Ithra Digital Wellbeing

ithra

Country Report

Kuwait

Country insights report 2024

sync

Kuwait

Overall score
50.0 (out of 100)

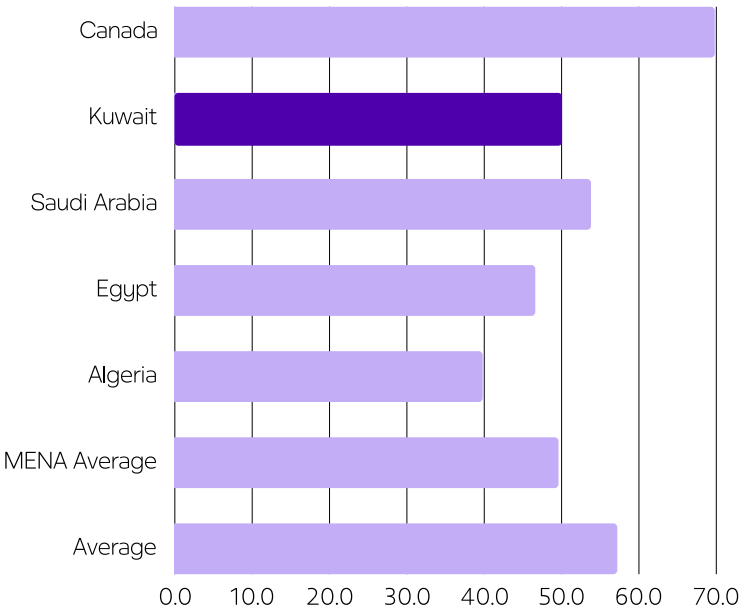
Placed
30th (out of 35)

The Digital Wellbeing Index (DWI) provides a clear picture of positive dimensions in Kuwait's digital landscape, while also signaling many opportunities for further advancement. The country is positioned 30th among the 35 examined countries, with relative strengths in connectivity and social connectedness. The biggest opportunities for improvement lie in the pillars associated with physical health and the ability to disconnect.

Scoring 50 overall, Kuwait slightly surpasses the MENA regional average of 49.6. Both sub-indexes, "Capturing Opportunities" (54.5) and "Balancing Needs" (45.4), present avenues for improvement. Kuwait has the potential to boost digital wellbeing by capitalizing on highlighted opportunities and achieving a more efficient balance in addressing the digital needs of its citizens.

Comparative performance in the DWI

FIGURE 1



Source: Global Digital Wellbeing Index 2024

The context of digital wellbeing in the country

Kuwait's digital transformation journey, propelled by the "New Kuwait" vision , launched in 2017 , encompasses 164 strategic development programs across pillars like Public Administration, Economy, Infrastructure, Living Environment, Healthcare, Human Capital, and Global Position. The emphasis on Information Technology (IT) and services highlights Kuwait's commitment to driving economic growth and innovation through technology, contributing to the broader canvas of digital wellbeing. Additionally, the focus on Education and Human Capital underscores the acknowledgement of technology's role in preparing the youth for a technologically advanced workforce, indirectly influencing digital literacy and skills development. Finally, Youth and Social Programs present opportunities for initiatives addressing the digital divide and ensuring inclusivity in the digital era. In alignment with this vision, the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) spearheads the nation's digital evolution. The "Automation Key to Digital Transformation" conference emphasizes CAIT's pivotal role in advancing Kuwait's digital strategy. The ambition is to transition toward a paperless office system, with a keen focus on addressing security and privacy concerns. An initiative that exemplifies this is the introduction of the digital AFIA card to Kuwait's mobile ID , which aims to simplify procedures for beneficiaries in healthcare settings, streamlining access to services without requiring the original AFIA card. By integrating various digital government documents, including the digital driving license, digital car book, digital birth certificate, and digital civil ID for minors, into the MyID app, the government enhances accessibility and convenience for citizens. This move leverages technology to improve the efficiency and ease of accessing essential services, particularly in the healthcare sector. The ongoing collaboration with relevant authorities and the expressed commitment to add more digital documents further align with Kuwait's digital initiatives to benefit its citizens.

Kuwait's healthcare sector is also undergoing a significant digital transformation, with a dedicated focus on integrating innovative solutions such as health records, telemedicine, and mobile applications. Despite progress in individual institutions, there has been a lack of linkage, hindering the creation of a national interconnected healthcare environment. The COVID-19 outbreak has accelerated digitization, particularly in remote e-health solutions, providing benefits to healthcare start-ups. The enactment of Kuwait's Mental Health Law in February 2019 marked a significant stride in confronting mental health challenges within the nation. Emerging from the absence of preceding legislation governing mental health, this law signifies a pivotal shift. In response to the rising need for mental health and psychosocial support during the COVID-19 pandemic, Kuwait's Ministry of Health has implemented impactful measures through the Center for Mental Health . These initiatives were designed to improve access to care despite lockdown constraints. The toll on mental well-being during the pandemic has been evident, particularly among vulnerable groups like the elderly and individuals with disabilities, leading to increased rates of anxiety and depressive symptoms. To address these challenges, the Kuwait Center for Mental Health has launched a hotline and online consultations, providing evidence-informed information on an Instagram page.

Despite Kuwait's advancements in integrating technology into its education system, a clear deficiency exists in directly addressing "Education Technology" within the legal framework. The research areas delineated in the 2019 Kuwait Public Policy Center (KPPC) Research Agenda for the Human Capital Pillar present prospective domains for implementing policy frameworks. These aim to guide the government on how to optimize the utilization of new technologies in the education sector. In the context of broader initiatives aimed at promoting digital wellbeing for children, CITRA's document on "Protecting Children from Internet Dangers" provides parents with guidelines on how to ensure their children's' online safety.

The country's strengths and areas for improvement

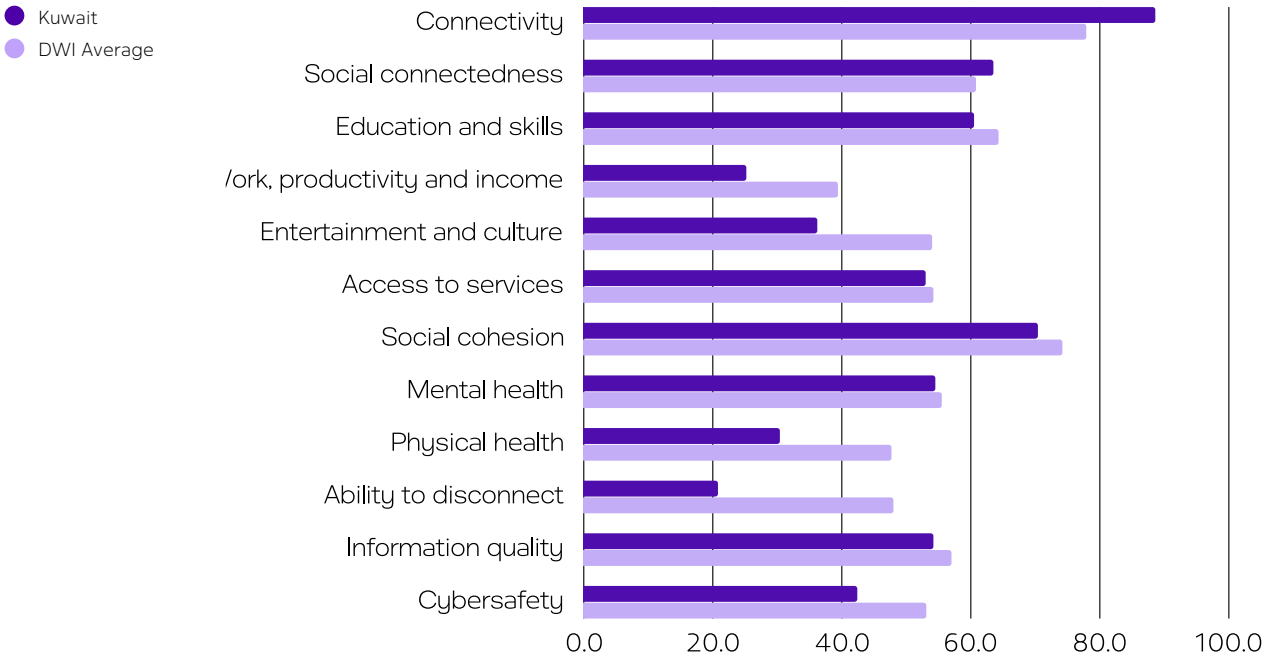
Kuwait excels in connectivity, securing a robust digital infrastructure and the 5th position in the DWI sample with a score of 88.6. This foundation supports widespread internet access, crucial for digital communication and innovation. The country also performs well in social connectedness, placing 14th with a score of 63.5, driven by active engagement on local and global social media platforms. In terms of mental Health, Kuwait scores slightly below average (54.5, 18th position), influenced by respondents perceiving no negative impact from technology use. Improvements could involve addressing digital addiction and incorporating mental health education into the curriculum to prevent potential risks associated with digital technology use.

Kuwait faces notable areas for improvement, particularly in physical health, placing 35th with a score of 30.4. Opportunities lie in incorporating guidelines for healthy digital technology use in government recommendations and integrating education on potential physical health risks associated with digital tech use into the ICT curriculum. This can also contribute to addressing challenges in the ability to disconnect dimension, where Kuwait places 35th with a score of 20.8. Policy measures recognising the right to disconnect and promoting digital wellness are needed to enhance citizens' work-life balance and mental health. The entertainment and culture pillar, scoring 36.2 (33rd), suggests room for improvement: the government could incentivize digital tourism and culture. Additionally, in work, productivity, and income, placing 33rd with a score of 25.2, exploring initiatives like digital nomad visas and flexible working arrangements can foster productivity and collaboration, coupled with reinforcing the ICT workforce for strategic advantages.

FIGURE 2

Source: Global Digital Wellbeing Index 2024

Performance of Kuwait by index pillars compared to DWI sample



Overall performance by index pillars

TABLE 5 Source: Global Digital Wellbeing Index 2024

Dimensions	Score (0 to 100)	Placed (out of 35)	Key findings
Connectivity	88.6	5	4G access is universal, coupled with high internet penetration and affordable broadband costs. International bandwidth could be improved.
Social connectedness	63.5	14	64% of survey participants actively utilize the most popular social media app, and alternatives in the social sphere are prevalent. Additionally, 71.1% leverage digital technologies for staying connected, while 39.8% employ them to engage with important issues.
Education and skills	60.5	31	Boosting connectivity in educational institutions would prove advantageous, especially when combined with the inclusion of digital and ICT skills into the education system. Only 26.8% of respondents have used technology to take part in online courses or pursued formal degree programs.
Work, productivity and income	25.2	33	There is a substantial opportunity to expand the ICT workforce and energise the tech sector community, which could positively impact the overall score. Furthermore, officially acknowledging remote work and implementing provisions for digital nomad visas is also advisable.
Entertainment and culture	36.2	33	The government can incentivize the promotion of digital tourism and culture. Usage of digital technology for entertainment, travel, and participation in offline activities is comparatively lower than in other nations.
Access to services and goods	53	23	The Telecom/ICT regulator is responsible for overseeing e-applications. Survey respondents predominantly used digital devices for payment and transportation, with significantly fewer participating in online shopping.
Social cohesion	70.4	22	Outside formal education, Kuwait actively advocates for digital literacy, exhibiting commendable gender-based parity in internet usage. Nonetheless, a moderate socio-economic gap persists, and there is a notable absence of a regulatory framework for ensuring ICT accessibility for individuals with disabilities.
Mental health	54.5	18	The national ICT/digital strategy lacks indicators addressing digital well-being concerns, presenting an opportunity to develop initiatives focused on combating online addiction and integrating mental health education into school curricula.
Physical health	30.4	35	It would be beneficial to offer guidelines promoting the healthy use of digital technology and integrate information about the physical health risks associated with digital tech use into the ICT education curriculum.
Ability to disconnect	20.8	35	The absence of regulations concerning the right to disconnect creates challenges in establishing boundaries between work and personal life during remote study or work. A minority of survey participants consistently integrate digital wellness measures into their routines.
Information quality	54.2	24	Limited efforts are directed towards raising awareness about misinformation through official campaigns, but education curricula incorporate learning about recognizing disinformation. Furthermore, there exists a moderate level of trust in online information, and survey participants occasionally verify the accuracy of information when faced with doubts.
Cybersafety	42.4	32	While there is a moderate policy commitment to cybersecurity, the emphasis on personal data protection is notably lower. Although existing frameworks address cyberbullying among children and youth, there is limited policy guidance for parents on cyberbullying and cybersafety. There is a need for additional efforts to involve parents in online safety measures.

Suggestions that may contribute to improvements across the digital ecosystem:

Empowering Kuwait's digital future
To boost digital wellbeing, Kuwait could invest in comprehensive digital skills programs, fostering proficiency in vital areas like online safety and information literacy. Collaboration among government, education, and the private sector is crucial for accessible and inclusive initiatives. This strategic investment not only enhances individual digital wellbeing but also fortifies Kuwait's societal resilience in the face of technological advancements. Additionally, promoting government-backed incentives for digital cultural content can cultivate engagement, enriching cultural participation and leisure activities.

Work-life balance
To enhance Kuwait's digital wellbeing, a "Right to Disconnect" would emphasise personal time, fostering a harmonious work environment. Coupled with public campaigns and educational guidelines on responsible screen time management, it would empower individuals to set clear boundaries, reducing stress and preventing burnout. Beyond personal benefits, this policy would contribute to positive work culture and address evolving digital challenges, providing a crucial legal framework for technology integration in the workplace while prioritizing employee wellbeing.

Digital health awareness drive for Kuwait's wellbeing
It's advisable to raise awareness about the physical health impact of digital technology use through comprehensive public campaigns and educational initiatives. These efforts should inform the population about potential health issues associated with prolonged device usage, emphasizing responsible screen time habits, ergonomic practices, and technologies prioritizing physical health. This aligns with broader public health objectives, building a digitally literate and physically resilient population. Additionally, public awareness campaigns should target excessive social media use, highlighting its mental and physical impacts through various channels and engaging social media companies for collaboration or exploring regulatory measures on content inducing addictive behavior.

Cultivating cultural engagement
Actively promote increased exposure to entertainment and culture through digital platforms, supporting government initiatives for incentivizing the creation and sharing of digital cultural content. Encourage citizen engagement with diverse digital content, fostering a vibrant online environment and enhancing overall satisfaction. Additionally, facilitate the discovery of offline cultural events and support travel planning through digital means. This strategic focus on digital entertainment and cultural exposure contributes to a more enriched and inclusive society, providing avenues for relaxation and stress relief. Cultivating digital cultural engagement, backed by government incentives, encourages citizens to actively participate in and share artistic and cultural content digitally, further enhancing cultural participation and leisure activities.

Global Digital Wellbeing Index Executive Summary

Digital technologies have reshaped how we connect, work, and perceive the world. As our dependence on these tools grows, so too does the need to understand and optimize the balance between technology use and wellbeing. The Global Digital Wellbeing Index (DWI) explores the foundational elements of digital wellbeing, acknowledging the complex and multifaceted dimensions involved. The DWI aims to stimulate global discussions, influence policymakers, and provide a benchmark for stakeholders to navigate the evolving landscape of digital wellbeing. It covers 35 countries and combines data from well-established secondary sources (e.g. UN, World Bank), a dedicated survey, and policy assessments into a framework that consists of 12 pillars, organized into two complementary components or sub-indices (1) balancing needs and (2) capturing opportunities. The DWI provides overall country-level scores out of 100, as well as scores for both components and for each of the 12 pillars (also out of 100).

In terms of overall scores on the index, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Estonia, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, and Italy do especially well. China stands out with a strong performance among middle-income countries. While wealthier countries achieve the best scores on average, having a higher income does not always guarantee a better performance: for example, China, Argentina, Colombia, Malaysia, Mexico, and Bulgaria achieve scores equal to or above the global average (57 out of 100). Across the entire sample, the pillars with the highest scores are connectivity (78) and social cohesion (74). Those with the lowest scores, requiring the most attention, are work, productivity and income (39), physical health (48), and the ability to disconnect (48). As highlighted throughout this report, each country has its relative digital wellbeing strengths as well as areas for growth and enhancement.

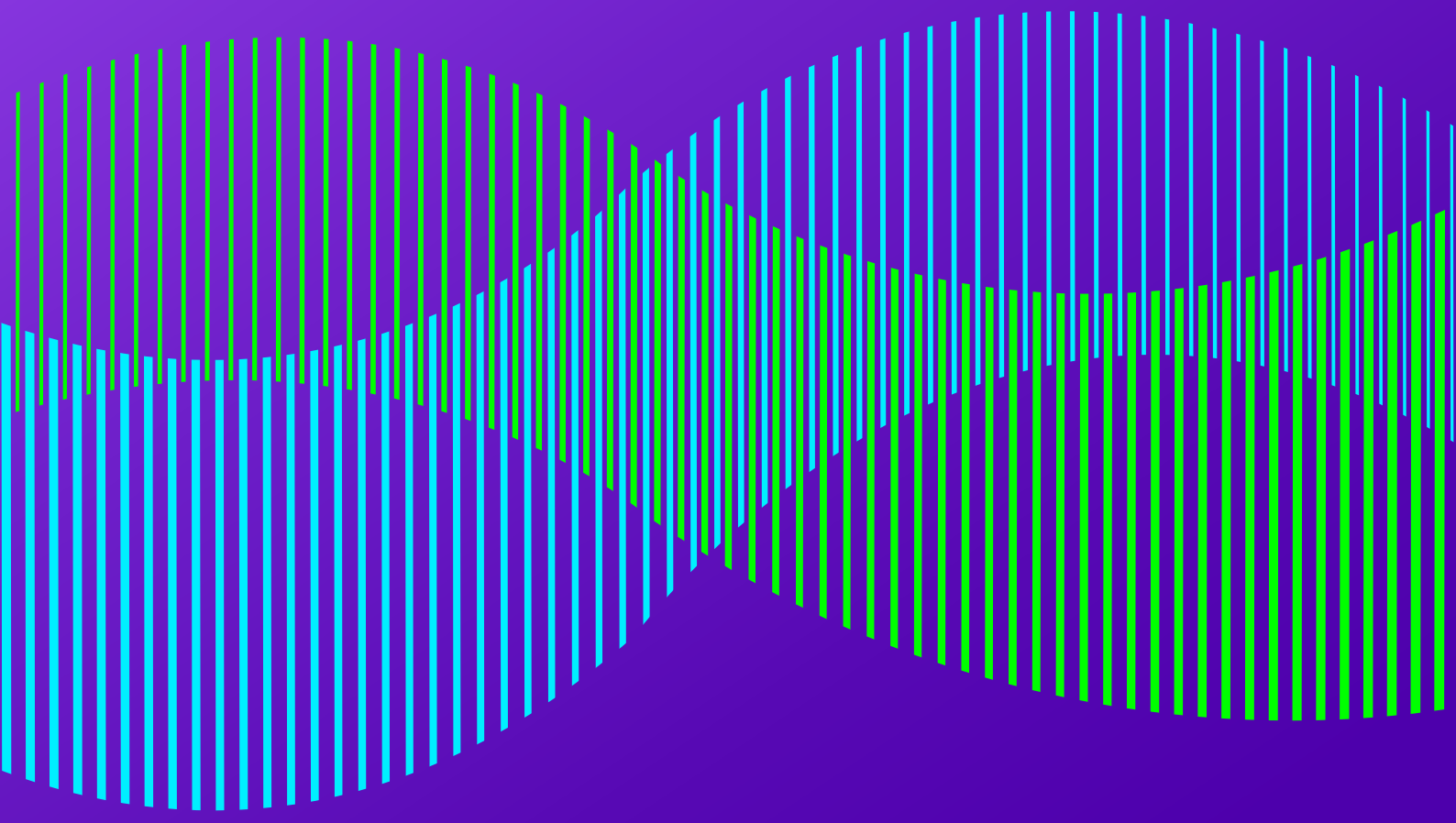


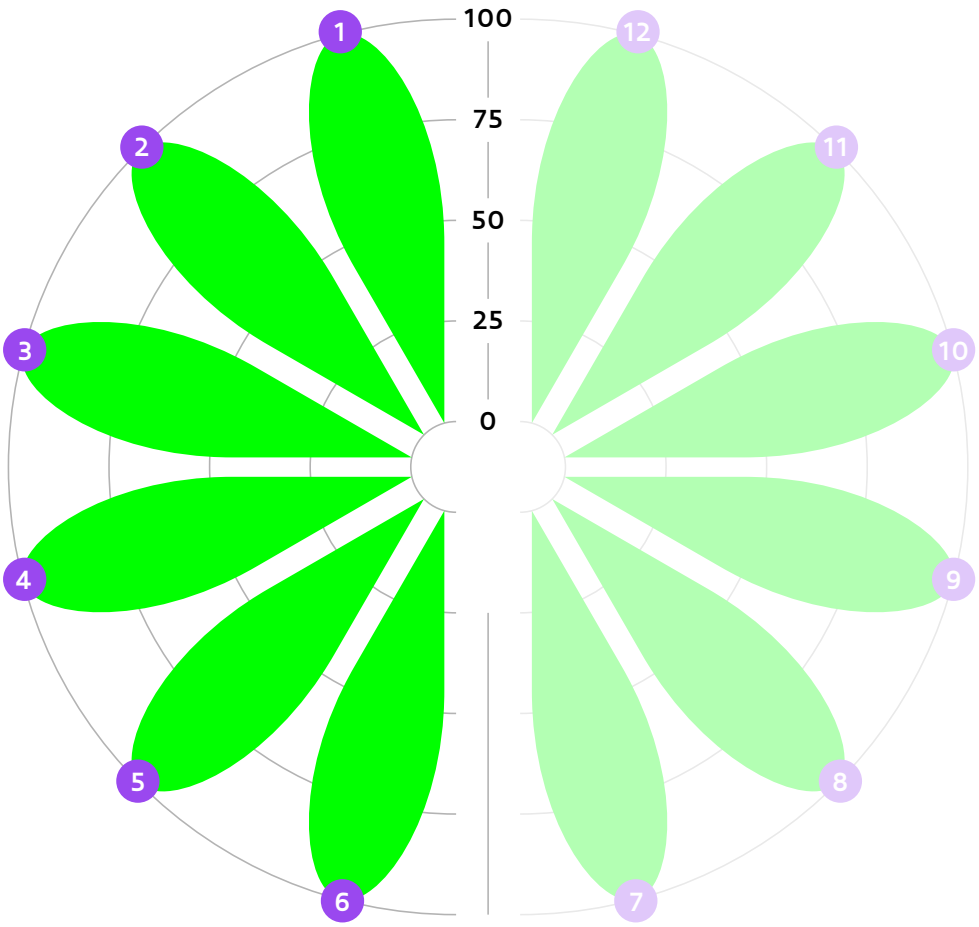
TABLE 1
Source: Global Digital Wellbeing Index 2024

Overall performance in the DWI

Rank	Country	Score (0-100)
1	Canada	69.8
2	Australia	69.0
3	Singapore	68.1
4	Estonia	67.1
5	France	66.8
6	United Kingdom	66.3
7	Germany	65.2
8	United States	61.0
=9	China	60.5
=9	Italy	60.5
11	Argentina	60.2
12	Sweden	60.2
=13	Chile	59.6
=13	Korea, Republic of	59.6
15	Colombia	58.1
16	United Arab Emirates	57.9
17	Malaysia	57.8
=18	India	57.5
=18	Japan	57.5
20	Mexico	57.4
21	Bulgaria	57.2
22	Brazil	55.1
=23	Indonesia	54.5
=23	Kenya	54.5
25	Türkiye	54.4
26	Viet Nam	54.1
27	Saudi Arabia	53.8
28	South Africa	53.0
29	Ghana	50.6
30	Kuwait	50.0
31	Nigeria	48.4
32	Egypt	46.6
33	Pakistan	45.1
34	Bangladesh	44.1
35	Algeria	39.8

Balancing Needs

The "Balancing Needs" sub-index includes six pillars examining the risks posed by digital technology and to what extent these risks are being addressed. This component of the DWI captures the most direct action being taken around the world to support digital wellbeing.



1 Social Cohesion
2 Mental Health
3 Physical Health
4 Ability to Disconnect
5 Information Quality
6 Cybersafety
7 Connectivity
8 Social Connectedness
9 Education and Skills
10 Work, Productivity, and Income
11 Entertainment and Culture
12 Access to Services and Goods

For the Balancing Needs component, data collected for the DWI reveals:

Policies to support digital mental health can help vulnerable individuals — an area with the potential to be improved across the board.

Singapore leads in the mental health pillar, followed by the United Kingdom and the Republic of Korea. Generally, advanced economies have better scores, but China and Algeria stand out among middle-income nations. Only eight countries have complete frameworks for digital mental health — that is, the use of digital technology to directly support mental health care and service provision — with Singapore, the United Kingdom, and Canada showcasing successful integration into education. Bangladesh, India, and the United Arab Emirates report greater levels of distress associated with extended digital technology use, while the United States, Australia and Canada report the most significant psychological impacts such as feelings of loneliness and anxiety linked with remote working or studying. Less affluent countries report lower levels of such distress, potentially due to less common remote activities, which can be linked to connectivity gaps and lower flexibility of work arrangements.

Maintaining physical health is a challenge given growing exposure to digital technologies, stressing the need for more dedicated policies.

Canada, France, and Australia lead in the physical health pillar; overall, richer countries attain higher scores in this area. Eight countries have clear government recommendations on the healthy use of digital technologies. Only Canada, India, Estonia, and Ghana fully address physical health risks in school curricula. Viet Nam, Malaysia, Ghana, and Nigeria reported more physical health complaints associated with digital technologies including dry eyes, headaches, and back pain. Algeria, Ghana, and Bangladesh reported greater disruption to offline activities such as in-person engagement with family and friends, and missing work and school related activities.

"Right to disconnect"[01] policies show decisive action to promote digital wellbeing and represent one area with the potential to be developed around the world.

Affluent countries are generally stronger in this area, with Australia, Italy, and Germany leading in the ability to disconnect pillar. Argentina, Mexico, and Colombia, middle-income countries, demonstrate a strong performance too. Nine countries in the DWI — Australia, Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, Italy, and Mexico — have established legislation on the right to disconnect. When it comes to remote work or study, challenges in maintaining healthy boundaries show no significant differences across income segments, but advanced economies show overall higher adoption rates of measures to promote digital wellbeing at work.

Misinformation and disinformation pose risks to wellbeing that require government action around the world.

Estonia leads in the information quality pillar, followed by Argentina, and Canada. Fourteen countries demonstrate clear governmental action against misinformation. Seventeen countries, across all income levels integrate disinformation awareness into education. Trust in online information is highest in Nigeria, followed by Bangladesh, Germany, and Estonia with generally similar levels across income segments. Viet Nam, Indonesia, and Malaysia are the most active in verifying information accuracy.

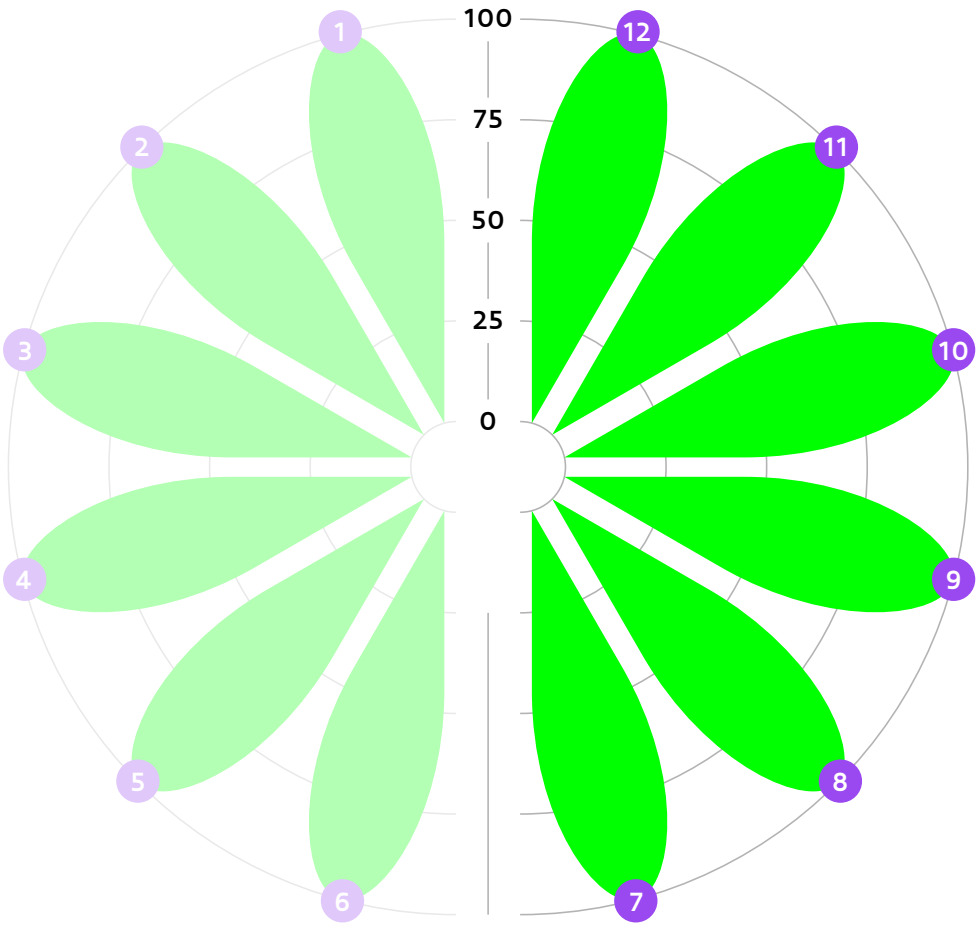
Challenges in data safety are more evident in middle-income countries, while cyberbullying needs more policy action around the world.

The top performers in the cybersafety pillar are the United States, France, and Singapore. The United States, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom lead in cybersecurity commitment. More secure internet servers are found in wealthier nations. Australia, China, and Canada lead in user strategies to protect personal data. The United States leads in cyberbullying and cybersafety policies, followed by Canada and France. Across most countries, policies focused on parents are well established. These include resources and digital safety toolkits for parents to deal with cyberbullying. However, policies focused on children and youth, such as e-safety guidelines and provisions for cyber wellness in education curriculum, are less common.

01 Refers to the "Right to disconnect" is defined as the right not to engage in work-related electronic communications during non-work hours.

Capturing Opportunities

The "Capturing Opportunities" sub-index/component examines six pillars comprising enablers of digital adoption and opportunity across a range of contexts. This component captures the pre-requisites for adopting digital technologies and the extent to which opportunities are maximized.



1 Social Cohesion
2 Mental Health
3 Physical Health
4 Ability to Disconnect
5 Information Quality
6 Cybersafety
7 Connectivity
8 Social Connectedness
9 Education and Skills
10 Work, Productivity, and Income
11 Entertainment and Culture
12 Access to Services and Goods

For the Capturing Opportunities component, data collected for the DWI reveals:

Digital interaction does not always lead to meeting people offline, and some of the least affluent countries are the most dynamic in online activism.

The strongest social connectedness is evidenced in the United Arab Emirates, Chile, Bulgaria, Colombia, and Malaysia. Social media engagement averages 68% across all countries, with advanced economies leading. Meeting new people using digital devices is less common in high-income nations (35%) compared with upper-middle-income (55%) and lower-middle-income countries (59%). China and India lead in online engagement, while Nigeria and Kenya are leaders in online activism. Generally, emerging economies score higher in active online engagement and activism.

Middle-income countries embrace online education and training, but still have a journey ahead in integrating digital skills (e.g. using digital safety tools, ability to verify misinformation) in curricula.

Estonia leads the education and skills pillar, followed by Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Kenya. While this reflects a mix of income levels, richer countries generally score higher. Internet access in schools is led by advanced economies, and less affluent nations face challenges in integrating digital skills. Most countries recognize micro-credentials, indicating a widespread trend among both employees and employers to be more open to new types of qualifications. Middle-income countries show strong engagement with digital tools in education, and digital device use for accessing information is also high across this group.

Advanced economies lead in work flexibility, while digital technologies and regulation allow middle-income countries to participate more fully in the knowledge economy.

Estonia, Singapore, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates lead in the work, productivity, and income pillar, with upper-middle-income countries outperforming high-income ones on average. Less affluent countries — including India, Viet Nam, and Bangladesh — have ample room for growth. Remote work frameworks are more advanced in richer nations, while digital nomad visas[02] are prominent in middle-income countries such as Argentina, Colombia, and Brazil. Estonia and Singapore have some of the strongest tech sectors. Ghana and Kenya, meanwhile, have growing tech sectors, demonstrating how the digital economy can empower emerging economies.

Digital technologies are democratizing access to art and entertainment.

Argentina leads in the entertainment and culture pillar, followed by Estonia, the Republic of Korea, India, and Sweden. The DWI notes widespread government support for digital tourism and culture, particularly in wealthier countries. Estonia stands out in experiencing art digitally, while China leads in using technology for creating and sharing art. Middle-income countries generally report greater use of digital devices for consuming artistic and cultural content online compared to their high-income counterparts.

02 "A digital nomad visa is a type of visa that allows you to work remotely for a country registered outside of the country you have chosen to currently live in. Typically, to work in another country, you must have a work permit, and be registered as a taxpayer. This requires you to uproot your entire life back home. Digital nomad visas, on the other hand, have the benefit of becoming a temporary resident of another country, while you work (and pay taxes) in your home country. In the majority of cases, digital nomads are not required to pay taxes in their host country." Source Schengen Visa Info https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/digital-nomad-visa/

There is widespread availability of key digital services for the population, but participatory policymaking remains nascent in some countries.

Seventeen out of the 35 countries have a telecom or ICT regulator for managing digital applications such as e-health and e-education. Meanwhile, Estonia leads in access to services and goods, followed by China and Singapore, with advanced economies dominating the top half of the list. China excels in overall digital health engagement, with lower-middle-income countries surpassing their higher-income counterparts. Digital payments have a 71% engagement rate globally. China leads in online shopping (80%), while Sweden and the United Kingdom do well in managing finances online, additionally, Estonia, Sweden, China, and Colombia show strong engagement with transportation technologies (e.g. car sharing or public transport apps).

Universal internet access is a goal around the world, but some disparities highlight the need for further government support.

The United Kingdom, followed by Canada and France, leads in social cohesion, which focuses on universal access policies, digital literacy for all, and digital inclusion). Almost all countries have universal access and service policies, while 16 countries, mostly high-income, feature comprehensive regulatory frameworks for information and communications technology accessibility. Digital literacy initiatives outside formal education show progress across countries, with notable examples in middle-income countries. The International Telecommunication Union gender parity score indicates that more women than men use the internet in some affluent countries, while Germany, the United Kingdom, and Estonia lead in socio-economic inclusion.

Some countries still require infrastructure investment to reach universal connectivity.

The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait excel in connectivity, with Malaysia and Bulgaria challenging the notion that only the wealthiest economies provide comprehensive connectivity. Despite widespread 4G coverage, some emerging economies face challenges in network infrastructure. Internet penetration rates vary significantly, with high-income countries at 93%, upper-middle-income countries at 79%, and lower-middle-income countries at 53%. Affordability issues reflect economic disparities, with people in richer nations spending less than 0.1% of their income on connectivity, compared with 2.3% and 5.4% in upper-middle and lower-middle-income countries.

ithra

sync

Sync is a digital wellbeing initiative by King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) with a vision to create a world where we are all in control of our digital lives.

The program is guided by extensive research - in collaboration with global entities - to understand the implications of technology and how it's affecting our lives, and translate the knowledge we gain into awareness campaigns, tools, experiences, educational content and programs aiming to raise global awareness around the topic.

sync.ithra.com