

CASE STUDY

How the OECD Uses Ookla Speedtest® Data to Bridge Rural-Urban Connectivity Divides



Introduction

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provides analysis and establishes evidence-based standards to inform international policy that solves social and economic challenges, including connectivity. The OECD leverages network performance data from the Ookla for Good™ open data initiative in their evaluation of broadband speeds across territorial levels within countries — including rural and remote regions where consistent global data is often more difficult to source. This collaboration supports efforts to close the rural-urban connectivity divide as governments and policymakers worldwide rely on recommendations set forth by OECD analysis and reporting.

“Universal and reliable access to the internet is a necessity now more than ever. In support of national governments’ efforts to help communities overcome digital deserts, the OECD has built a partnership with Ookla for Good™. Their open datasets enable us to assess the progression of broadband development. For the first time, this allowed us to have granular information in rural areas, in a harmonized manner for G20 and OECD countries, where quality data on a global scale is more challenging to source. The collaboration and guidance with data scientists and experts from Ookla has been crucial for our spatial analysis and reporting on public policies. This collaboration was a game changer that continues to inform and help governments bridge global digital divides.”



– Michelle Marshalian
Economist, Regional and Rural Policy Unit, OECD

Benefits



Facilitated local governments' access to federal resources, supporting communities to reduce digital divides



Provided insight into the state of connectivity in over 50 countries



Communicated the availability of new resources for policy analysis to national and sub-national government agencies



Utilized Ookla For Good data in multiple OECD published works including reports, presentations, and international policy reviews

Situation

People depend on reliable connectivity; the internet is crucial for accessing information, services, work opportunities, and education. Despite the increasing necessity for connectivity to participate in society, many rural communities have been left behind when it comes to ensuring fast and reliable internet access, as well as proper resources to support digital literacy skills. While internet traffic has increased over 1,000x throughout the past two decades, these digital deserts are missing the necessary broadband infrastructure to support network traffic.

G20, a forum for international economic cooperation comprising 19 countries and the European Union, had set forth agreements emphasizing the need to improve digital infrastructure in order to ensure universal and affordable access to the internet for all by 2025. Recognizing its role in informing actionable policy for governments worldwide, the OECD set out to study fixed and mobile network accessibility in rural areas. The OECD needed a way to measure the extent of digital divides between urban and rural areas within G20 countries. This data would play an important role in understanding user experience and benchmarking performance of the existing fixed and mobile networks.

Solution

The OECD leveraged Ookla For Good open datasets to uncover geographical inequality in internet access and to offer actionable recommendations for policy makers to drive broadband development. They published a report titled [“Bridging Digital Divides in G20 Countries”](#) using Ookla’s Global Fixed and Mobile Network Performance Maps and other data sources. In the report, the OECD assessed the differences in both fixed and mobile download speeds experienced by users in cities, towns, and rural areas within the G20 countries. The data revealed that rural areas were underserved, experiencing overall poorer network performance. In the below chart, you can see the gap between urban and rural areas is significant in most countries.

Gaps in Download Speeds Experienced by Users, by Degree of Urbanization
Speedtest Intelligence® | Q4 2020



The OECD found that fixed download speeds in rural areas were 31% below the national average. In contrast, fixed download speeds in cities were 21% above the national average, highlighting the rural-urban connectivity divide. This 52% point difference highlighted the disparities within countries in the quality and performance of broadband connections.

Outcome

The report surfaced critical measurements of the disparities in network performance between urban and rural areas. Along with identifying the gaps in download speeds experienced by users, the OECD further revealed that limited connectivity and lower fixed broadband speeds may be linked to the lower share of individuals with digital skills in rural areas. The OECD found that addressing the issues of connectivity and digital literacy is paramount to strengthening the economic and social revitalization of these areas. The report concluded with detailed policy mechanisms that have proven to progress connectivity, emphasizing the importance of fostering competition among network providers, promoting investment, and easing infrastructure-related regulations to streamline the deployment process. There was particular consideration on policies and regulatory measures that encourage broadband development and deployment in rural areas to bridge the connectivity divide.

The OECD continues to collaborate with Ookla as a data partner, utilizing Ookla for Good open datasets in order to evaluate internet accessibility worldwide, and reporting these findings to inform policy decisions that aid local and regional development.