

Preface

ESPEN BARTH EIDE

Managing Director, World Economic Forum

The 2015 edition of *The Global Information Technology Report* is released at a time when many economies around the world are struggling to ensure that economic growth is equitable and provides benefits for their entire populations. Advanced economies have not yet reached their full potential and they struggle with persistently high unemployment, rising inequalities, and fiscal challenges. Emerging markets and developing economies are facing stronger headwinds than before and need to adjust their development models to ensure economic growth and a more broad-based distribution of gains.

As a general-purpose technology, the impact of information and communication technologies—or ICTs—extends well beyond productivity gains. As shown in this *Report*, ICTs act as a vector of social development and transformation by improving access to basic services, enhancing connectivity, and creating employment opportunities.

Since 2001, *The Global Information Technology Report* series published by the World Economic Forum in partnership with Cornell University and INSEAD has measured the drivers of the ICT revolution using the Networked Readiness Index. For each of the 143 economies covered, it allows areas of priority to be identified to more fully leverage ICTs for development.

Four important messages emerge from the 2015 edition. First, as mentioned above, the ICT revolution holds the potential of transforming economies and societies and of addressing some of the most pressing global challenges of our time. Second, this ICT revolution is well under way in some parts of the world. In these places, it is even accelerating as a result of the ubiquity of broadband Internet, the democratization of technologies, and the accelerating pace of innovation. Third, the ICT revolution has not so far reached large parts of the planet. Many of those who stand to gain the most from it are not yet connected. In order to better leverage ICTs for development, a higher level of preparedness and better infrastructure and access are needed. In this context, government leadership and vision are critical. Finally, we observe that digital divides exist within countries. Even in the most advanced economies, only certain segments of the population are benefitting from ICTs. Many are left behind because of their age, limited digital literacy, lack of access, or remoteness.

It would be wrong to assume that these divides will be bridged by merely increasing ICT use. The *Report* therefore concludes with a call for action. Policymakers must work with other stakeholders to swiftly adopt holistic long-term strategies for ICT development, implement sound legislation, and make smart investments. Under the theme “ICTs for Inclusive Growth,” *The Global Information Technology Report 2015* offers many solutions and examples of enabling policies and investments to help countries to better leverage ICTs for shared prosperity

As the ICT revolution unfolds, it will indeed bring benefits, but it will also bring risks and challenges. Some of these are seen in the increasing incidents related to breaches of cybersecurity or cyberwarfare, and in questions related to privacy and the neutrality of the Internet. The World Economic Forum is addressing these issues through its *Future of the Internet* Global Challenge. This endeavor aims to ensure that the Internet remains a core engine of human progress and to safeguard its globally integrated, highly distributed, and multi-stakeholder nature. It includes the *Cyber Resilience* initiative, which aims to raise awareness of cyber risk and to build commitment regarding the need for more rigorous approaches to cyber risk mitigation. We hope that through this *Report* and its initiatives, the World Economic Forum contributes to making the ICT revolution truly global, growth supportive, and inclusive.