RESOLUTION 37 (Rev. Kigali, 2022)

Bridging the digital divide

The World Telecommunication Development Conference (Kigali, 2022),

recognizing

a)   the continuing disparity between those who have and those who do not have access to telecommunications/information and communication technologies (ICTs), cannot afford them or do not have the skills to use them, referred to as the "digital divide";

b)   that the distribution of the benefits brought about by ICTs and the digital economy is not equitable between developing[1] and developed countries, and between social categories within countries, taking into account the commitments of both phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to bridge the digital divide and transform it into a digital opportunity;

c)   that telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications are essential for political, economic, social and cultural development, that they play an important role in poverty alleviation, job creation, environmental protection and the prevention and mitigation of natural and other disasters (in addition to the importance of disaster prediction), and that they must be placed at the service of development in other sectors; and that, therefore, opportunities offered by ICTs should be accelerated and fully exploited in order to foster digital inclusion towards sustainable development;

d)   that gaps in access to and adoption of ICTs would lead to an extreme escalation of economic and social disparities, with negative impacts on the social and economic environment in the various regions excluded from the use of ICTs;

e)   that the digital divide is characterized by inequality in the technical and economic availability of telecommunication/ICT facilities and services, as well as in the level of the development of the regulatory environment, and in the level of awareness and skills required to use them;

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[1] These include the least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

f)   that there is a clear connection between, *inter alia*, the affordability of telecommunications/ICTs in general, Internet access in particular, and the level of their use,

recalling

a)   United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 70/1, on transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

b)   the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the 2015 Third International Conference on Financing for Development, endorsed in UNGA Resolution 69/313, and its commitment to bridging the digital divide;

c)   UNGA Resolution 70/125, on the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS);

d)   Resolution 25 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on strengthening the regional presence;

e)   Resolution 135 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on ITU's role in the durable and sustainable development of telecommunications/ ICTs, in providing technical assistance and advice to developing countries and in implementing relevant national, regional and interregional projects;

f)   Resolution 139 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on the use of telecommunications/ICTs to bridge the digital divide and build an inclusive information society;

g)   Resolution 191 (Rev. Dubai 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on the strategy for the coordination of efforts among the three Sectors of the Union;

h)   Resolution 200 (Rev. Dubai 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on the Connect 2030 Agenda for global telecommunication/ICT, including broadband, for sustainable development;

i)   Resolution 11 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of this conference, on telecommunication/ICT services in rural, isolated and poorly served areas;

j)   Resolution 16 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), on special actions and measures for the least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states (SIDS), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and countries with economies in transition;

k)   Resolution 23 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of WTDC, on Internet access and availability for developing countries and charging principles for international Internet connection;

l)   Resolution 46 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of this conference, on assistance to indigenous peoples and communities through ICTs;

m)   Recommendation ITU-D 19 (Dubai, 2014) of WTDC, on telecommunications for rural and remote areas;

n)   Resolution 30 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on special measures for LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs and countries with economies in transition;

o)   Resolution 58 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of this conference, on telecommunication/ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs;

p)   Resolution 201 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on creating an enabling environment for the deployment and use of ICT applications;

q)   Resolution ITU-R 69-1 (Rev. Sharm el-Sheikh, 2019) of the Radiocommunication Assembly, on the development and deployment of international public telecommunications via satellite in developing countries,

noting

a)   that broadband connectivity is critical to accelerate digital transformation in order to bridge the digital divide and to achieve, *inter alia*, digital inclusion;

b)   that the coronavirus disease COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the global demand for Internet access, speed and affordability following major shifts in Internet use and traffic patterns, where ICTs have enabled billions of people to continue to work, study, shop and transact, care for others, and stay in touch with loved ones virtually;

c)   that digital literacy is a requirement for closing the digital divide;

d)   that digital transformation will benefit all walks of society, especially women and girls, youth, children, persons with disabilities, persons with specific needs, older persons and indigenous people, as well as people living in remote areas;

e)   that digital transformation is a requirement to bridge the digital divide and drive resilient recovery from and beyond the global pandemic and crisis, and will improve education and quality of life, assist in connecting all citizens globally, and facilitate effective use of national resources for the future of society,

noting further

a)   the provisions of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, defining WSIS action lines falling under ITU's responsibility;

b)   the WSIS+10 statement on the implementation of WSIS outcomes and WSIS+10 vision for WSIS beyond 2015, adopted at the ITU-coordinated WSIS+10 High-Level Event (Geneva, 2014) and endorsed by the Plenipotentiary Conference (Busan, 2014);

c)   the global targets set by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development to be achieved by 2025;

acknowledging

a)   that the telecommunication environment has undergone significant changes due to a global surge in connectivity demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that has shifted Internet use and traffic from offices to residential premises;

b)   that the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the digital divides between and within countries, gender, age, disability, socio-economic status and geography;

c)   that development of and increased demand for telecommunications/ICTs has contributed to reducing and should continue to reduce the cost of relevant equipment and services towards ensuring equal access and use of ICTs for all;

d)   that there is an urgent need to continue to create digital opportunities and accelerate the adoption of telecommunications/ICTs in developing countries, including LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs and countries with economies in transition, taking advantage of the revolution that ICTs have witnessed and are currently witnessing, and acknowledging the role ICTs will play in ensuring resilient recovery from global pandemic and crisis;

e)   that relevant activities of ITU-D study groups included studies on telecommunication/ICT complementary access networks and solutions and their possible relevance to the connectivity ecosystem and help to bridge the digital divide;

f)   that ITU has committed itself to narrowing the digital divide in accordance with the WSIS outcomes, as well as the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

g)   that it is important for ITU to assist in bridging the national, regional and international digital divide in telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications by facilitating interoperability, interconnection and global connectivity of telecommunication networks and services, and by playing a leading role in the process for follow-up and implementation of the relevant goals and objectives of WSIS, and to focus on bridging the digital divide and providing broadband for all;

h)   that UNGA will assess the outcomes and implementation both of the SDGs in 2030 and the WSIS outcomes in 2025,

considering

a)   ITU's role as a catalyst, and in particular that of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) as coordinator and promoter of the rational use of resources in the context of the various projects intended to narrow the digital divide;

b)   that the programmes of the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) under its action plans, on information and communication infrastructure and technology development, have provided assistance to developing countries in the area of spectrum management and in the efficient and cost-effective development of rural, national and international broadband telecommunication networks, including satellite;

c)   that various activities are being executed towards bridging the digital divide by many international and regional organizations, such as, in addition to the ITU, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the United Nations economic commissions, the World Bank, the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), the regional economic communities, the regional development banks and many others, and that such activities have increased following the conclusion of WSIS and the adoption of the Tunis Agenda, particularly in relation to implementation and follow-up;

d)   that many stakeholders in the public, private, academic, non-governmental organization and multilateral sectors are seeking to bridge this divide;

e)   that the development of radiocommunication technologies and deployment of terrestrial, stratospheric (e.g. high-altitude platform stations) and space services and applications enable sustainable and affordable access to information and knowledge, through the provision of communication services with high connectivity (broadband) and wide coverage (regional or global reach), which contribute significantly to bridging the digital divide, efficiently complementing other technologies and enabling countries to be connected directly, quickly and reliably;

f)   that using systems, such as low-cost wired and wireless technologies, such as the ones used for telecommunication/ICT complementary access networks and solutions, can be an effective solution for connecting rural, remote, and underserved communities;

g)   that, in many ITU Member States, regulations have been adopted dealing with regulatory issues such as interconnection, determination of tariffs, universal service, etc., designed to bridge the digital divide at the national level;

h)   that it is necessary to coordinate the efforts of both the public and private sectors to ensure that opportunities arising from the information society yield benefits, especially for the most disadvantaged;

i)   that each region, country and area should tackle its own specific issues regarding the digital divide, while stressing the importance of cooperation in this area at regional and international level in order to benefit from experience gained;

j)   that national strategies for the provision of telecommunication services in developing countries contribute to reducing costs to users and bridging the digital divide,

considering further

a)   that the goal of integrating ICTs and accelerating digital transformation is to improve the quality of all aspects of our daily life, and that equitable and affordable access to ICTs is a key to digital inclusion, as well as resilient recovery from global pandemic and crisis;

b)   that the security of these applications requires the building of confidence and trust in the use of telecommunications/ICTs;

c)   that, as ICTs are being rapidly integrated into all sectors of society, the applications referred to in WSIS Action Line C7 are triggering profound changes in social productivity and hastening a major leap forward in industrial productivity, thus creating a good opportunity for developing countries to raise their level of industrial development and improve social and economic growth, as well recovery from global pandemic and crisis;

d)   that sharing of telecommunications/ICT experiences and best practices among ITU members will help to facilitate and accelerate digital transformation;

e)   that, despite the previous decade's achievements in ICT connectivity, digital divides remain, both between and within countries, and in particular many developing countries do not have the necessary basic infrastructure, long-term plans, laws, appropriate regulations and the like in place for telecommunication/ICT development that need to be addressed through, among other actions, strengthened enabling policy environments and international cooperation to improve affordability, access, education, capacity building, multilingualism, cultural preservation, investment and appropriate financing, as well as measures to accelerate digital literacy and skills, and to promote cultural diversity,

confirms

a)   the importance of approaches to transparent funding for bridging the digital divide in the Geneva Plan of Action, the Tunis Agenda and the strategic plan for the Union and their translation into equitable mechanisms for action, particularly in respect of issues related to Internet management, having regard to women and girls, youth and vulnerable groups, indigenous peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities and persons with special needs, telecommunications/ICTs for disaster relief and mitigation, and the Child Online Protection initiative,

b)   that the international and regional financial institutions and other organizations have programmes aimed at bridging the digital divide, and that these funding and technical assistance programmes are essential to bridging that divide in developing countries, especially LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS,

undertakes

to expedite and prioritize work from which all countries, especially the developing countries, may benefit, with a view to establishing international methods and specific mechanisms to strengthen international cooperation for narrowing the digital divide, through connectivity and digital literacy solutions and digital transformation to accelerate sustainable, inclusive and affordable access to telecommunications/ICTs, and, in parallel, to continue to shorten the time-frames for implementation of the Digital Solidarity Agenda, beginning with the Geneva Plan of Action, the outcomes of the Connect the World summits, the Tunis Agenda and the strategic plan as well as urgent priorities for the Union,

resolves

that BDT, in collaboration with the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau and the Radiocommunication Bureau, continue to adopt the necessary measures to accelerate the implementation of regional projects, to actively link all stakeholders, organizations and institutions of the various sectors in an ongoing relationship of cooperation in which information is disseminated over networks, so as to bridge the digital divide in line with the outputs of Phases 1 and 2 of WSIS, and to contribute and work towards the Connect 2030 Agenda, as well as the United Nations' 10 priorities for 2021 that, *inter alia*, call for seizing the opportunities of digital technologies through the implementation of the United Nations Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation which was launched in 2020,

resolves to instruct the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau

1   to continue to assist the Member States and Sector Members in developing a pro-competition policy and regulatory framework for telecommunications/ICTs, in order to bridge the digital divide, including for online services and e-commerce, as well as capacity building in connectivity and accessibility, taking into account the specific needs of women and marginal, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups;

2   to continue to follow up BDT's work pursuant to Resolution 8 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of this conference in creating social connectivity indicators for the digital divide, standard indicators for each country and a single index, in cooperation with the competent organizations and the relevant United Nations agencies, using available statistics so that information on the current situation for each country and region in terms of the digital divide is continuously available online on the ITU website in a clear and user-friendly manner;

3   to continue to advocate the advantages of developing low-cost, modern, high-quality telecommunication/ICT customer equipment, that can be directly connected to the networks supporting the Internet and Internet services and applications, so that economies of scale and social benefits can be achieved on account of their acceptability at the global level, taking into consideration the possibility of the use of terrestrial, stratospheric and space-based emerging technologies, and to promote human-centred approaches to regulatory and policy frameworks;

4   to continue to assist in developing a user-awareness campaign in order to build user trust and confidence in ICT services and applications;

5   to encourage the use of new and emerging technologies, and the development of business models or other ways to help the diverse ecosystem of telecommunication operators in reducing costs and thereby bridging the digital divide;

6   to continue to advocate the need for affordable devices and services and assist in reducing access costs by inviting Sector Members to develop appropriate technology scalable to broadband applications and having a low operating and maintenance cost, this having been adopted as a key objective of the Union as a whole and ITU-D in particular;

7   to continue to foster the development of innovative models and digital transformation in order to successfully reduce poverty and bridge the digital divide in the developing countries;

8   to continue to make these applications a major strand for the activities of the relevant BDT programme, focusing on its key role for the implementation of study Questions related to ICT applications for the previous and forthcoming study periods;

9   to continue to help bridging the digital divide between urban and rural areas;

10   to continue to support and coordinate efforts to connect women and girls, youth and vulnerable groups, indigenous peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs using telecommunication/ICT services and applications;

11   to ensure that special programmes under the ITU Academy training centres (ATCs) and the digital transformation centres (DTCs) continue to address the specific issue of ICT training and development of digital literacy and skills for poverty alleviation and improving quality of life, and to give top priority to these centres;

12   to ensure BDT plays a central, agile and fit-for-purpose role in bridging the digital divide and collaborates closely with ITU Member States, through the ITU regional offices, to implement relevant programmes and projects, in addition to maintaining an active communication channel between strategic stakeholders;

13   to facilitate discussion and exchange of best practices regarding the challenges and benefits of implementing projects or activities relating to ICT-applications as referred to in WSIS Action Line C7 through strategic partnerships;

14   to continue to identify key, fit-for-purpose telecommunication/ICT applications in rural areas and to cooperate with specialized organizations, national initiatives, and the study groups of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) in relation to bridging the standardization gap between developing and developed countries, with a view to developing a standardized user-friendly content format that overcomes the barrier of digital literacy and language;

15   to encourage innovation and accelerate the use and adoption of emerging digital technologies and the development of business models or other innovative ways to help telecommunication operators, as well as telecommunication/ICT complementary access networks and solutions, for reducing costs and overcoming geographic obstacles, leading to acceleration of digital inclusion to bridge the digital divide;

16   to take into consideration the importance of security and confidentiality of the ICT applications highlighted in WSIS Action Line C7 and of protection of privacy, in order to facilitate discussions regarding guidelines, tools and mechanisms; improve collaboration between government authorities; implement user-friendly government services, through integration and personalization of services; improve the quality and use of e-government services; and increase awareness of such services;

17   to continue supporting Member States, where requested, in developing policy and regulatory frameworks that could expand and support the engagement of telecommunication/ICT complementary access networks and solutions in bridging the digital divide;

18   to continue to help in promoting greater participation of women and girls, youth, children, persons with disabilities, persons with specific needs, older persons, indigenous people and people living in remote areas in digital transformation initiatives;

19   to promote the implementation of studies or projects and activities, in collaboration with the ITU Radiocommunication Sector (ITU-R), with a view to building capacities in efficient use of the orbit/spectrum resource for the provision of terrestrial, stratospheric and space-based technologies, including emerging radiocommunication technologies, in order to support utilization of the orbit/spectrum resource to stimulate broadband development and bridge the digital divide, especially in developing countries;

20   to continue to identify key telecommunication/ICT applications in rural areas and to cooperate with ITU-T to bridge the standardization gap between developing and developed countries;

21   that BDT continue to play a central role in bridging the digital divide, and collaborate closely, through the ITU regional offices, with ITU Member States in order to implement relevant programmes and projects, in addition to maintaining an active communication channel between strategic stakeholders and playing a central, agile and fit-for-purpose role;

22   to promote studying, exchanging and applying public-private partnership (PPP) models for developing digital infrastructure as well as models for centres providing Internet access and digital capacity development in rural and isolated areas;

23   to continue to take measures to develop cooperation, while ensuring a high level of transparency, with international financial institutions, donor agencies and private-sector associations, regarding projects aimed at bridging the digital divide, to inform Member States of the status of these efforts on a regular basis, and to create and maintain a resource on the ITU website where members of the Union can find information on ITU-partnered institutions and United Nations agencies that have available programmes for funding and technical assistance related to bridging the digital divide;

24   to ensure that the necessary resources within the budgetary limits are allocated to comply with this resolution;

25   to circulate the outputs of the implementation of this resolution to all Member States on a regular basis;

resolves to instruct the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, in collaboration with the Directors of the Radiocommunication Bureau and the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau

1   to support Member States, in particular developing countries, in increasing awareness and understanding about disaggregated[2], open[3], and interoperable network technologies, such as open radio access networks (Open RAN) and others, by organizing workshops and other capacity-building activities;

2   to work in collaboration with Member States, Sector Members and other stakeholders to facilitate information-sharing about the development and implementation of these technologies and solutions referred to in *resolves* 1 above, as well as others, with the objective of promoting reliable broadband access at affordable cost, in particular in unserved and underserved areas and communities,

invites the Secretary-General

1   to include the subject of the digital divide in the list containing the areas of mutual interest to the three Sectors and the General Secretariat[4];

2   to suggest to the Inter-Sector Coordination Group on issues of mutual interest (ISCG) that it consider the digital divide as a subject of mutual interest to the three Sectors,

calls upon international financial institutions, donor agencies and private-sector entities

to assist in developing capacity in bridging the digital divide, as well as various inclusive, fit-for-purpose and sustainable business models for developing telecommunication/ICT applications towards digital transformation, including through PPP projects and programmes in developing countries, in a transparent manner,

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[2] Disaggregated refers to separation of hardware and software.

[3] Open may refer, among others, to open standards and open interfaces to support interoperable network technologies.

[4] Such a list is maintained by the ITU Secretary-General in accordance with Resolution 191 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference.

invites Member States

1   to develop and promote relevant policies to foster public and private investment in the development and construction of terrestrial, stratospheric and space-based emerging technologies in their countries and regions, and to consider including the use of such systems in their national and/or regional broadband plans, as an additional tool that will help to bridge the digital divide and meet digital transformation needs, especially in the developing countries;

2   when implementing Resolution 17 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of this conference, on implementation of and cooperation on approved regional initiatives at the national, regional, interregional and global levels, to consider the possibility of implementing projects in the framework of regional initiatives on bridging the digital divide that reflect optimal integration of telecommunications/ICTs;

3   to consider the possibility of promoting digital literacy policies and mechanisms, as a means to help bridge the digital divide, and to participate actively in regional and global collaborative forums dealing with experiences and best practices in the implementation of e-government strategies and programmes;

4   to create policy conditions for effective competition in the domestic Internet access services market as an important factor for lowering the cost of Internet access for users and service providers;

5   to consider inclusive and innovative policies to close the digital divide, taking into account national initiatives and telecommunication/ICT complementary access networks and solutions,

invites Member States and Sector Members

1   to incorporate, in their e-government strategies and programmes, actions to accelerate the use of ICTs to improve collaboration between government authorities, actions to accelerate the implementation of user-friendly digital services, potentially including integration and personalization of services to improve the quality and use of e-government services, and actions to increase awareness of such services;

2   to support the collection and analysis of data and statistics on telecommunication/ICT applications and services, including in agriculture, education, health care, manufacturing and processing, entertainment and media, oil and gas, transportation, tourism and smart sustainable cities, that will contribute to the formulation and implementation of public policies, and cross-country comparisons related to the digital divide;

3   to participate actively in regional and global collaborative forums dealing with experiences and best practices in the implementation of e-government strategies and programmes;

4   to participate in the study of the role of telecommunications/ICTs in education systems by contributing their own experiences regarding the implementation of telecommunications/ICTs to achieve universal education worldwide;

5   to consider expanding the implementation of projects and programmes to promote development of the telecommunication/ICT sector, including with the participation of ITU, in order to bridge the digital divide, and provide information on such projects and programmes for BDT;

6   to provide ITU with up-to-date ICT connectivity and rural experiences, which can then be put on the ITU-D website,

invites Member States, Sector Members and other stakeholders

to participate in and contribute to the activities referred to in *resolves* 1 and 2 of *resolves to instruct the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, in collaboration with the Directors of the Radiocommunication Bureau and the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau* above and to undertake all efforts to foster an enabling environment for the greater growth and development of technology-neutral broadband connectivity, in particular in developing countries.