1 August 2019

# **First Draft Outline of the Report by the ITU Secretary-General** for the Sixth World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2021

**1. Preamble**

**1.1 The Sixth World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2021 (WTPF-21)[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1.1.1 Originally established by the 1994 Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum (WTPF) has been successfully convened in 1996, 1998, 2001, 2009 and 2013. By [Resolution 2 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-002-E.pdf), the 2018 Plenipotentiary Conference of the ITU has now resolved to hold the next WTPF in 2021.

1.1.2 The purpose of WTPF is to provide a venue for exchanging views and information and thereby creating a shared vision among policymakers worldwide on the issues arising from the emergence of new telecommunication/ICT services and technologies, and to consider any other policy issue in telecommunications/ICTs which would benefit from a global exchange of views, in addition to the adoption of opinions reflecting common viewpoints ([Resolution 2 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-002-E.pdf)).

1.1.3 By [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en), the 2019 Session of ITU Council decided that the theme for WTPF-21 will be “*Policies for mobilizing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development”* and thatthe WTPF-21 would discuss how new and emerging digital technologies and trends are enablers of the global transition to the digital economy. Themes for consideration would include AI, IoT, 5G, Big Data, OTTs etc. and focus on opportunities, challenges and policies to foster sustainable development.

1.1.4 WTPF-21 shall not produce prescriptive regulatory outcomes; however, it shall prepare reports and adopt non-binding opinions by consensus for consideration by Member States, Sector Members, and relevant ITU meetings ([Resolution 2 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-002-E.pdf)).

1.1.5 All information relating to WTPF-21 is posted on <https://www.itu.int/en/wtpf-21/Pages/default.aspx> .

**1.2 Preparatory process for the ITU Secretary-General’s Report**

1.2.1 Discussions at WTPF-21 shall be based solely on a single report by the ITU Secretary-General, and contributions from participants based on that report, prepared in accordance with a procedure adopted by the Council and based on the proposals of Member States and Sector Members, and on the views of Associates, Academia and stakeholders, and WTPF shall not consider drafts of any new Opinions that were not presented during the preparatory period foreseen for drawing up the Secretary-General’s report prior to the forum ([Resolution 2 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-002-E.pdf)). This Report outlines a potential scope for discussions and presents some of the policy issues under consideration among different stakeholder groups on new and emerging digital technologies and trends.

1.2.2 In accordance with [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) of ITU Council 2019, the ITU Secretary-General will convene an Informal Experts Group (IEG), each of whom is active in preparing for WTPF-21. A circular letter ([CL-19/34](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-SG-CIR-0034/en)) has been sent to Member States, the State of Palestine, Sector Members, Associates, Academia, and Organizations which have the right to attend ITU conferences and meetings as observers on 18 July 2019 calling for nomination of experts to constitute the IEG.

1.2.3 The preparatory process will be guided by the timetable set out as Annex 2 in [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) and in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Timetable for the elaboration of the ITU Secretary-General’s Report**

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| --- | --- |
| **1 August, 2019** | A First Draft outline of the report by the Secretary-General shall be posted online for comments |
| **21 August, 2019** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the First Draft  Deadline for nominations for a balanced group of experts to advise the Secretary-General on further elaboration of the report and of draft opinions associated with it |
| **1st IEG Meeting (September 2019 during the CWG cluster)** | First meeting of the group of experts to discuss the First Draft of the report by the Secretary-General and the comments received |
| **1 November, 2019** | The Second Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, incorporating discussions from the 1st IEG meeting  This draft will also be made available online for open public consultations |
| **23 December, 2019** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Second Draft, and for contribution on broad outlines for possible draft opinions  Deadline for inputs from the open public consultations |
| **2nd IEG Meeting (January/February 2020 during the CWG cluster)** | Second meeting of the group of experts to discuss the Second Draft of the report by the Secretary-General and the comments received, including from the open public consultation |
| **1 April, 2020** | The Third Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, incorporating discussions from the 2nd IEG meeting and including outlines of draft Opinions  This draft will also be made available online for open public consultations |
| **June 15, 2020** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Third Draft, and for contribution on possible draft Opinions  Deadline for inputs from the open public consultations |
| **3rd IEG Meeting (September 2020 during the CWG cluster)** | Third meeting of the group of experts to discuss the Third Draft of the report by the Secretary-General and the comments received, including from the open public consultation |
| **1 November, 2020** | The Fourth Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, including the draft Opinions, and incorporating discussions from the 3rd IEG meeting |
| **23 December, 2020** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Fourth Draft |
| **4th IEG Meeting (February 2021 during the CWG cluster)** | Fourth meeting of the group of experts to discuss the Fourth Draft of the report by the Secretary-General, including the draft Opinions, and the comments received |
| **15 March, 2021** | The final report of the Secretary-General to WTPF will be posted online, including the draft Opinions |
| **Mid-May, 2021 (back to back with WSIS Forum 2021)** | Sixth World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum |

**2. Themes for WTPF-21**

2.1 By [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en), the 2019 ordinary session of Council decided that the theme for WTPF-21 is “Policies for mobilizing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development” and that it would discuss how new and emerging digital technologies and trends are enablers of the global transition to the digital economy. Themes for consideration would include AI, IoT, 5G, Big Data, OTTs etc. In this regard, the WTPF-21 will focus on opportunities, challenges and policies to foster sustainable development.

2.2 New and emerging digital technologies have the potential to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by facilitating enabling action by ICTs on each and every one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, they are also expected to drive progress in alignment with the WSIS Action Lines. As the world stands on the cusp of the fourth industrial revolution, breakthroughs in telecommunications/ICTs are transforming the global digital economy addressing issues across diverse sectors such as health, education, employment, transportation, agriculture, nutrition, disability, youth, social inclusion, gender equality and poverty.

2.3 This transformative power comes with complex policy challenges in various areas including, inter alia, equality and equity (inclusion), trust, interoperability, transparency and accountability.

2.4 Concerns regarding the various implications of emerging technologies are not new, and the world has previously witnessed similar paradigm shifts across society, industry and economy that lead to new models of growth and innovation. There is a policy imperative to learn from these past experiences to better inform strategies to maximize the benefits promised by these technologies and foster innovation through balanced and considered policies.

2.5 Policy-making in this respect, therefore, is critical for facilitating country efforts, particularly in developing and least developed countries, to address a range of potentially common issues across these technologies that will help drive meaningful innovation for sustainable development. These issues include, *inter alia*, infrastructure needs, investment, regulatory environment, training and skills development, market environment, institutional cooperation, the role of development aid, etc.

2.6 In this regard, some of the broad questions that could be addressed while considering the opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies include:

2.6.1 Looking ahead, what are the new and emerging digital technologies and trends that ITU membership would consider the key enablers of the global transition to the digital economy? Given the inter-connections or -dependencies in the use and deployment of such technologies, what is the role that policymakers can play to foster an enabling environment that creates a holistic and agile ecosystem to enable sustainable use of new and emerging digital technologies?

2.6.2 As key decision makers, how does ITU membership envision the role of new and emerging digital technologies in accelerating sustainable development, keeping in mind the current and future needs of both developing and developed countries as well as all segments of the population? What are the trends in developing the whole-of-government, multi-stakeholder collaborative policy approaches that are forward-looking, flexible and evidence-based that can contribute to this goal?

2.6.3 What are the key opportunities and challenges facing the development and deployment of such new and emerging digital technologies?

2.6.4 How can the benefits of new and emerging digital technologies be made more accessible to all? Along with the challenge of connecting the unconnected through infrastructure, what can be done to ensure that everyone, particularly women and girls, has affordable access to new technologies; that people have the skills to leverage an environment where they can learn, share, and engage; that there is presence and use of balanced incentives for continued innovation; and that an environment of trust and inclusion is fostered? How can better international cooperation contribute to these efforts?

2.6.5 How can the global community continue building local and inclusive innovation ecosystems that enable the use and building of trust in new and emerging digital technologies?

2.6.6 What are the ways in which stakeholders can work together to drive progress towards ensuring interoperability of technological solutions based on these emerging technologies to facilitate, among other things, greater access for all?

2.7 *Note: These overarching questions will be considered in conjunction with more detailed and specific analysis of the topics set out in* [*Decision 611*](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en)*. Such analysis in each of these sections could potentially be broadly divided into three parts – opportunities, challenges, and policies to foster sustainable development.*

**2.8 Sub-Themes for Discussion**

[Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) lists various sub-themes for consideration as indicated below.

**2.8.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

2.8.1.1 AI solutions and technologies have the potential to transform areas as diverse and critical as education, healthcare, finance, mobility, agriculture and energy.

However, they also bring with them several implications of risks to aspects such as security, trust and inclusion, as well as issues of transparency and accountability – in AI algorithms, tools, and the data they depend on.

2.8.1.2 Some examples of AI-related policy questions that could be considered include:

a. What are the key policy imperatives driving decision makers to explore and harness the potential of AI-based solutions and technologies to enable the global transition to digital economy?

b. How do AI technologies support or challenge the development of telecommunications/ICTs? Conversely, how can telecommunications/ICTs enhance and disseminate inclusively the positive externalities of AI?

c. How can AI help the developing countries to better benefit from the use of advanced data-driven technologies?

d. What are the challenges facing the deployment and use of AI technologies? How can issues such as trust, transparency, accountability, bias and representativeness be best addressed?

e. How can stakeholders foster innovation while also ensuring that the future of AI is synonymous with a safe, inclusive and sustainable future for all?

**2.8.2 Internet of Things (IoT)**

2.8.2.1 The IoT and connected sensors are driving improvements to national growth and human wellbeing in a range of areas such as healthcare, water, agriculture, natural resource management, resiliency to climate change and energy.

However, while IoT is increasingly responsible for connectivity-based service models in the aforementioned diverse areas of application, capturing its full potential will require an understanding of where real value can be created and a successful effort to address a set of systems issues, including interoperability.

2.8.2.2 Some examples of policy questions that could be considered to provide a better understanding of efforts needed to successfully deploy IoT include:

a. What are the key challenges and opportunities facing policymakers for ensuring that IoT applications create real value? What is the role that policymakers can play in developing an ecosystem at the national and international level that best supports the cross-sectoral nature of such applications?

b. How can stakeholders ensure that technologies continue to evolve, providing lower costs and more robust analytics, to support use of these applications? How can the critical issues of interoperability and trust be addressed?

c. What steps can be taken to ensure that the benefits arising from the use and application of IoT systems are more equitably accessible, across countries and populations?

**2.8.3 5G**

2.8.3.1 5G has the potential to act as the connecting tissue of tomorrow’s digital economy, linking everything from smartphones to wireless sensors and industrial robots to self-driving cars.

It could play a key role in supporting governments and policymakers in transforming cities into smart cities - allowing citizens and communities to realize and participate in the socio-economic benefits delivered by an advanced, data-intensive, digital economy.

Harnessing the potential of 5G’s capabilities will require addressing several challenges relating to its deployment including, inter alia, costs and infrastructure.

2.8.3.2 In this respect, some essential questions include:

a. What are some of the key uses/application for 5G technologies that can drive global development? What are the main challenges relating to deployment of such technologies?

b. What is the role that policymakers can play to ensure that policies and strategies supporting 5G implementation provide benefit and access to all?

c. What are the steps that all stakeholders can take to foster an innovation ecosystem and new business partnership models to maximize the benefits for all while minimizing associated costs, financial and otherwise?

**2.8.4 Big Data**

2.8.4.1 Big Data has the potential to create significant value for the world economy and consumers everywhere - enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of the private and public sector globally.

However, policymakers may need to address several challenges if they are to capture its full potential.

2.8.4.2 In this respect, some of the key questions to be considered include:

a. What tools, technologies and techniques can stakeholders apply to fully harness the potential of Big Data?

b. What are the key safeguards that policymakers could consider to ensure that the use and application of Big Data benefits all?

c. How can Big Data challenges be addressed? How can data be made available to all in a responsible manner? What can be done to ensure that Big Data applications also respond to those not generating data on their needs, i.e. typically those left furthest behind?

**2.8.5 OTTs**

2.8.5.1 The emergence of OTTs has been driving growth, connecting people, and advancing innovation in the global economy. These services are reshaping and expanding the entire communications ecosystem, while also providing social and economic benefits to consumers worldwide and the global economy.

At the same time, the economic impact on the traditional model of the telecommunications industry and on telecom operators is being increasingly analyzed, including inter alia, the competitive environment, the level of regulatory exposure, the level of substitutability between OTTs and traditional telecom services and the interconnection between OTTs and public networks.

2.8.5.2 In this regard, some examples of OTT-related policy questions that could be considered include:

a. What are some of the key policy opportunities and challenges associated with OTT services?

b. How can OTT players and other stakeholders offering application services contribute in those aspects related to the security, safety and trust of the consumer?

c. What approaches might be considered regarding OTTs to help the creation of an environment in which all stakeholders are able to prosper and thrive?

d. How can OTT players and telecom operators best cooperate at local and international level? Are there model partnership agreements that could be developed?

**3 Conclusion**

This draft is intended as a preliminary outline for the Secretary-General’s Report to WTPF-21, serving as a reference for experts as they develop draft Opinions on themes indicated in [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en). This report will be further elaborated in subsequent drafts taking into consideration the written inputs received from experts as well as discussions during physical meetings of the IEG.

1. Note: The title of WTPF-21 is specified in ITU Council 2019 [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)