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| DRAFT OPINION ON BRIDGING DIGITAL DIVIDES, PARTICULARLY ON GENDER AND AGE AS WELL AS SKILLS AND CONNECTIVITY |
| **Purpose**Draft Opinion on opportunities, challenges and policy recommendations on bridging digital divides, particularly on gender and age as well as skills and connectivity for its inclusion in the Report by the ITU Secretary-General for the Seventh World Telecommunication / Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2026.**Action required**The Informal Expert Group on WTPF-26 is invited to consider and approve this document and include in the Report by the ITU Secretary-General for the Seventh World Telecommunication / Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2026.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**References***UNGA Resolution* [*70/1*](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf)*, WTDC Resolutions* [*11 (Rev. Kigali, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/pub/D-RES-D.11-2022) *and* [*37 (Rev. Kigali, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/pub/D-RES-D.37-2022)*, PP Resolutions* [*71 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-071-E.pdf) *and* [*200 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-200-E.pdf) |

DRAFT OPINION

Bridging digital divides, particularly on gender and age
as well as skills and connectivity

The seventh World Telecommunication/ICT Policy Forum (Geneva, 2026),

recalling

*a)* United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 70/1 (25 September 2015) on transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

*b)* WTDC Resolution 11 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) on Telecommunication/information and communication technology services in rural, isolated and poorly served areas;

*c)* WTDC Resolution 37 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) on bridging the digital divide;

*d)* Resolution 71 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union about ITU strategic framework for 2024-2027 with one of the goal for universal connectivity with aim to enable and foster universal access to affordable, high-quality and secure telecommunications/ICTs;

*e)* Resolution 200 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union on Connect 2030 Agenda for global telecommunication/information and communication technology, including broadband, for sustainable development,

considering

*a)* that digital literacy programs such as basic computer usage, internet navigation, software proficiency, and cybersecurity can empower women, older adults, and underserved communities by providing essential skills for the digital age. Such programs will enable participants to thrive in the digital world and help bridge the digital divide, create economic opportunities, and foster social inclusion;

*b)* that financial inclusion may provide a significant opportunity to enhance economic growth and reduce poverty by providing marginalized and low-income individuals with access to formal financial services such as savings, credit, and insurance. Financial inclusion may also promote greater economic stability and resilience by enabling people to save for emergencies and reduce reliance on informal and often exploitative financial services. Additionally, advancements in financial technology (FinTech) will make it easier to reach underserved populations, further expanding the potential for inclusive economic development;

*c)* that access to digital tools can open up new job opportunities and entrepreneurial ventures, particularly for women and marginalized groups. Digital platforms has potential to lower barriers to entry, allowing individuals to start businesses with minimal initial investment and without the need for physical storefronts. Such flexibility will particularly be beneficial for women who may face mobility constraints or caregiving responsibilities. Such digital tools may help women and marginalized groups c overcome traditional barriers, participate more fully in the economy, and achieve greater financial independence;

*d)* that digital platforms can enhance social connectivity and access to services, improving the quality of life for all age groups. It has potential to enable real-time communication, allowing individuals to stay connected with family and friends, participate in online communities, and access social support networks. Additionally, digital technologies may facilitate access to vital services such as healthcare, education, and government services, breaking down physical and social barriers. By providing these opportunities, digital platforms can help bridge the gap for marginalized groups, ensuring that everyone can participate fully in society and benefit from the digital age,

recognising

*a)* that the absence of valid identification documents poses significant challenges for many individuals, particularly those in marginalized communities. Without IDs, people face difficulties accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, and financial services. This lack of access can perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion. Additionally, obtaining an ID can be hindered by burdensome documentation requirements, high costs, limited availability of ID services, and complex bureaucratic processes. These barriers disproportionately affect certain groups, including low-income individuals, immigrants, and transgender people, who may face additional hurdles due to discrimination and systemic inequities;

*b)* that many people, especially in rural or low-income areas, lack access to affordable internet and digital devices. This digital divide is exacerbated by the high cost of broadband subscriptions and digital devices, making it difficult for these communities to participate fully in the digital economy. Additionally, rural areas often suffer from inadequate broadband infrastructure, further hindering access;

*c)* that there is a significant disparity in digital skills, with women and older adults often having less access to training and education. This digital skills gap is influenced by several factors, including historic underinvestment, structural inequities, and social norms. Women are less likely to be online than men and often lack advanced digital skills needed for the workplace. Older adults, even those who are online, show significant variation in digital skills, often linked to their education and income;

*d)* that societal norms and stereotypes can limit the participation of women and older adults in the digital economy. Traditional gender roles often dictate that women prioritize household responsibilities over professional or educational pursuits, restricting their access to digital skills training and employment opportunities. Similarly, stereotypes about older adults being less capable of learning new technologies can discourage them from engaging with digital tools. These cultural barriers not only reduce the economic potential of these groups but also perpetuate inequality and exclusion in the digital age,

is of view

*a)* that the digital identification programs such as India’s Identity program called Aadhaar are crucial for ensuring secure and efficient identity verification online. Key policies initiatives required for universal identity include providing universal access to digital IDs, prioritizing privacy and security, and ensuring interoperability across platforms. User-friendly design and public-private partnerships enhance the system’s effectiveness, while a clear legal framework ensures accountability and transparency. These measures collectively promote social and economic inclusion by enabling all individuals, especially marginalized communities, to access essential services and participate fully in the digital economy;

*b)* that Interoperable banking platforms and tools like India’s UPI and eKYC enhance financial inclusion and efficiency by enabling seamless transactions and data sharing across financial institutions. Key policies interventions may include establishing standards for interoperability, implementing robust regulatory frameworks for data privacy and security, and fostering public-private partnerships. Additionally, providing incentives for adoption and educating consumers about these tools can accelerate their implementation and usage, creating a more inclusive financial ecosystem;

*c)* that governments should prioritize investments in expanding latest mobile technologies such as 5G and other broadband infrastructure to underserved areas to ensure universal access to high-speed internet. By improving infrastructure, these investments help bridge the digital divide, enabling more people to participate in the digital economy, access essential services, and improve their quality of life;

*d)* that implementing targeted digital literacy and skills training programs can help bridge the skills gap, particularly for women and older adults. Digital literacy programs may aim to equip individuals with essential skills to navigate and utilize digital technologies effectively. These programs may cover basic computer skills, internet navigation, software proficiency, online communication, and cybersecurity awareness. The benefits of these programs include enhanced employability, social inclusion, and continuous learning;

*e)* that creating policies that promote gender equality and support the inclusion of older adults in the digital economy can help address cultural barriers These policies should ensure equal access to technology, provide targeted digital literacy programs, promote careers in STEM for women and design accessible technology for older adults;

*f)* that Collaborations between governments, private sector, and non-profits can drive initiatives to provide affordable digital access and training. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can leverage the strengths of government agencies, private companies, and non-profits to provide affordable digital access and training. These collaborations may include pooled resources, combining technological innovation with regulatory support, and scale initiatives effectively. Incentives for the private sector and supportive regulations can further enhance the effectiveness of PPPs in bridging the digital divide,

invite Member States

1 to consider taking policies initiatives and create legal framework for scalable and sustainable universal identity program having universal access to digital IDs, online any time anywhere consent based identity authentication and provision of eKYC (*Know your Customer*), prioritizing privacy and security, ensuring interoperability across platforms and user-friendly design;

2 to consider taking policy decision and creating legal and technical framework for Interoperable banking platforms. The key policies interventions may include establishing standards for interoperability, implementing robust regulatory frameworks for data privacy and security, and fostering public-private partnerships, providing incentives for adoption and educating consumers;

3 to consider prioritizing investments in expanding Latest mobile technologies such as 5G and Satellite and other broadband infrastructure to underserved areas. Provide Incentives to Private Telecom Operators for providing Mobile and broadband services in underserved and unserved area;

4 that creating policies that promote gender equality and support the inclusion of older adults in the digital economy can help address cultural barriers These policies should ensure equal access to technology, provide targeted digital literacy programs, promote careers in STEM for women and design accessible technology for older adults,

invites the Secretary-General

to continue to reinforce the ITU’s efforts, within its remit and in partnership with states and other agencies and organizations, in collaboration with stakeholders to bridging digital divides, particularly on gender and age as well as skills and connectivity.

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