



Telecommunication
Development Bureau (BDT)



Ref.: Circular BDT/DKS/IDA/087

Geneva, 08 October 2025

To :

- Administrations of ITU Member States
- ITU Academia Members

Subject: Data Hackathon - “Bridging the Digital Divide by Uncovering Digital Deserts”

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am pleased to announce that the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is organizing the **Data Hackathon “Bridging the Digital Divide by Uncovering Digital Deserts”** with the financial support of the European Union.

What is the purpose of the data hackathon?

The main goal of the data hackathon is to harness the innovation and creativity of the younger generation by using data science and visualisation techniques and to identify geographical areas and subpopulation groups currently underserved in terms of access to universal and meaningful connectivity, at an affordable cost, in a safe environment and with the necessary skills.

The participants will address one or several of the following problems:

- Who are the population groups that lag behind in access to and use of ICT? What is their profile and what are the socioeconomic barriers that they face?
- Where does such population live? What are the geographical and infrastructure challenges they face?
- What innovative data science methods and data sources can be used to analyse the digital gap?
- What policies and interventions can be recommended, based on the evidence gathered?

Who can participate?

The data hackathon will host teams of 3-4 participants comprising university students and young professionals (age limit set at 30 years) from various disciplines (statistics and data science, telecommunications, geography, public policy, communication, etc.) A registration process will be open until November 2025.

What is the timeline?

- **September 2025:** First announcement at WTIS 2025 (Geneva).
- **October – November 2025:** Registration and preselection of teams.
- **December 2025 – March 2026:** Online phase with pre-hackathon workshops (on the concept of universal and meaningful connectivity and its measurement, on data sources and good practices in visualisation) and accompaniment by mentors.
- **April 2026:** Two-day, in-person hackathon in New Delhi for shortlisted teams (short training sessions, teamwork, presentations, selection by the jury and award ceremony).

- **September 2026:** Presentation of winning project(s) at the World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Symposium (WTIS)-2026 in Geneva.

What are the expected deliverables?

Teams will work on mapping unconnected regions, profiling populations with low Internet use, predicting Internet usage based on infrastructure and socioeconomic factors and addressing questions related to the problems stated above. Expected deliverables may include visualizations, maps, dashboards, ICT user personas, policy recommendations, data processing code (e.g. R or Python notebooks), and an in-person presentation before the jury.

What awards and forms of recognition will be offered?

All participants will receive certificates of participation, with their work showcased in an online gallery. Winners will receive special acknowledgement certificates, with their work promoted through ITU channels and presented at WTIS-2026 in Geneva. Travel costs for shortlisted teams to the in-person event in New Delhi and for the winning team to Geneva will be covered by the project "Promoting and Measuring Universal and Meaningful Connectivity", financed by the European Union. Mentors will be recognised for their support.

We invite your institution to support ITU's effort for the organisation of this hackathon by:

- disseminating the call for interest and promoting the event (Website: <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/projectumc/2025/08/28/umc-data-hackathon/>)
- identifying potential mentors with experience in data science, visualisation, and the communication of evidence and research
- providing access to open access national data sets relevant to research on access to and use of ICT, demographic and socio-economic statistics and geospatial sources
- sponsoring national teams.

Further details will be communicated through the website and social media. Should you have any further queries about the event, please do not hesitate to contact my colleagues, Mr. José L. Cervera-Ferri (jose.cervera@itu.int) and Ms. Shaina Hasan (shaina.hasan@itu.int).

Yours faithfully,

(signed)

Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava
Director