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| Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau | | | |
| Preparations for the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2021 | | | |
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| **Summary:**  This document covers the preparations so far for the organization of the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2021 (WTDC-21) that is scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 8 to 19 November 2021.  **Action required:**  TDAG is invited to note this document.  **References:**  N/A | | | |

1. **Background**
   1. No. 141 of the ITU Constitution stipulates that there shall be a World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) between two Plenipotentiary Conferences.
   2. Resolution 77 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) resolves to hold the WTDC in the last quarter of 2021.
   3. WTDC Resolution 31 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) expresses the firm convictionthat the coordination of preparations at regional level for the six regions of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) are of great benefit to Member States.
2. **Place, duration, dates, and venue for WTDC-21**
   1. At its 2019 session, the ITU Council noted with appreciation the official invitation from the Government of Ethiopia to host WTDC‑21 in Addis Ababa from 8 to 19 November 2021 and approved the precise place and exact dates.
   2. By [Circular Letter No. 19/33](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-SG-CIR-0033/) of 22 July 2019, ITU Member States were invited to confirm, in writing, their agreement with the precise place and exact dates of WTDC-21 by 30 September 2019.
   3. By [Circular Letter No. 19/45](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-SG-CIR-0045/) of 3 October 2019, ITU Member States were informed that the consultation carried out as outlined above had received the agreement of the required majority of ITU Member States, in accordance with Nos. 42 and 213 of the ITU Convention.
   4. It is envisaged that a Youth Summit will be held on 6 and 7 November 2021, just prior to WTDC-21, also in Addis Ababa.
   5. The current COVID-19 pandemic has caused the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly 2020 (WTSA-20) to be postponed twice, initially to dates in the first quarter of 2021 (23 February-5 March 2021), and finally to 1-9 March 2022.
   6. During the first Inter-Regional Meeting to prepare for WTDC-21 (IRM-1), Ethiopia submitted a [contribution](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMIRM-C-0021/en) outlining the four possible options envisaged by the host country for the holding of the conference, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. This contribution contained a study of the various mitigation measures that would be required and that the host country would implement for each of the four options for the conference to be held. Some of the Member States present at this meeting noted and endorsed the request made by the CEPT in a letter dated 3 March 2021 to the Secretary General, that any decision on a potential change of format or dates of the conference be taken six months in advance of the currently scheduled dates. A Task Group has been formed comprising representatives of the host country and the secretariat, which is collaboration with the UN organs in Africa, are monitoring the global pandemic situation and working to develop options to ensure a timely decision on plans for the conference.
   7. On 12 April 2021, the Ethiopian Administration wrote to the Secretary General (see [Document CL21/76](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0076/en)) noting that due to the current sanitary situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unknown whether travel restrictions will be lifted by November and if all Member States will be able to participate on equal footing. Considering this uncertainty, Ethiopia proposed to postpone the WTDC-21 to 6-15 June 2022, and requested that the Secretary General consult ITU’s membership on the postponement as soon as possible.
   8. By [circular letter DM-21/1010](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-DM-CIR-01010/en), dated 15 April 2021, and and in accordance with Rule 3.2 of the Council’s Rules of Procedure on consultations and decisions between sessions and No. 42 of the ITU Convention, the Secretary General commenced a consultation of members of the Council on the request by Ethiopia to postpone the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2021, to 6 to 15 June 2022. The deadline given for responses from members of Council was 7 May 2021, and following the consultation, if members of Council agree to Ethiopia’s proposal, a consultation of member states will need to be undertaken to confirm the Council’s decision.
3. **Latest developments**

3.1 A first site visit took place from 30 September to 3 October 2019 by an ITU team to visit potential venues to hold the events, and to visit the potential hotels where participants and ITU staff will be staying.

3.2 The virtual signing ceremony of the Host Country Agreement between Ethiopia and ITU relating to the holding, organizing and financing of WTDC-21 was held on 9 November 2020, during the first Road to Addis event. It signalled the start of the official one-year count-down to WTDC-21. Conversations on the holding of the Youth Summit are under way.

3.3 Discussions on the Conference preparatory process and the development of impact-oriented outcomes began in a brainstorming session during [TDAG-19](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/TDAG/Pages/TDAG24/default.aspx). These discussions have been further informed through a [membership-wide survey](https://itu-d.limequery.com/365362?newtest=Y&lang=en), as well as two [TDAG web dialogues](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/TDAG/Pages/TDAG25/default.aspx). Consultations continued up to the TDAG meeting in June 2020, which decided to create three working groups, two of which are directly linked to WTDC-21, and hold an extraordinary meeting on 23 November 2020 (TDAG-20/3) to endorse the proposals from these working groups:

a) The TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations (TDAG-WG-Prep), which has its terms of reference on the [TDAG-WG-Prep webpage](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/TDAG/Pages/TDAG_WG_WTDC_Prep.aspx). This group picked up from the above-mentioned web dialogues, worked until TDAG-20/3 and submitted its [proposals](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG27-C-0005/en) to this meeting, for endorsement. The endorsed recommendations may be summarized as follows:

* Holding two or three Inter-Regional Meetings (IRMs) to facilitate a platform for membership to come to a common position on key issues to be discussed at WTDC-21;
* Determination of the conference theme: “Connecting the unconnected to achieve Sustainable Development”;
* Holding a partnership segment within the Conference, that will merge the former high-level segment and side-events, based on the ITU-D thematic priorities and that will be open to key non-member stakeholders.

b) The TDAG Working Group on WTDC Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities (TDAG-WG-RDTP). The work of this group will continue until TDAG-21. The terms of reference and other information about the work of this group may be found on the [TDAG-WG-RDTP website](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/TDAG/Pages/TDAG_WG_WTDC.aspx).

1. **Preparatory process**

4.1 As per Resolution 31 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017), six **Regional Preparatory Meetings (RPMs)** are being organized in each of the six regions, as follows:

| **Region** | **Dates** | **Virtual host country** | **Output documents** |
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| RPM-EUR | 18-19 January 2021 (virtual) | Virtual host country: Czech Republic | [Report](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMEUR-C-0034/en) |
| RPM-ASP | 9-10 March 2021 (virtual) | -- | [Report](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMASP-C-0015/en) |
| RPM-AFR | 29-30 March 2021 (virtual) | Virtual host country: Burkina Faso | [Summary of conclusions](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-210329-TD-0003/en) |
| RPM-ARB | 7-8 April 2021 (virtual) | -- | [Draft report](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMARB-210407-TD-0002/en) |
| RPM-CIS | 21-22 April 2021 (virtual) | -- | -- |
| RPM-AMS | 26-27 April 2021 (virtual) | Virtual host country: Peru | -- |

RPMs aim at engaging the membership in the WTDC process in order to encourage regional coordination before the conference. RPMs also seek to identify regional topics of interest and challenges that need to be addressed to foster the development of telecommunications/ICTs and help Member States and Sector Members set common priorities.

4.2 On occasion of the six RPMs, each region launched the initiatives the **Network of Women** and the regional **Generation Connect** groups:

a) The [Network of Women (NoW)](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/NoW/Pages/default.aspx) is an initiative that encourages gender balance in the activities leading up to WTDC-21.

b) [Generation Connect](https://www.itu.int/generationconnect/generation-connect/) is the overarching initiative of the ITU Youth Strategy on the journey to WTDC-21 and the WTDC-21 Generation Connect Global Youth Summit.

4.3 An **RPM Coordination Meeting** will be held virtually on 24 May 2021, which will examine the reports of the six RPMs and submit a consolidated report to TDAG, as instructed by WTDC Resolution 31.

4.4 Based on the proposals of the TDAG-WG-Prep, three **Inter-Regional Meetings (IRMs)** to prepare for WTDC-21 were scheduled:

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| [IRM-1](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/Pages/IRM/IRM-1.aspx) | 11 March 2021, 1300h-1600h (virtual) |
| [IRM-2](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/Pages/IRM/IRM-2.aspx) | 12-14 May 2021, 1300h-1600h (virtual) |
| IRM-3 | 16-17 September 2021, Geneva (tbc) |

IRMs are open to all ITU-D membership. Member States are encouraged to include in their delegations, representatives from regulators, policy-makers, civil society, academia, Internet technical community, youth, gender equality organizations, and others.

IRM agendas are built around key discussions taking place during RPMs, and may include proposals from Member States, Sector Members, Regional Telecommunication Organizations (RTOs), BDT and other stakeholders. Discussions focus on key topics that require coordination and consensus between the different regions.

Following TDAG’s recommendations, the Chairman-designate of WTDC-21 was appointed to chair the three IRMs, and six vice-chairmen were appointed, one nominated by each of the respective RTOs. Each RTO was also invited to identify the representative(s) of their choice to speak on behalf of their region.

4.5 The **Road to Addis** is a series of virtual events hosted by the ITU in anticipation of WTDC-21, and was designed with three goals in mind:

a) Build momentum and awareness towards WTDC-21

b) Engage key stakeholders and communities, and

c) Provide an inclusive platform to discuss some of the key themes that will be addressed at the WTDC-21.

The events of the Road to Addis series will take place across the entire year 2021 and will capitalize on opportunities to create global awareness around WTDC-21 and the 6 enablers. The final event of the Road to Addis series will be in September 2021 at the UN General Assembly, where the conclusions, outcomes for connectivity, and the key messages to accelerate digital transformation at WTDC-21 will be presented. This final event will also serve to mark the starting point of a global call to action for the 6 enablers of connectivity.

* [Road to Addis, kick-off event, 9 November 2020](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/Pages/RoadToAddis/Road-To-Addis-11-2020.aspx)
* [Road to Addis, partnerships, 2 February 2021](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/R2A/Pages/Partner2Connect.aspx)
* [Road to Addis, inclusion, 18 March 2021](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/R2A/Pages/Connect2Include.aspx)
* [Road to Addis, financing, 28 April 2021](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/R2A/Pages/Finance2Connect.aspx)
* Road to Addis, leadership, 22 June 2021
* Road to Addis, innovation, 21 July 2021
* Road to Addis, youth, 12 August 2021

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