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| **Council 2021 Virtual consultation of councillors, 8-18 June 2021** |  |
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| **Agenda item: PL 3.2** | **Document C21/62-E** |
| **23 March 2021** |
| **Original: English** |
| Report by the Secretary-General | |
| ICT development index | |

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| Summary  This report provides an overview of latest developments regarding the attempt to resume the publication of the ICT Development Index.  Action required  The Council is invited **to note** this report.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  References  [*Resolution 131*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-131-E.pdf) *(Rev. Dubai, 2018);* [*WTDC Resolution 8*](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/Documents/WTDC17_FinalReport_en.pdf) *(Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017)* |

## 1 Background

1.1 Resolution 131 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) instructs the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau to publish annually the ICT Development Index (IDI). It also resolves that ITU should establish a four-year period of validity for the structure and methodology of the IDI, in case these need to be reviewed and revised as appropriate through an expert group meeting in Geneva representing all countries, developed and developing, on an equal footing. Resolution 131 also instructs the Council to make appropriate recommendations as necessary regarding the ongoing implementation of the resolution.

1.2 The ICT Development Index (IDI), a composite index that assesses the state of ICT development across countries and over time, was released annually between 2009 and 2017. During an Extraordinary Meeting of the Expert Group on Telecommunication/ICT Indicators (EGTI) and the Expert Group on ICT Household Indicators (EGH) held in 2017, a revised set of indicators (referred to as “revised IDI”) was agreed to be included in the IDI as of 2018.

1.3 In Circular Letter SG/BDT/010 of 5 December 2018, the Secretary General informed the membership that ITU had decided to postpone the publication of the revised IDI until 2019, because of the amount of estimations needed to calculate the index, and concerns about the quality of some of the underlying data. These problems only surfaced once the secretariat started to calculate the revised IDI.

1.4 In Circular [BDT/DKH/IDA/026](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/IDI2019consultation/BDT_Cir_026_DKH_IDA_E.pdf) of 3 October 2019, the Director of BDT announced that the IDI based on the revised set of indicators could still not be published in 2019 due to persisting issues of data availability and quality, as well as methodological issues, that prevented the index from reflecting the true state of ICT development. A [background document](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/IDI2019consultation/IDI_BackgroundDocument_E.pdf) attached to the circular detailed these issues.

1.5 Further, the Circular Letter recommended to exceptionally use the original IDI methodology only for publication in 2019 and announced an informal consultation on that subject. Circular [BDT/DKH/IDA/027](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/IDI2019consultation/BDT-cir_027E_DKH-IDA.pdf) of 16 October 2019 presented the results of that consultation, concluding that there was no consensus, and therefore no IDI would be published.

1.6 Circular [BDT/DKH/IDA/028](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/egmITUindex2020/BDT-cir_028E_DKH-IDA.pdf) of 21 November 2019 invited Administrations of ITU Member States and Resolution 99 to attend the 1st Expert Group Meeting on a new ITU index on 10 February 2020 to present and discuss the draft concept and framework for an ITU index. The [Summary Report](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/egmITUindex2020/Summary_EGM_10_Feb_2020.pdf) of that meeting noted that participants welcomed the proposal of the ITU Secretariat to develop and publish a new ITU index that is based on the SDG framework. This new index would allow governments to assess how digital technologies and digital transformations impact their ability to achieve the SDGs.

1.7 [Circular BDT/DKH/IDA/038](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/2ndegmITUindex2020/BDT-CIR-0038PDF-E.pdf) of 17 March 2020 provided a summary of the 1st EGM and invited Administrations of ITU Member States and Resolution 99 to the 2nd Expert Group Meeting on a new ITU index, that took place on 17 April 2020.

1.8 At the [2nd EGM meeting](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/events/2ndegmITUindex2020/default.aspx), the ITU secretariat presented a background document including the further revised conceptual framework of the new index, as well as a preliminary list of indicators that could be considered.

1.9 The meetings and consultations revealed large and persisting divergences of views among Member States regarding the (dis-)continuation of the IDI, the overall direction of a potential new index, the selection of indicators, various methodological aspects, and the overall process that should guide the development of a methodologically sound, robust, and impartial index.

1.10 Resolution 131 does not provide for a mechanism to address such lack of consensus. Consequently, the ITU secretariat sought guidance from the Council on the way forward (Circular [BDT/DKH/IDA/043](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/2ndegmITUindex2020/D18-BDT-CIR-0043PDF-E.pdf)). Council Document [C20/62-E](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CL-C-0062/en) detailed the reasons for this decision, while Information document [C20/INF/17-E](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CL-INF-0017/en) provided background information and facts about the revised IDI and the issues that prevented its publication.

## 2 Virtual consultation of councillors (June 2020)

2.1 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 physical session of the Council was postponed. Instead, a [virtual consultation of councillors](https://www.itu.int/en/council/2020/Pages/default.aspx) was held on 9-12 June 2020 during which the subject of the ITU index was discussed.

2.2 As reported in the [Summary record of the fourth meeting of the virtual consultation of councillors](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CLVC-C-0018/en), the Chair took it that the virtual consultation, having examined Documents [C20/62](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CL-C-0062/en), [VC/3](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CLVC-C-0003/en), and [VC/14](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CLVC-C-0014/en), wished to propose to the next physical meeting of the Council that it consider the issues raised in those documents and advise on the way forward on the development of an ITU index. In the meantime, it encouraged the secretariat to continue to work with the expert group on the development of an index based on a robust, sound and scientifically proven methodology, and with a view to publishing an accurate index as soon as possible taking into account Resolution 131 (Rev. Dubai, 2018).

## 3. Secretariat’s proposal for resuming the publication of an index in 2020

3.1 In accordance with the conclusion of the virtual consultation, and since [EGTI](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/events/egti2020/default.aspx) and [EGH](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/events/egh2020/default.aspx) were set to convene in September 2020 for their annual meetings, the secretariat decided to work on a possible solution to be submitted to the members for consideration during a joint session of the two expert groups.

3.2 The ITU secretariat advanced a proposed index which addressed only the issues that prevented the computation of the revised IDI. This approach was considered as the likeliest one to be agreed upon, since it was based on the revised set of indicators adopted by EGTI/EGH members in 2017. The solution was named “IDI 2020” to distinguish it from the original IDI of 2009 and the revised IDI. The key principle that guided the development of the IDI 2020 was to only fix those specific issues that prevented the computation of the revised IDI.

3.3 The proposed IDI 2020 comprises 11 indicators distributed across the three subindices (see Diagram below). Five indicators in the Access subindex, three in the Use subindex, and three in the Skills subindex. Eight indicators are from ITU. Three are from UNESCO, consistent with the revised IDI.

3.4 Ten indicators of the revised IDI are retained without any modification in the IDI 2020. There are four main changes between the revised IDI and the IDI 2020: one concerns the fixed broadband subscription indicator, whose methodology was adapted; two indicators, mobile phone ownership and the proportion of individuals with ICT skills, were dropped due to insufficient data; and one indicator, fixed-broadband Internet traffic, was dropped due to data quality issues. The methodology used in the IDI 2020 for normalizing the indicators and aggregating them was the same as in previous versions.

**4 Diagram: Proposed IDI 2020**



4.1 The proposed IDI 2020 is presented in the [background document](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/egh2020/IDI2020_BackgroundDocument_E.pdf) “ICT Development Index 2020: A proposal”. The document was posted on the webpages of the EGTI and EGH meetings and attached to Circular [BDT/DKH/IDA/057](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/egh2020/BDT_cir_057E_DKH-IDA.pdf) of 3 September 2020, which explained that the proposal would be presented during the joint session of EGTI/EGH on 14 September for endorsement by EGTI/EGH members.

4.2 From 9-11 September 2020, ahead of the EGTI/EGH session, informal briefings were organised in all six regions. These sessions provided an opportunity for the secretariat to present the IDI 2020 proposal to ITU constituents, answer questions and provide clarifications.

## 5 EGTI/EGH session on the ICT Development Index (14 September 2020)

5.1 During the [joint session](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/egh2020/IDI2020_EGHEGTIsession_14092020_DraftSummary.pdf) of EGTI/EGH, in her opening remarks, the Director of BDT clarified that if the members agreed on the proposed way forward, the secretariat could commit to releasing an IDI by December 2020. If that were not the case, she said she would need to revert to the Council to ask for further guidance. The secretariat then [presented](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/egh2020/IDI2020_Presentation_14Sep2020.pdf) the background document and the proposed IDI 2020.

5.2 In the discussion that followed, many participants welcomed the efforts by the secretariat to meet their demand for an index to be released this year and expressed support for the proposal. Some participants, who supported the proposal, made suggestions for improvement regarding specific elements of the proposal.

5.3 Participants to the meeting engaged in a comprehensive discussion about various aspects of the Secretariat’s proposal, calculation of particular indicators, inclusion or omission of indicators, the future of the IDI, and whether or not the proposal could be finalised at the expert group or needed to be decided on by Council.

5.4 The secretariat answered the questions and concerns and provided clarifications on the considerations that motivated the proposed changes.

5.5 Towards the end of the meeting, the Deputy Director of the BDT reminded that an agreement during the meeting would mean that the secretariat would be in the position to publish an index in 2020. Following his intervention, some delegates wished to ask further questions. As time ran out, the Chair closed the session before a conclusion was reached.

## 6 Follow-up meeting on the ICT Development Index (29 September 2020)

6.1 Since no conclusion was reached, a follow-up meeting was organized (Circular [BDT/DKH/IDA/060](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/events/egh2020/D18-BDT-CIR-0060PDF-E.pdf)) on 29 September 2020 to complete the discussion and reach a conclusion.

6.2 At the beginning of the meeting the secretariat explained that Resolution 131 instructs the BDT Director to publish annually the IDI on the basis of a methodology developed and approved by the expert group, and to ensure that ITU statistics are based on reliable, transparent and scientifically proven methodologies that reflect the real development of ICTs. It also recalled Council’s advisory role in relation to the implementation of Resolution 131 (Rev. Dubai, 2018).

6.3 The secretariat also provided further technical, methodological and conceptual clarifications on the IDI 2020 in response to several comments and suggestions made during the meeting of 14 September 2020.

6.4 During the meeting, many members expressed or re-iterated their support for the secretariat’s proposal for an IDI 2020. However, consensus could not be reached as some participants maintained sustained objections to the proposal. The Chair therefore concluded that no consensus could be reached on the methodology and that the experts groups’ could not agree on proposals for publication of the IDI 2020.

## 7 Report to the Council

7.1 Despite the above noted efforts, the meetings of 14 September and 29 September 2020 revealed that EGTI/EGH members could not agree on a methodology for the ICT Development Index nor the process for developing such a methodology. As a result, it was not possible to release an index in 2020.

7.2 The ITU secretariat invites the councillors to take note of these developments.

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