UNITED NATIONS
ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Concept Note (first draft)

Fifth session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS)
Steering Committee

Virtual Meeting

25 November 2021, 13:00-16:00 hours (Bangkok time)

1. Overview

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with economic, social and environmental uncertainties, has brought to the fore new digital divides and development inequalities in the Asia-Pacific region. The pandemic has also highlighted the growing importance of digitalization and digital connectivity - across the entire development spectrum. While the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic vary within and across the region, the region has witnessed the common implication of COVID-19 that digital readiness, universal broadband connectivity and digital capacity have played a key role in containing the contagion, mitigating the devastating socio-economic impacts and preparing for building back with more resilience.

At the same time, despite progress made in policy development for addressing the digital divide and bringing affordable connectivity to all, many low-income economies in the Asia-Pacific region still struggle with basic levels of digital connectivity and large swathes of their populations suffer from a lack of access to meaningful and affordable broadband Internet for inclusive development. This limited connectivity impedes governments' efforts to address the impacts of COVID-19, maintain delivery of a broad range of services during lockdowns and enhance productivity for economic growth.

Against this background, the third session of the Committee on Information and Communications, Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation (CICTSTI-3) held in August 2020 recommended that the secretariat 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.

In this connection, the ESCAP secretariat established the drafting group and organized two drafting group meetings in May and September 2021. The drafting group chaired by H.E Mr. Mohamed Shareef, State Minister, Department of Technology, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, Republic of Maldives, discussed the draft action plan for the next phase of implementation of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS action plan 2022-2206), and produced the final draft documents for endorsement at the fifth session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee.

This AP-IS action plan will serve as a blueprint for regional cooperative actions that promote digital connectivity and digital transformation as the underlying foundations for regional economic connectivity and an inclusive digital economy. The action plan will also support the regional implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation which calls on all stakeholders to work together towards achieving universal access to affordable broadband Internet by 2030.

2. **Key Agendas of the fifth session of AP-IS Steering Committee**
    a) Review the progress of the 1st AP-IS Master Plan;
    b) Review and endorse the AP-IS action plan 2022-2026;
    c) Review and endorse the revised Terms of Reference of the AP-IS Steering Committee and Working Groups;

3. **Mode and date**
    - Virtual meeting
    - On 25 November 2021, 13:00-16:00 hours (Bangkok time).

4. **Participants**
    - Representatives of member and associate member States
    - Partner organizations (observers)

5. **Invitation / Registration Process / Meeting documents**
    - Participants are requested to complete online registration no later than **15 November 2021** at <https://www.unescap.org/events/2021/fifth-session-asia-pacific-information-superhighway-ap-steering-committee>.
    - Participants can access the meeting documents through the same link provided above.
    - Any question related to this event may be directed to the ESCAP secretariat (at email: escap-ids@un.org).

6. **Interpretation**
    - The meeting will be conducted in English only.

Attachment: Tentative programme