the region and expressed the hope that the workshop would help build inclusive data governance capacity. She also emphasized alignment with global frameworks such as the WSIS Action Lines and the Global Digital Compact and expressed ESCAP's commitment to support its members.

Mr. Vincenzo Aquaro, Chief of Branch, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), UN DESA, opened the workshop on behalf of UN DESA. He recognized the collaboration between UN DESA and ESCAP and thanked the Government of Thailand and partners for their support. He highlighted Asia's leadership in digital development, while noting continued gaps in institutional capacity and digital inclusion. He introduced UN DESA's project on digital data governance, supported by the UN Peace and Development Fund, and emphasized the importance of peer learning, regional cooperation, and alignment with the SDGs and AI governance needs.

Session 2: Data Governance Project – Key findings and the way forward in Asia Pacific countries

Mr. Junho Lee, Associate Expert, DPIDG, UN DESA, presented the findings of the 2024 E-Government Survey and the results of a data governance baseline study conducted in 11 Asia-Pacific countries ([PPT slides](#)). First published in 2001 and updated biennially, the Survey serves as a global benchmarking tool for e-government development. The 2024 edition introduced two key enhancements: a new comprehensive digital framework and a stronger focus on AI. Mr. Lee shared global and regional EGD trends using a color-coded map, noting significant progress in ASEAN countries. He also emphasized the importance of APIS under ESCAP and highlighted digital cooperation and development initiatives led by ESCWA. In the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand remain leaders, while several other countries have shown marked improvements. He emphasized the importance of data governance in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), citing Cambodia's rural water management system as a notable example. He outlined the Data Governance Project, launched in 2022, which includes workshops held at national, regional, and global levels, reaching approximately 800 beneficiaries. He explained the classification of data and how effective data governance supports better management. Finally, he introduced an AI-based benchmarking toolkit that enables participating countries to learn from best practices.

Representatives delivered panel presentations from Cambodia, Bhutan, and the Lao PDR.

- **Mr. Rapid Sun, Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, Cambodia**, emphasized the importance of digital transformation in building a digital economy and society ([PPT slides](#)). Cambodia's developing data governance policy aims to effectively and efficiently utilize data in the public sector, promoting data sovereignty and fostering data-driven economies with four strategic goals. UN-DESA supported Cambodia in creating the data governance baseline report and collaborated with the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT) and the National Information Society Agency of Korea (NIA) to produce the report on open government data. He presented Cambodia's draft data governance policy with four strategic goals and seven follow-up activities, aiming for adoption by end-2025.
- **Mr. Tandin Dorji, Senior ICT Technical Associate, Government Technology (GocTech), Bhutan**, introduced Bhutan's national data governance framework, which is built around the four EGD pillars and six core elements ([PPT slides](#)). He emphasized that data governance enhances informed decision-making and service delivery. Six major challenges were identified, including a lack of legal structures and capacity. He recognized UN DESA's contributions in knowledge and skills development and called for continued international cooperation in the form of technical assistance, capacity building, and institutional reform. He stressed that successful implementation depends on reforms and global partnerships.
- **Ms. Kittisack Pasomsouk, Deputy Director, Digital Government Center, Lao PDR**, presented Lao PDR's progress in building digital capacity and infrastructure ([PPT slides](#)). She outlined the three pillars of digital transformation—government, economy, and society—and five strategies covering infrastructure, services, policy, skills, and

collaboration. She cited limited digital literacy and rural infrastructure as key barriers and pointed to the digital divide and data privacy concerns. The government is implementing four projects aligned with the SDGs, focusing on enhancing infrastructure, building partnerships (including with NGOs and universities), and developing regulations. She acknowledged UN DESA's role in sharing global best practices and fostering South-South cooperation.

Session 3: Digital Inclusion and Transformation of APIS

Mr. Tae Hyung Kim, Chief, ICT and Development Section (IDD), ESCAP, presented the achievements and strategic priorities of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative (APIS) and its Action Plan 2022-2026 ([PPT slides](#)). He emphasized that the APIS Initiative is the only regional ICT cooperation network covering members and associate members of ESCAP across all the Asia-Pacific region. The APIS Action Plan 2022-2026 provides a regional blueprint for cooperation among countries and stakeholders, and is structured on three pillars (Connectivity, Digital Technology and Applications, and Digital Data) and 25 actions. Mr. Kim introduced the APIS Steering Committee and its three associated working groups, supporting countries' digital inclusion and transformation. He also highlighted two recent flagship publications: (1) the APDT report 2022, highlighting the development of a new Digital Transformation Index, and (2) the APDT report 2024, analyzing the Digital-Growth-Climate nexus. Among the eight projects implemented in the ICT and Development Section of ESCAP, he shared the importance of the Pacific IXP, covering Fiji, Samoa, and New Zealand, and ESCAP's E-Resilience Monitoring Dashboard [as the cases](#).

Presentations from representatives of the APIS working groups from Sri Lanka, the Republic of Korea, Azerbaijan, India, the Russian Federation, and Samoa followed.

- **Mr. Chanuka Wattegama, Director (Policy), Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), Sri Lanka – APIS WG1 & WG3**, presented the key challenges in data governance faced by developing countries ([PPT slides](#)). These included: 1) poor data quality and consistency due to outdated or incomplete information; 2) data silos and reliance on costly legacy systems, compounded by a shortage of skilled professionals; 3) difficulties in balancing data utility with user privacy; 4) legal and regulatory complexity arising from differing data protection rules; 5) a lack of skilled personnel in data governance, data science, and cybersecurity; and 6) cultural resistance to organizational change.
- **Mr. Sang-yirl Nam, Senior Research Fellow, International Cooperation Research Division, Korea Information Society Development Institute (KISDI), Republic of Korea – APIS WG3**, presented Korea's approaches to digital transformation and inclusion ([PPT slides](#)). He highlighted Korea's achievements in data governance, particularly its top performance in public data policy and implementation. He noted that global data governance discussions often focus on data production, ownership, and cross-border flows, and pointed to differing perspectives on data sovereignty between countries such as the United States

and China. He concluded by outlining several cross-cutting policy challenges, including the need to strike a balance between data openness and control, and the difficulty of managing overlapping or conflicting interests across sectors and stakeholders.

- **Mr. Semral Aliyev, Head, Public Service Design and Innovation Department, State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations, Azerbaijan – APIS WG2**, shared the ASAN success story ([PPT slides](#)). He described ASAN as a transformative initiative that simplifies complex administrative procedures, reduces processing time, and enhances data transparency. The service also fosters a social ecosystem through the adoption of AI and other technological innovations. He reported that ASAN achieved the highest scores across all seven evaluation parameters. Additional features include 24/7 centralized online payment systems for all government transactions, public data portals, management tools, a model for service center construction, and a publication produced with ESCAP support.
- **Mr. Bramhanand Jha, Vice President – Program and Knowledge Management, National E-Governance Division, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, India – APIS WG2**, presented India's experience in digital data governance ([PPT slides](#)). He highlighted the importance of seamless data exchange and integration and emphasized global cooperation through the use of an internationally standardized system architecture. He noted that such platforms are publicly accessible and designed to be inclusive across countries.
- **Mr. Zorikto Gomboin, Deputy Head, Laboratory of International Development, Standardization and Applications of ICTs, Radio Research and Development Institute, Russian Federation – APIS WG2**, introduced a project focused on enhancing digital public services for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) ([PPT slides](#)). He outlined the project timeline, beginning on June 26, 2024, and culminating in a regional workshop scheduled for August 26–27, 2025. He described multi-level needs assessments conducted at national, regional, and international levels, and categorized government-to-business (G2B) public services into several distinct types.
- **Ms. Ofaofa Iosefo, Senior Records Officer, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Samoa**, shared key findings and challenges from Samoa's digital transformation journey ([PPT slides](#)). She presented Samoa's planned approach to establishing a National Data Governance Framework based on four pillars—policy, institutions, people, and processes— and six elements of the UN DESA model, and outlined next steps, including the formulation of a data protection policy, investment in digital literacy and capacity building, and stronger collaboration with regional partners.

Mr. Prabin Maharjan, Programme Management Expert, UNPOG (DPIDG), UN DESA, explained the role of public officials and institutions in advancing digital inclusion within public governance ([PPT slides](#)). He introduced the Global Digital Compact and highlighted key findings from the 2024 UN E-Government Survey, along with a working definition of digital inclusion. To address structural barriers, he outlined three key strategies: data-informed decision-making, user-centred design, and innovative service delivery mechanisms. He explained that the role of public officials spans

four main areas and that UNPOG is currently developing a Digital Inclusion Capacity Toolkit. The toolkit's three objectives are to strengthen competencies, support the formulation and implementation of inclusive strategies, and promote continuous learning and institutional capacity.

Session 4: Successful Case of Regional and Intra-National Data Governance and Cooperation Initiatives

Mr. Elmir Aghasoy, Chief Specialist, Strategy Planning and Development Department, Azerbaijan, presented Azerbaijan's e-participation platform ([PPT slides](#)). He explained that the platform aligns with the country's broader digital development strategy and supports inclusive policymaking by amplifying the voices of citizens. It operates through modular features, including petitions and discussion forums. Citizens can access services via mobile phones or public kiosks, including tools for AI voice interaction and audio playback for people with impaired vision. The platform supports data-driven policymaking through sentiment analysis and publishes results to ensure transparency. It includes features such as visualized dashboards, AI chatbots in multiple languages, and the ability for citizens to request new datasets, to which the government must respond within 15 days. The platform is currently undergoing a limited-scale pilot to gather feedback from vulnerable groups before nationwide deployment.

Mr. Baek Dongyub, Principal Director, National Information Society Agency, Republic of Korea, presented ROK's comprehensive open data strategy and the development of a "one data ecosystem" that promotes private sector innovation ([PPT slides](#)). ROK has enacted open data laws since 2013 and established a governance framework, including the Open Data Strategic Council. Examples of open data applications include flood alert systems, proptech services, and livestock management. The "MyData" initiative empowers individuals to control their personal data, facilitating secure data transfer across various sectors. The government has also invested in AI training datasets for SMEs through the AI Hub. ROK operates international cooperation centres in several countries to support digital government development.

Day 2

UN DESA's E-government survey toolkit workshop

Mr. Junho Lee, Associate Expert, DPIDG, UN DESA, introduced the E-Government Development Index (EGDI), first published in 2001, with the latest edition in 2024. He presented the components of the National E-Government Toolkit, which include technology, content provision, e-participation, and service provision. Using a Mentimeter poll, participants were invited to identify key EDGI indicators in their countries, including underperforming areas and policies or initiatives that could enhance performance. Participants actively engaged in the exercise. He also guided participants to the 2024 E-Government Survey and Knowledgebase website, explaining how to access country-specific data. In response to questions about data input, he demonstrated the feedback process and clarified that EGDI scores reflect the timing of data collection.

In addition, he demonstrated how to utilize the national e-government toolkit to analyze and compare e-government performance across regions and cities. He explained how participants could access the specific questions used to assess each indicator and identify underperforming sub-components in their countries. Emphasizing the goal of self-improvement rather than competition, he encouraged participants to complete the workshop survey to pinpoint areas for enhancement. Facilitators provided guidance throughout the exercise. He also presented a case from Nepal, illustrating how the analysis of government-submitted answers can help understand the causes of underperformance and how EDGI scores are derived.