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| **Agenda item: PL 2** | **Document C24/76-E** |
| **21 May 2024** |
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| Contribution by Australia  |
| THEME FOR THE WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION/ICT POLICY FORUM 2026 (WTPF-26) |
| **Purpose**Resolution 2 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference resolves to hold the World Telecommunication/ICT Policy Forum (WTPF) and instructs the ITU Council to:1. **decide** on the duration, date, venue, agenda and themes of any future WTPF;
2. **adopt** a procedure for preparation of the report by the Secretary-General to WTPF.

The Plenipotentiary Conference also instructed the Council to schedule a WTPF in 2026. Contribution C/24-5 proposes a timeline for WTPF-26 and invites Council to provide guidance on this. **Action required by the Council**Australia proposes that Council should adopt the timeline proposed in C24/5 and decide on the following theme for WTPF-26:**“Policies to advance digital skills to increase diversity, promote gender equality and empower women in education, skills development and the ICT workforce, and promote diverse perspectives in the development of technology and its standards.”**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**References**  *Council documents* [*C24/5*](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0005/en)*,* [*C24/6*](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0006/en)*;* [*ITU Plenipotentiary Resolution 2 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-002-E.pdf)[*ITU Plenipotentiary Resolution 70 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Documents/S22-PP-Res70-E.pdf) |

**Introduction**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported the regional disparities in women’s digital literacy, with men being 52 percent more likely to be online than women in least developed countries, as compared to 21 percent globally. The UNDP further states that women’s full participation and decision-making in innovation, technological change and digitalisation is a prerequisite to deliver transformative impact in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals[[1]](#footnote-2). ITU’s Facts and Figures 2023 Report[[2]](#footnote-3) highlights that women are still overrepresented in the global offline population, outnumbering men by 17 percent and being 8 percent less likely to own a mobile phone.

Technology often reflects the society in which it is created, developed and used. Where gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls persist, there will also be disparities in access to and utilisation of telecommunications/ICTs. The under-representation of women in the design, development and use of technologies[[3]](#footnote-4) is a significant concern, given the increasingly central role these technologies play in all aspects of life. This gap denies opportunities for women to access and use technology, which can have profound implications for both women and broader society.

The importance of enhancing women’s participation in technology and leadership roles cannot be overstated. In fact, ITU Plenipotentiary Resolution 70 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) invites Member States and Sector Members “foster successful strategies to strengthen gender equality in senior-level positions in telecommunication/ICT administrations, government, regulatory bodies and intergovernmental organizations, including ITU, and in the private sector.”

ITU is currently addressing some of these issues through study groups and initiatives, including the Network of Women. However, it is important that the Union’s efforts extend beyond purely technical skills to encompass a deeper understanding of how individuals’ behaviours and cultural norms intersect with technology. ITU has emphasised this need in [C24/6](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0006/en), requesting a “more concerted effort across ITU and its membership” to reinforce ITU’s work towards gender equality for a more equal and inclusive digital future for all.

The urgency to address the issue of women’s underrepresentation in technology and leadership roles stems from the need to harness the full potential of talent, drive and innovation. This will facilitate the development of a more diverse, inclusive and successful future that corresponds with the constantly evolving landscape of technology.

**Proposal**

Australia recognises the opportunity for improvement in promoting diversity among those involved in designing and developing technologies, setting and implementing regulations, shaping policies, making decisions, and accessing technologies. As such, WTPF-26 could serve to facilitate discussions on this policy issue, focusing on the following topic:

**“Policies to advance digital skills to increase diversity, promote gender equality and empower women in education, skills development and the ICT workforce, and promote diverse perspectives in the development of technology and its standards.”**

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1. UNDP, 2023, *Achieving gender equality*, <https://www.undp.org/stories/bridging-gender-digital-divide-way-out-crisis>). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. ITU, 2023, Fact and Figures 2023: <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/facts-figures-2023/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. UN Women, 2023, [Power on: How we can supercharge an equitable digital future](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiT0bSVy52GAxWjxjgGHV9KDr0QFnoECBAQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.unwomen.org%2Fen%2Fnews-stories%2Fexplainer%2F2023%2F02%2Fpower-on-how-we-can-supercharge-an-equitable-digital-future&usg=AOvVaw1d6Lsb3W62g4-TAgIwxYkh&opi=89978449). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)