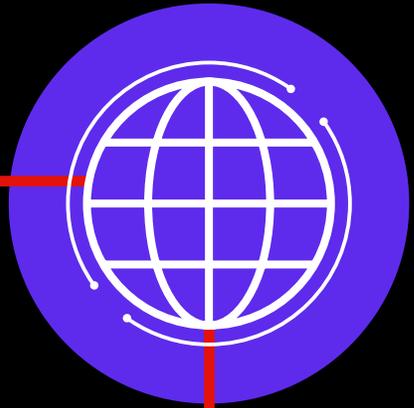


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# Unlocking the potential of the anywhere economy



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# About the research and acknowledgements

*Unlocking the potential of the anywhere economy* is a research programme conducted by Economist Impact and sponsored by DocuSign. It leverages insights from primary research data, desk research, econometric modelling and expert interviews to understand the opportunities and challenges that the anywhere economy brings to people, businesses and countries. In doing so, insights are generated to help organisations and societies leverage these new opportunities and thrive.

We conducted two global surveys between September and October 2022 to gauge sentiments and check the reality among consumers and executives, respectively. These were fielded among 2,800 consumers in the general population and 764 executives with seniority at the director level and above. Both surveys were conducted in ten countries: Australia and Japan in Asia-Pacific, France, Germany, Ireland and the UK in Europe, Mexico and Brazil in Latin America, and Canada and the US in North America. These surveys were paired with a series of econometric models and forecasts assessing the potential impacts of the anywhere economy in the ten countries through various socio-economic lenses.



We would like to thank the following experts for their time and insights:

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## Foreword by DocuSign

Digitalization has made business more distributed and less coupled to time and place. But even greater transformation lies ahead as new technologies drive an extraordinary surge in productivity and expansion of the global economy over the coming decade. Our current economic slowdown may prove to be just a lull before a new boom begins.

Beneath the surface a recovery is already taking shape, as forward-looking companies are accelerating their investments in digital infrastructure to gain competitive advantage and reap the benefits of the anywhere economy. We're heartened by the survey results, showing that so many executives and consumers share our excitement about the possibilities that the anywhere economy presents.

At DocuSign we believe that technology can and should be a force for good, a way to lift people up and bring people together. The anywhere economy is giving people greater flexibility in how, when and where they work. This is boosting diversity and inclusion, and creating new economic opportunities for people who previously have been marginalized, including those in rural areas and developing economies.

To be sure, we face challenges. In this tech-driven economy, benefits accrue disproportionately to organizations and countries that invest in building digital infrastructure. This report serves as a call to action for governments to direct policies and resources toward improving digital infrastructure and literacy, providing wider access to technologies, and for corporations to pave the way and be a model for others.

Perhaps the most notable finding is the importance of trust, which is key to unlocking the benefits of the anywhere economy. Trust means not only the ability to protect against bad actors, but also to be a dependable, reliable partner—always. Trust removes friction and makes business move faster. The acceleration may take place behind the scenes, but the impact will be felt everywhere.

DocuSign is pleased to sponsor this report, which provides an exciting outlook for the coming decade, in which the anywhere economy will create new opportunities and help us build a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable world.

**Allan Thygesen,**  
Chief Executive Officer, DocuSign

# Executive summary

The advancement in digital tools and infrastructure, catalysed by the covid-19 pandemic, has upended the way hundreds of millions of people live and work. The ability to work, socialise, and conduct personal and business activities online presents endless possibilities. Our understanding of its impacts on businesses, economies and the planet is still evolving. Our study shows that, overall, both executives and consumers are confident that the anywhere economy will improve economic conditions and personal lives. They also believe that embedding digitalisation in daily life can help overcome some of the inequities of modern life and accelerate the planet's decarbonisation process.

## What is the anywhere economy?

The anywhere economy is the flexibility brought by electronic devices, internet connectivity and digital platforms that allows communication, collaboration and transactions to take place in real-time and independent of space. This new economic era is defined by the capacity to conduct business, leisure and personal activities in any location at any time.

The acceleration of the anywhere economy has been rapid, and uncertainties remain about its indirect benefits and costs. For example, while remote work can help some workers reduce their carbon footprint by eliminating their daily commute, the benefits could be offset by increased emissions from air travel to meet with colleagues in distant locations. Likewise, the development of the anywhere economy may encourage advanced countries to invest in costly digital infrastructure, such as data centres, potentially widening the digital divide with emerging markets that cannot make similar investments.

To this point, the anywhere economy has demonstrated both positive and negative impacts. Moving forward, it will be important to maximise its benefits and minimise its costs. Achieving this goal requires a comprehensive understanding of the complex effects that the anywhere economy has on our lives.

## Key findings:

### **The anywhere economy is rapidly expanding, and executives and consumers are enthusiastic about its potential.**

Fifty-nine percent of executives and 47% of consumers expect the anywhere economy to accelerate further. They believe it will have an overall positive impact by creating jobs, broadening the range of online services, and improving equity, health and well-being. Despite broad overall enthusiasm about the anywhere economy from both surveyed groups, the executives, who typically earn more, were more optimistic than consumers.

### **The anywhere economy is linked to economic growth.**

The anywhere economy allows for flexibility in the workplace and offers a digital foundation for online marketplaces to thrive, resulting in macroeconomic gains. Economist Impact models suggest that as the anywhere economy expands, the purchasing power parity (PPP) converted GDP will cumulatively expand by US\$19.4trn during 2022-30 across the ten selected countries. This is driven, in part, by increased productivity growth and expanded labour force participation enabled by remote work. Productivity will grow in all ten countries studied, increasing on average by 10% over the forecast period, the average female labour force participation rate will rise by five percentage points (from 55% in 2021 to nearly 60% in 2030), and older adults' average labour force participation rate will also rise by five percentage points (from 15% in 2021 to 20% in 2030).

### **By improving digital infrastructure and investing in digital skill-building on a national level, the anywhere economy can play a vital role in promoting equity.**

Although there is a risk that the digital divide may hinder its potential for development, our models show that the anywhere economy can enhance equity. For every 1,000 rural residents aged 15+, the anywhere economy will bring about 20 additional

jobs, while eight of the ten studied countries will see a drop in the percentage of low-income households. Investing in infrastructure will ensure that rural areas and emerging economies can benefit from these opportunities, and skill-building programmes will enable low-income and remote populations to take advantage of remote jobs, which are predominantly digital.

### **Fostering trust is essential to unleashing the potential of the anywhere economy.**

Trust forms the bedrock of key relationships in the anywhere economy, including trust in digital systems, in information, between employees and employers, and between consumers and the online companies they patronise. Sixty-eight percent of executives say that the anywhere economy has positively impacted their organisation's ability to cultivate trust in business relationships, and 65% say it has bolstered their organisation's reputation and consumer trust. However, trust can be jeopardised by cybersecurity threats, which top the list of areas requiring greater attention and investment to create the right ecosystem for the expansion of the anywhere economy—44% of consumers and 46% of executives selected cybersecurity as the area most in need of attention and investment.

### **Recognising the constraints of the anywhere economy can lead the way to a more effective path forward.**

Experts noted that the anywhere economy hinges on the capability to be truly "anywhere". However, in this new economy, jobs in certain sectors such as retail or healthcare may not be accommodated, global trade can be subject to government restrictions, and unequal access to the internet and digital services can impede progress of the anywhere economy. To fully capitalise on the advantages of this new economic era, policymakers and companies should acknowledge and manage these limitations.

# I. Introduction

Digitalisation is one of the most profound societal and economic advances made since the turn of the millennium. The ways that hundreds of millions of people live and work have transformed from just two decades ago. Internet access, the shrinkage of processing power into mobile devices, the optimisation of software platforms and the development of powerful servers created the infrastructure needed to enable digitalisation. Today, many of us do our jobs, run our social lives, complete our shopping and fulfil our administrative tasks using nothing more than the devices in our pockets.

**“In theory, the economy is at our fingertips.”**

Dr Javier Lopez Gonzalez, senior trade policy analyst and senior economist, OECD

Flexibility is a central feature of this new reality. We no longer need to be in the workplace, shop at the store or go to the bank to meet our responsibilities. All these activities can now be conducted online, in real-time.

“In theory, the economy is at our fingertips”, explains Dr Javier Lopez Gonzalez, a senior trade policy analyst at the OECD.<sup>1</sup> Dr Shane Greenstein of Harvard University adds that the anywhere economy reduces the limitations of physical geography.<sup>2</sup> This ability to conduct communication, collaboration and transactions in real-time and independent of space is what we call the anywhere economy.

Despite the potential of digitalisation, we lacked the catalyst to use it to its full extent. The covid-19 pandemic acted as the accelerator for consumers and businesses to incorporate digital processes more deeply into their lives and activities. According to our survey, around two-thirds of the consumer respondents reported that the pandemic had either prompted them to start online shopping and streaming entertainment or increased the frequency of engaging in both. Additionally, 60% of respondents reported using video calls more, while half indicated an increased level of online socialising.

<sup>1</sup> Economist Impact interview

<sup>2</sup> Economist Impact interview

This pattern was repeated in the commercial domain. Organisations are revisiting their strategies around people, processes and places to keep up pace with the anywhere economy. Since the onset of the pandemic, almost 90% of surveyed executives registered increased communications on digital platforms between colleagues and with customers and 77% had started or increased selling products or services online. The enthusiasm to provide these services at the highest quality and the greatest convenience has upended the global economy,

creating some of the world's most valuable companies and sending others into obsolescence.

Our research examines the following dimensions that the anywhere economy has impacted: i) economic competitiveness and prosperity; ii) the distribution of economic development; and iii) environmental sustainability. The report will also discuss the crucial role of increased access to digital connectivity infrastructure and trust-building in the outlook for the anywhere economy.

### **Limitations of the anywhere economy**

Although the anywhere economy offers new pathways for achieving economic growth and prosperity, experts noted that limitations still exist. Sabine Mueller, CEO of DHL Consulting, says that "the system is not as flexible as the technologies ... e-commerce gets more complicated as soon as borders are crossed." She adds that "customs, embargoes and compliance with regulations and data security must be ensured." Dr Shane Greenstein of Harvard University agrees, arguing that although the anywhere economy brings down costs, governments still impose taxes and tariffs on transactions, limiting the truly global reach.

On whether the anywhere economy can be truly "anywhere", Dr Greenstein notes that "it is not entirely independent of distance, as time zones still matter." Equity questions are also a major determinant of whether the anywhere economy lives up to its name. If the internet is not everywhere, a digital divide exists, and thus the anywhere economy cannot truly be "anywhere". This also applies to different jobs and workflows. At present, work in many crucial sectors, such as retail or healthcare, cannot be done anytime or anywhere. These roles are still bound by geography, so employees in these fields are excluded from this new economy.

## II. Economic competitiveness and prosperity

With the advent of the anywhere economy, online e-commerce marketplaces are booming, remote work is commonplace, and digital products, such as streamed movies, music and video games, are widely available for consumers. The anywhere economy is transforming global marketplaces, demanding innovation and enabling productivity gains. Greater flexibility also allows access to a wider pool of candidates. These effects ushered in by the anywhere economy will catalyse economic growth.

**According to Economist Impact's estimates, as the anywhere economy expands, productivity will grow in all ten countries, increasing on average by 10% over the forecast period.**

### A. Boosting productivity

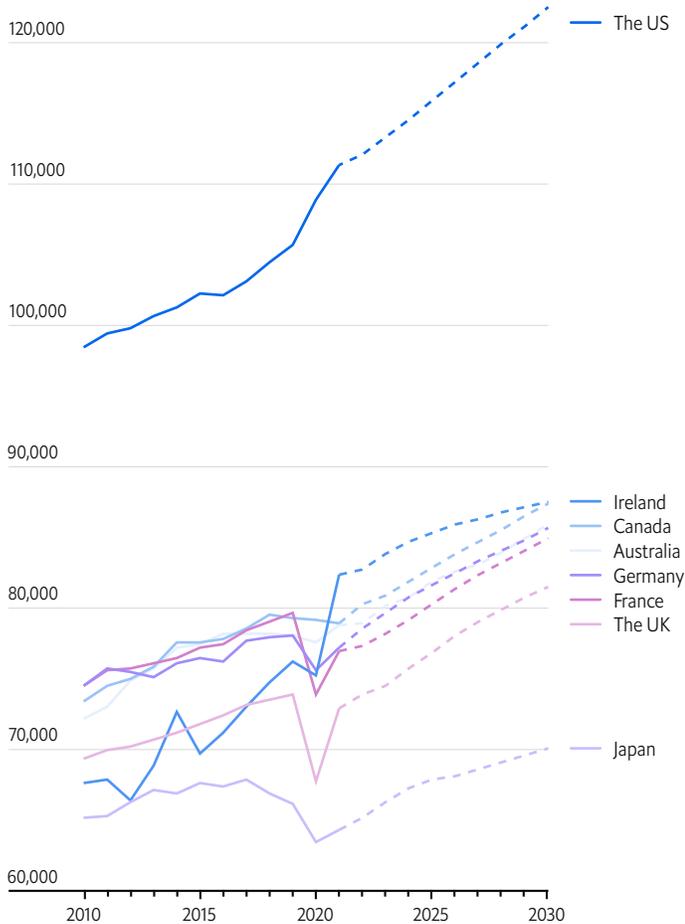
Innovations, new product demands and shifting ways of conducting commercial relationships can improve workers' productivity at the micro level. Studies have suggested that moving workers to hybrid models can generate substantial savings for firms, notably through higher productivity due to lower absenteeism and staff turnover.<sup>3</sup> More than three-quarters of surveyed executives agreed that the ability to work at any time and from any location has increased productivity.

According to Economist Impact estimates, the anywhere economy has the potential to boost productivity (defined as GDP per worker). The results suggest that as the anywhere economy expands, productivity will grow in all ten countries, increasing on average by 10% over the forecast period.<sup>4</sup>

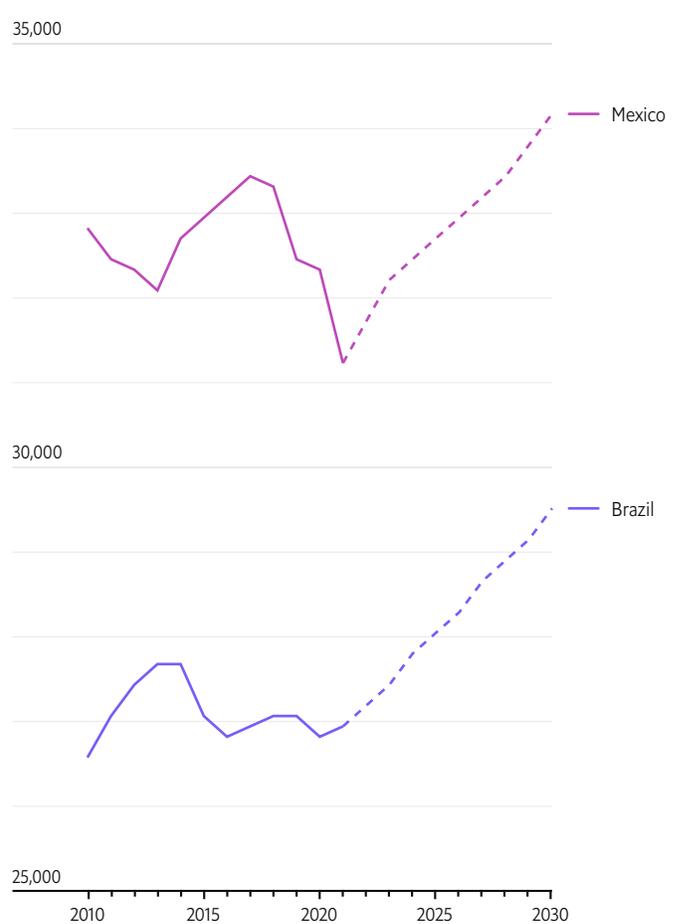
<sup>3</sup> See for example: <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/cut-oil>

<sup>4</sup> Mexico and Brazil are presented in a separate graph to better reflect the scale. In Brazil and Mexico, the overall productivity in terms of GDP per worker is lower than the other eight countries, although they experience similar relative growth gains over the forecast period.

**Labour productivity (GDP per worker, US\$ at PPP) - developed countries**  
2022–30



**Labour productivity (GDP per worker, US\$ at PPP) - emerging markets**  
2022–30



### Spurring innovation

As companies look to take advantage of the demand for new products and services in the anywhere economy, the need for innovation takes centre stage. More research and development (R&D) spending is required to understand and meet the opportunities associated with digital services within the anywhere economy, in areas as diverse as telemedicine, logistics and banking.

According to Economist Impact estimates, as the anywhere economy expands, business expenditure on R&D in all ten countries will increase significantly—reaching 1.3-1.5 times its 2021 level by 2030. The UK and France are projected to have the highest growth rate over the forecast period, at 51% and 47% respectively; government action to prioritise R&D expenditure in these countries places innovation at the forefront, leading them to excel in this area.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/ga/preasraitis/18f45-minister-harris-launches-impact-2030-irelands-new-research-and-innovation-strategy/>

## B. Expanding the talent pool

Remote work flexibility has opened up new hiring opportunities for organisations by allowing them to consider candidates from a wider geographic range. Remote work has also enabled groups such as working parents, older adults and individuals with disabilities to work from the comfort of their homes, avoiding the challenges of a daily commute or physical work settings. Women also stand to benefit. Gender-based discrimination and burdensome caregiving responsibilities can disadvantage women's advancement in the workforce, and the anywhere economy can help assuage inequity by opening up new opportunities. The majority (77%) of surveyed executives agreed that the anywhere economy had a positive impact on their ability to hire from a wider pool of

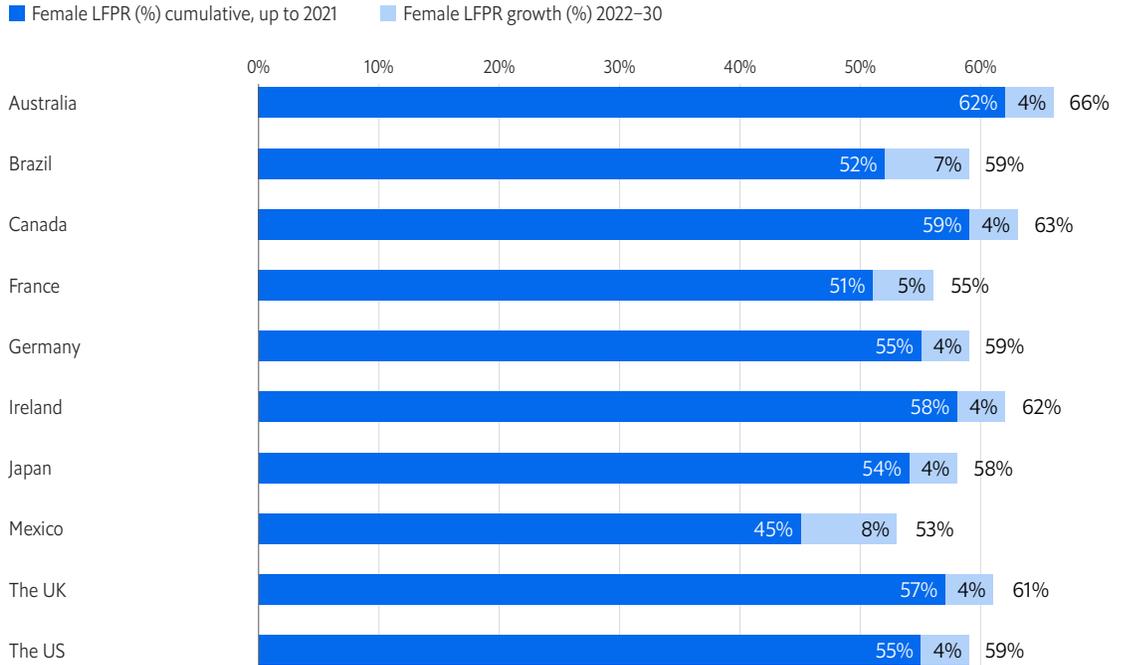
candidates. They were enthusiastic about the potential benefits of broader hiring for promoting diversity and inclusion. Most executives and consumers believe that the anywhere economy enhances labour market access for groups such as individuals with a disability, working parents, women and older adults (aged 65 and above).

To see what this looks like in practice, we estimated the change in the female and older adults' labour force participation rate (LFPR) stemming from the anywhere economy in the ten studied countries during 2022-30. We forecast that an additional 25 million women will be brought into the labour force in 2030 alone. This represents an average growth of five percentage points, from 55% in 2021 to nearly 60% in 2030. The two emerging markets, Brazil and Mexico, will see the largest gains in their female LFPR, at 6.6 and 8.0 percentage points, respectively—although their overall female LFPR is lower than that of most developed countries. Across the ten countries, for every 1,000 women aged 15 and above, the anywhere economy is estimated to draw 48 additional women to join the labour force.

**Across the ten countries, for every 1,000 women aged 15 and above, the anywhere economy is estimated to draw 48 additional women to join the labour force.**



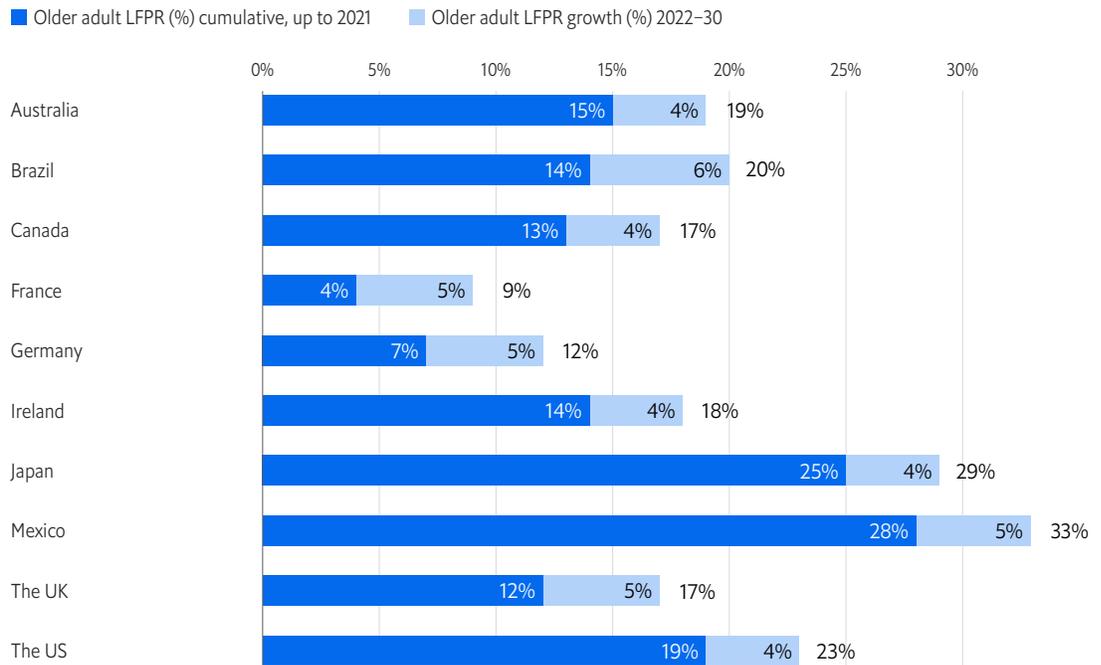
**Expansion of female LFPR associated with the expansion of the anywhere economy**



Flexible work hours and the option to telework also offer opportunities for older adults to stay engaged in the workforce for longer.<sup>6</sup> Our forecast shows that across the ten countries, the anywhere economy will bring an additional 10 million people aged 65+ into the labour force in 2030 alone. The older adults' average LFPR will be nearly 20%, up from 15% in 2021. This rise varies on a country-by-country basis, ranging from 8.8% in France

to 33.5% in Mexico. The two emerging markets, Brazil and Mexico, will see the largest gains in the older adults' LFPRs. Despite having the lowest LFPR of older adults among the studied countries, France will still see their rate double from 4% in 2021 to nearly 9% in 2030. Across the ten countries, for every 1,000 people aged 65+, the anywhere economy is estimated to draw 47 additional older adults to the labour force.

**Expansion of older adults' LFPR associated with the expansion of the anywhere economy**



<sup>6</sup> <https://gacommuteoptions.com/about-us/media-center/flexwork-for-an-aging-workforce/>

The “anywhere” nature of the anywhere economy extends to global recruitment. Almost two-thirds of executives said that the anywhere economy had expanded their organisation’s recruitment geographically, while a quarter said that their firm was planning to do so. More than three-quarters agreed that it had opened up a wider talent pool, and more than 60% said that they had hired workers in new locations because of the possibility of remote working. Competition for labour in the anywhere economy is further encouraging firms to open up hiring across geographies and demographics.

### C. Economic growth

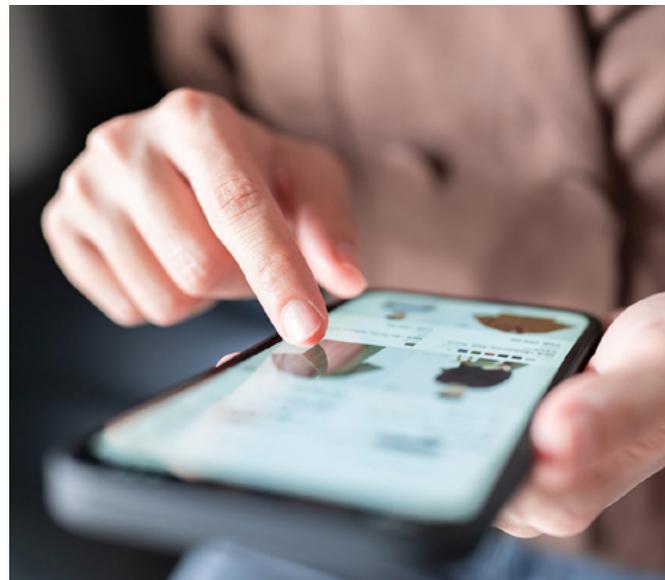
Taken together, access to a larger labour force and higher productivity ushered in by the anywhere economy will catalyse economic growth. We estimate that US\$2.6trn will be added to the combined GDP of the ten countries in 2030 alone, with a cumulative US\$19.4trn over 2022-30.<sup>7</sup>

**US\$2.6trn will be added to the combined GDP of the ten countries in 2030 alone, with a cumulative US\$19.4trn over 2022-30.**

Consumer-facing marketplaces are set to experience similar growth. Sabine Mueller, the CEO of DHL Consulting, recognises that “global e-commerce offers unprecedented opportunities for businesses to expand their reach and increase their profits.” The increased flexibility and access to a wider range of goods and services via online platforms can extend to consumers’ greater access to leisure and educational opportunities. Consumer expenditure on leisure and education is projected to grow across the ten studied countries, with Ireland, Mexico and Australia expected to experience the largest increases, at 1.3-1.5 times their 2021 level by 2030.

Conducting business online generates opportunities to create new products and services and sell them into new markets. Seventy percent of the surveyed executives agreed that the ability to connect to global buyers and sellers online has enabled more cross-border business. This is primarily because it removes one of the biggest barriers to trade: the need for buyers and sellers to be in the same place for the transaction. Harvard Business School’s Dr Greenstein explains: “Digital commerce has improved both standardisation and personalisation: suppliers have access to more buyers, and buyers have access to more suppliers. This removes a lot of the friction from a transaction.”<sup>8</sup>

The opportunity to increase their sales of digital services was a primary reason for organisations to participate in the anywhere economy, according to the executives we surveyed. “There is a natural tendency towards economies of scale, as new digital products are being created,” notes Dr Lopez Gonzalez of the OECD. In short, the anywhere economy facilitates economic growth by providing the tools necessary to expand the existing growth patterns.



<sup>7</sup> This GDP is measured using purchasing power parity (PPP) to establish an equilibrium among various countries’ currencies, enabling a more precise comparison of economic growth across countries.

<sup>8</sup> Economist Impact interview

## III. Distribution of development



Participation in the anywhere economy relies on having stable and useful access to its platforms. All its benefits are predicated on the assumption of access, and developed markets tend to benefit more. Therefore, a central question surrounding the value of the anywhere economy is its long-term impact on inequality between countries. Access to the anywhere economy is impossible without sophisticated mobile devices and affordable and reliable internet connections. The provision of these attributes varies wildly around the world. Almost half of the world's eight billion people remain offline. Men are 21% more likely to be online than women, and that number rises to 52% in the world's least developed countries.<sup>9</sup>

The issue of access is not limited to emerging markets. Distribution gaps also exist within advanced economies. A researcher at Stanford University found that only 65% of Americans reported having a sufficiently fast internet connection to support video calls.<sup>10</sup> The Australian Digital Inclusion Index, a study produced in collaboration between telecom providers and academics, found major differences in inclusion between highly educated Australians and the elderly, those on low incomes and those with low educational achievement.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <https://impact.economist.com/projects/inclusive-internet-index/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/06/29/snapshot-new-working-home-economy/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/dashboard/Total.aspx>

## A. Distribution of development between countries

The distribution gap between countries poses the largest scale risk, and global action is needed to ensure that the anywhere economy does not push emerging markets further behind. Dr Dutta of the University of Oxford argues that digital technologies increase inequities worldwide because they have a multiplier effect. Wealthier countries can use the advantages of the anywhere economy to create value at a higher rate.<sup>12</sup> He predicts that the value-creation gap between developed and less developed countries will continue to widen as technological capabilities expand.

Christy Hoffman of UNI Global Union shares this concern, commenting that the working conditions in low-income countries may face a greater risk of falling behind under the anywhere economy. Remote work, particularly in countries with inadequate digital infrastructure, weak labour law enforcement, and insufficient coverage of collective bargaining, may conceal workers' issues from trade union representatives and regulators. Additionally, it could fragment the workforce, making collective action considerably more challenging.<sup>13</sup> Without the same infrastructure, institutions and skills to benefit from the same multiplier effects of the anywhere economy, developing countries risk falling behind. Facilitating access by investing in and improving digital infrastructure and focusing on skill-building at the national level will be crucial to close the gap between advanced economies and emerging markets.



**Dr Dutta of the University of Oxford argues that digital technologies increase inequities worldwide because they have a multiplier effect. Wealthier countries can use the advantages of the anywhere economy to create value at a higher rate.**

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.un.org/technologybank/news/ldc-insight-4-strengthening-digital-capacities-least-developed-countries-even-more-urgent-post>

<sup>13</sup> Economist Impact interview

## B. Distribution of development within countries

Over the past 50 years, deindustrialisation in advanced economies, enabled by deepening globalisation, has resulted in a greater shift in economic power from rural to urban areas.<sup>14</sup> As cities have grown, agglomeration effects have spurred their growth still further.<sup>15</sup> Dr Greenstein of Harvard University cites data centres as a good example of such an effect: “Data centres are not placed in low-density areas. The next-generation technology requires a huge amount of investment, so it favours more developed and high-density areas”.<sup>16</sup> Despite greater property costs, it remains preferable for firms to invest closer to where more people live and work because there is greater capacity for cost savings and better performance across a higher volume of users.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, a higher proportion of our executives and consumers that live in urban areas believe that their communities have received more investment from corporations than those in rural areas.

give them better housing and comparable access to education and amenities without a time-consuming commute to the office.<sup>18</sup> Companies have also spotted the potential benefits of this trend. A third opened more satellite offices, indicating an acceptance of their employees’ desire to move, and a quarter shrank the size of their premises, a more obvious commitment to hybrid working in the long term. Already, 17% of companies have moved their offices from a large city to the suburbs. Consumer respondents are enthusiastic about the shift, with a plurality believing that the anywhere economy will increase the value of their home (49%), increase investment in local technology infrastructure (48%) and improve their access to job opportunities (43%).

Economist Impact estimates that across the ten countries, the anywhere economy will create an additional 2.6 million jobs in rural areas in 2030 alone. The average rural employment rate (age 15+) will rise from 57% in 2021 to 59% in 2030—ie, for every 1,000 rural residents age 15+, the anywhere economy will bring about 20 additional jobs. Notably, Brazil will see the largest gain in the rural employment rate during 2021-30 (2.4 percentage points), while the US will see the largest increase in job creation in rural areas (860,000) in 2030.

**The average rural employment rate (age 15+) will rise from 57% in 2021 to 59% in 2030—ie, for every 1,000 rural residents age 15+, the anywhere economy will bring about 20 additional jobs.**

However, the anywhere economy offers a compelling vision of something different. The pandemic persuaded many workers, typically those with higher education and income levels, that moving to smaller cities would

Our forecasts on household income distribution look at the percentage of low-income households within the economy and show a similar trend. With the exception of France and Ireland, all countries assessed will see a decrease in

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5jlr068802f7-en.pdf?expires=1677781767&id=id&acname=guest&checksum=008B2C16F27F9D349077320B15EA7656>

<sup>15</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9787.2009.00657.x>

<sup>16</sup> Economist Impact interview

<sup>17</sup> <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/where-the-cloud-rests-the-economic-geography-of-data-centers>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20220125-the-small-cities-and-towns-booming-from-remote-work>; <https://www.governing.com/work/small-towns-draw-remote-workers-for-lifestyle-affordability>; <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/02/16/covid-19-pandemic-continues-to-reshape-work-in-america/>

the percentage of low-income households, indicating an improvement in household income distribution. Notably, Mexico will see the greatest improvement (reduced by 7 percentage points), potentially driven by the recent significant increase in investments in social security benefits in addition to the impact of the anywhere economy.<sup>19</sup> France and Ireland

will see an increase in the percentage of low income households, rising by nearly 2 percentage points and 0.4 percentage points, respectively. Both France and Ireland have historically reported higher levels of inequality than most EU countries, which may, in part, negate the anywhere economy's capacity to lower the percentage of low-income households.<sup>20</sup>

### How does the anywhere economy change where people live?

Gen Z, Millennial and Gen X consumers were more likely to prefer a hybrid model than Baby Boomers. Roughly 40% of Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X reported a preference for a hybrid work model compared with 23% of Baby Boomers. Gen X was the generation most likely to prefer a fully remote work model (15%), and men tend to prefer fully in-person models compared with women (34% to 28%).

For employees, the anywhere economy also allows them to live wherever they wish rather than where they can find work. Remarkably, **57% of consumers said that if cost, work and community ties were not a restraint, they would like to live in a different place.** Of those, 18% would like to live somewhere else in the same country, 14% would like to move internationally, and 25% would like to travel continuously all over the world. The pandemic appears to have jolted some of this group into action. A global services company, PwC, estimated in 2021 that 12% of US workers had moved at least 50 miles away from a core office location since the start of the pandemic, while another 22% were planning to do so.

However, Greg Wright of the Brookings Institute and Christy Hoffman, general secretary of UNI Global Union, pointed out that some workers will always be excluded from the anywhere economy because their jobs require them to work at fixed locations: in hospitals, schools, science labs and airports, for instance. This could be because of the need to use specialised equipment or the necessity of interacting face-to-face with customers.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2019/07/11/Income-Inequality-and-Government-Transfers-in-Mexico-47015>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/income-inequality-in-ireland-the-devil-is-in-the-detail-1.4653255>

### C. Diversity, equity and inclusion

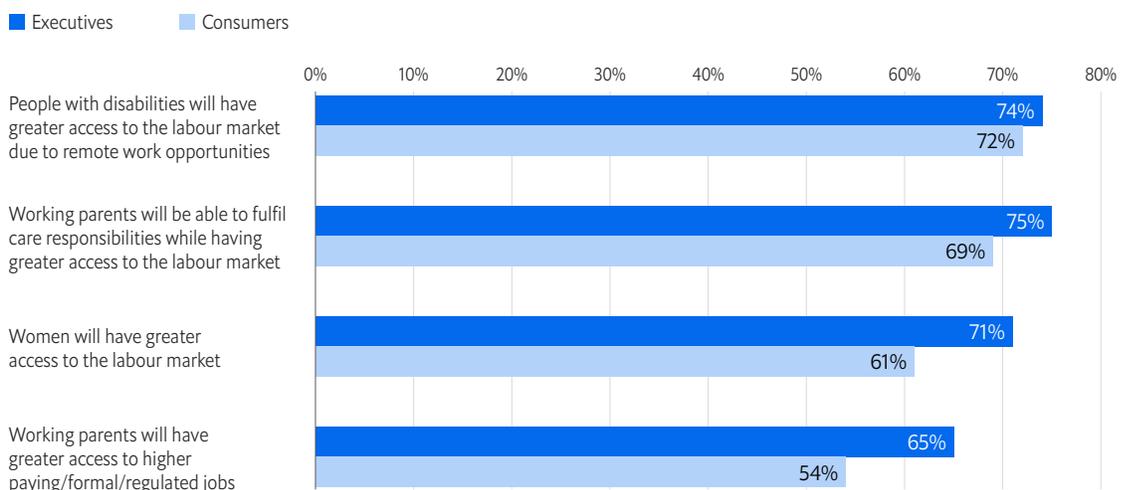
Two-thirds of executives stated that the adoption of remote work and increased digitalisation have contributed to diversifying the workforce, and more than three-quarters agreed that flexible work schedules had made their workforce more diverse and equitable. It is easy to imagine why this might be the case. Working remotely is likely to generate more employment opportunities for employees who need to work more flexible hours because of their domestic situations or need adapted equipment at home. Claire Hastwell of Great Place To Work confirms that “people with disabilities felt like their health and psychological safety improved when they were able to work from home.”<sup>21</sup>

The majority of executives and consumers recognised that the anywhere economy will expand access to the job market for older adults, women, the disabled and working parents through working flexibly and/or remotely. However, respondents also expressed concern that insufficient technical skills or a lack of visibility could negatively impact members

of these groups. Greater access may help people in marginalised groups land a job, but new barriers may prevent upward mobility and success if they are not targeted and addressed. For example, 61% of executives are concerned that older adults may face fewer job opportunities due to insufficient technical skills.

Consumers were more cautious than executives in endorsing the anywhere economy’s role in improving job opportunities for women, parents, the disabled and older workers. The share saying that it improves women’s access to the labour market was nine percentage points lower than for executives. There were similarly large gaps between the two groups in their view of older adults’ access to remote work opportunities (11 percentage points) and working parents (6 percentage points), but it was less of a marked difference for disabled workers (2 percentage points). The divisions in consumers’ and executives’ income levels and varied experiences within the workforce are likely to explain some of these differences of opinion.

**Percentage of respondents who agree with anywhere economy's impact of increased access to job opportunities for select demographic groups**



<sup>21</sup> Economist Impact interview

The survey indicated that the benefits of conducting activities online are disproportionately distributed across the income spectrum. Executives and consumers are both positive about its potential: three-quarters of executives and more than half of consumers believe that increased flexibility in when and where we work, exercise and socialise has improved health and well-being, with the ease of connecting with friends and family remotely being a major contributor. High-income earners were much more upbeat. There was a gap of 12 percentage points between high- and low-income earners reporting a positive impact on their physical health and a seven percentage point difference reporting improved mental well-being. Moreover, 25% of low-income consumers felt that the impact of digital technology on mental health deserved more attention and investment, compared with 20% of high-income earners. High-income earners and executives have more confidence that corrective actions will be taken to use the anywhere economy as a tool for equitable development.

#### **D. How can equity gaps be remedied?**

The anywhere economy could reduce social inequity if access can be made available to those currently excluded. Two-thirds of the executives and over half of the consumers agreed that enhancing connectivity, financial inclusion and access to trade and services through the anywhere economy could be a great social equaliser. A similar proportion of our executives agreed that the anywhere economy is helping emerging markets to become more prominent in global trade. Actions such as government investment in internet infrastructure and the development of accessible technology training programmes can alleviate equity gaps and help make the benefits of the anywhere economy apply more broadly to marginalised groups. If policy measures are taken to improve access, the anywhere economy could be a force for good.



## IV. Environmental sustainability

A study of the environmental effects of the anywhere economy is necessary to understand its overall impact. Given the short timeframe since the anywhere economy became more embedded in societies and the simultaneous volatility in many economic indicators, it is still hard to see a clear picture. For example, global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions fell by 5.3% in 2020 from 2019. This decline, unprecedented in modern history, was an externality of the pandemic, but led to hopes that the anywhere economy could become a driver of falling carbon emissions and greater environmental sustainability.<sup>22</sup> Since the pandemic abated and economies reopened, emissions have reverted to their previous levels.<sup>23</sup>

**Almost three-quarters of the executives surveyed agreed that remote working has enabled their organisations to progress towards net-zero targets, and two-thirds reported using emissions data to make more environmentally sustainable decisions.**

It is possible that remote working continues to promote environmental sustainability, but that more emissions-heavy drivers are overshadowing it. The most obvious route through which the anywhere economy can reduce emissions is by cutting down on commuting. The US Environmental Protection Agency calculated that transport emissions, which account for around a quarter of the total US GHG emissions, fell by 13% in 2020.<sup>24</sup> This is a significant decline in the context of the emissions produced by the world's largest economy. However, this drop occurred during a severe recession. Some journeys were foregone because consumer demand for goods declined, and others because jobs were lost. The impact purely from lost commuting will be smaller.

There are other factors in play too. Some workers will offset many low-emission train journeys with a smaller number of emission-intensive flights to see colleagues who now work in more distant locations. Emissions saved in energy-efficient offices could be replaced by those generated in less efficient homes. A study by the US National Bureau of Economic Research found that electricity usage during the height of the pandemic in the second quarter of 2020 fell by just 3.5% from the year-earlier period.

<sup>22</sup> [https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report\\_2022](https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2022)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.iea.org/news/global-co2-emissions-rose-less-than-initially-feared-in-2022-as-clean-energy-growth-offset-much-of-the-impact-of-greater-coal-and-oil-use>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions#:~:text=From%202019%20to%202020%2C%20transportation,that%20led%20to%20less%20travel.>

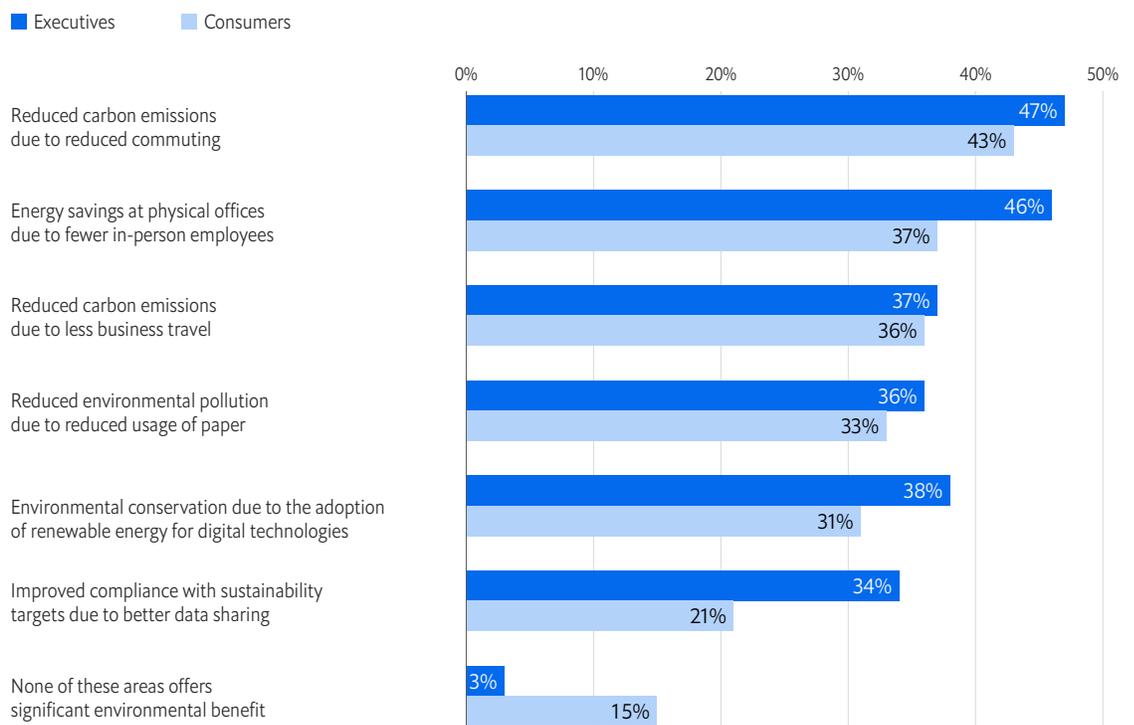
This is because a 10% increase in domestic electricity consumption largely offset a 12% fall in commercial use and a 14% drop in industrial demand.<sup>25</sup> The environmental impacts tend to “cancel out”, which is why current environmental impact studies are inconclusive.

Executives appear to be more optimistic about the positive impact of the anywhere economy on environmental sustainability than consumers. Forty-seven percent believe that reduced commuting is the biggest environmental benefit. Energy savings through smaller physical offices was another popular choice, as was forgone longer-haul business travel. Almost three-quarters agreed that remote working has enabled their organisations to

progress towards net-zero targets, and two-thirds reported using emissions data to make more environmentally sustainable decisions.

Around a third of consumers believe that a positive feedback loop is possible. They believe that environmentally friendly digital solutions can help tackle climate change, leading to the greater adoption of such solutions, which then spurs stronger climate mitigation. However, one note of caution came from Alexander Holst, a managing director at Accenture. He remarked that the benefits will only be felt if we commit to sustainability wholeheartedly. Intentional action to ensure that advancements of the anywhere economy are also sustainable is needed to ensure the environmental impact is net positive.

**Executives and consumers' perceptions on the environmental sustainability impact of the anywhere economy**



<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nber.org/digest/202012/working-homes-impact-electricity-use-pandemic>

# V. Outlook

We have entered the age of the anywhere economy. The pandemic provided the impetus for its rapid progression, but its full potential has not yet been realised. Questions remain about what the progression of the anywhere economy will look like and what that means for people, businesses and economies.

## **A. Adoption of the anywhere economy is likely to accelerate**

The anywhere economy is here to stay, and businesses and consumers will continue to adapt their behaviour to the new technology and infrastructure. Around a third of executives and consumers believe that complex risks or crises, such as the pandemic or climate change, will deepen our dependence on digitalisation. Many believe that the role played by the anywhere economy in our lives will only grow as a consequence. Fifty-nine percent of executives and 47% of consumers expect its expansion to accelerate in the future.

The surveyed executives and consumers are excited about the opportunity to maximise the benefits of the anywhere economy. Most executives reported a positive impact of the anywhere economy on their organisations in areas such as productivity, profitability and

reputation. They identified increased trade in digital services (33%), expanding business at home and abroad (31%), and greater competition in the market (29%) as the most significant ways that the anywhere economy will benefit their businesses. Consumers were almost as optimistic, citing time-saving, greater access to goods and services, and easier connections to friends, family and co-workers as the greatest benefits.

## **B. Trust must be built to enable this acceleration to happen**

The expansion of the anywhere economy relies on a continuation and a deepening of trust at all levels. Sixty-eight percent of executives say the anywhere economy has positively impacted their organisation's ability to develop trust in business relations, and 65% say it has improved their organisation's reputation and consumer trust. Consumers also have trust in the anywhere economy. Forty-four percent report that it has positively impacted their trust in information, and 42% say the same for companies. There is an implicit trust in permitting employees to work away from where they can be supervised directly, likewise in signing a contract with a supplier on a different continent or purchasing a product online without seeing it in person.



Ensuring the reliability of the technology that forms the foundation of the anywhere economy is crucial for maintaining trust. Anton Chuvakin, security advisor at the office of the chief information security officer (CISO) at Google Cloud, warns that “as we become more digital, cybersecurity needs and risks change. There are risks to the business, data and society.”<sup>26</sup> Weak security protections, lagging regulation, and concerns about the health and well-being impacts of our dependency on technology were all viewed as impediments to the growth of the anywhere economy by respondents.

Executives and consumers are particularly concerned about the risks posed by inadequate security that enable both micro-crimes, such as identity theft, and macro-attacks, like ransomware. Just under half of executives and consumers agreed that cybersecurity was the most critical area for attention and investment to grow the anywhere economy. Embedding digital verification technology, which offers verified and authenticated proof of identification, into IT infrastructure was a particularly popular choice among respondents to reduce security risks. A secure and trustworthy digital foundation is vital for the anywhere economy to achieve the rates of acceleration that executives and consumers predict.

### C. Digital literacy and infrastructure should become more inclusive

Our survey respondents identified digital literacy and infrastructure as the second and third most significant barriers to the acceleration of the anywhere economy, after cybersecurity. Widespread access can only exist if users have the physical capacity and understanding to utilise digital devices successfully.

It is vital to increase the proportion of the population that feels comfortable participating in the anywhere economy to enable it to be a driver of greater equality.

The age of digital literacy emphasises the ability to validate knowledge and distinguish between fact and fiction.<sup>27</sup> This validation process is a skill, and practising it builds the foundation of trust that underpins the anywhere economy. Digital literacy varies between countries and socio-economic groups, and executives are aware of the need to promote it among their employees. Sixty percent of organisations report that they have increased online skill development courses because of the pandemic, but the need to develop digital literacy extends beyond organisations. National-level action is needed to provide the required skills for people of all demographics to effectively participate in the anywhere economy.

There is also a clear role for governments in promoting physical access: 34% of executives said that increased state support through industrial policy and investment in infrastructure would result in a greater acceptance of the anywhere economy within society. This is also linked to equality. If governments take visible steps towards directing the anywhere economy to support marginalised groups, it could enhance the perception of its advantages among the broader population.

<sup>26</sup> Economist Impact interview

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/publications/21st-century-readers-a83d84cb-en.htm>

## VI. Conclusion



Just 20 years ago, the prospect that our economy could be accessible anytime, anywhere was unimaginable. But digitalisation has ushered in a new economic era, and now we must grapple with this new reality. There is much to be excited about. The anywhere economy has created a tremendous amount of economic opportunity. Businesses have new pathways to prosperity, and consumers are offered new forms of entertainment, connectivity, and ways to balance their work and lives.

But this new era also raises new challenges. We need to understand its impacts so we can work collectively to ensure that policy measures are implemented to maximise its benefits and minimise its costs. Technology will always be ahead of our capabilities, and the regulatory response will always lag, making it all the more important to consider how we effectively manage the complexities of the anywhere economy. Its success hinges on whether countries at all stages of development, communities of all sizes and people from all demographics can reap the economic and personal benefits it can offer.

# VII. Appendix: methodology note

Through an extensive literature review and expert interviews, Economist Impact identified four areas that are expected to be the most impacted by the anywhere economy. Across these areas, we selected eight indicators that we expect to be the most significant externalities, including:

- Workplace transformation: productivity; business research and development (R&D) expenditure.
- Labour force and talent pool: female labour force participation; labour force participation of older adults.
- Development equality: rural employment; low-income households.
- Trade and economic development: GDP growth; leisure and education expenditure.

We quantified these impacts at the macro level from 2022-30 for the ten countries included in this programme (Australia and Japan in Asia-Pacific; France, Germany, Ireland and the UK in Europe; Mexico and Brazil in Latin America; and Canada and the US in North America). The estimates were conducted through the following two approaches, depending on data availability.

## **Econometric modelling**

We constructed econometric models to quantify the change in the three indicators of productivity (as GDP per worker), business R&D expenditure, and leisure and education expenditure associated with the expansion of the anywhere economy. The models were built upon historical data for the ten countries from 2010 to 2021. For each indicator, we forecasted annual values from 2022 to 2030 for the ten countries.

Based on desk research and data availability, two main input variables were selected to be proxies of the anywhere economy: exports of digitally deliverable services and the number of remote workers. Where necessary, country and time-fixed effects or controls were included to account for differences between countries and the effects of the covid-19 pandemic.

The data on exports of digitally deliverable services comes from the UN Conference on Trade and Development and is an aggregation of potentially ICT-enabled services, including insurance and pension services, financial services, charges for the use of intellectual property, telecoms, computer and information services, other business services, and audiovisual and related services.

Our forecast was based on a 'what if' scenario: what if exports of digitally deliverable services would double as a percentage of GDP by 2030, as compared with the annual average percentage of GDP for 2010-21, as the anywhere economy expands?

Data on remote workers were gathered from official national statistics from each country and academic literature. There are inconsistencies in how 'remote worker' is defined by these various sources; however, in general, remote workers are considered as those who work primarily from home (all or most of the time). Additionally, due to inconsistent data on remote workers from before the covid-19 pandemic, generally constant percentages of remote workers were assumed to estimate missing data where necessary. Similar to the other proxy, our forecast was based on a 'what if' scenario: what if the ratio of remote workers to total employment would stay constant at its 2021 level for 2022-30? The underlying assumption here is that the 2021 level represents the maximum extent of remote work potential over the forecast period.

The key limitation of our model is the need to use proxy variables for the anywhere economy due to the novelty of this concept. While we believe that our two main input variables are good proxies given data availability, they are not a perfect measure of the anywhere economy. Therefore, this 'what if' exercise is more to illustrate the potential scale by using our best approximate quantification of the growth of the anywhere economy. In addition, the models cannot establish causality between the variables, so our forecasts rely on the historical relationship between variables to predict future values. While the growth of the anywhere economy is associated with positive or negative changes in each indicator, we cannot with certainty say that it is the cause of these changes.

### Survey-based projection

For the remaining indicators, we projected the impact of the anywhere economy through 2030 by leveraging results from the consumer survey conducted for this programme. This approach was selected mainly due to the lack of quality historical data essential for estimating statistically significant relationships between relevant variables.

Our consumer survey gauged respondents' perceptions about the impact of the anywhere economy on access to job opportunities and income inequality based on an individual's gender, age and location (eg, urban or rural). We used these results in conjunction with historical and forecast data from the International Labour Organization, The Economist Intelligence Unit and the UN Population Prospects to assess the impact of the anywhere economy on the labour force participation rate of women and older adults, rural employment and the distribution of low-income households.

In addition, we quantified a potential increase in GDP stemming from the expansion of the anywhere economy based on our estimates of its impact on productivity (GDP per worker) and growth of the female and older adults' workforce.

While every effort has been taken to verify the accuracy of this information, Economist Impact cannot accept any responsibility or liability for reliance by any person on this report or any of the information, opinions or conclusions set out in this report. The findings and views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the sponsor.

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