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|  | **Document IEG-WTPF-26-1/5-E** |
| **28 August 2024** |
| **Original: English** |
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| Contribution by the United States of America | |
| U.S. COMMENTS ON FIRST DRAFT OUTLINE OF THE REPORT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL | |
| **Purpose**  This contribution provides U.S. comments on the first draft outline of the report by the Secretary-General and on the structure of possible draft Opinions.  **Action required**  The Informal Expert Group on WTPF-26 is invited to **consider** this document and **take appropriate action**.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **References**  [*ITU-SG WTPF26PREP Report 1*](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-WTPF26PREP-R-0001/en)*;* [*Decision 641 (C24)*](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0136/en) | |

The United States welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Informal Group of Experts for the seventh World Telecommunication/ICT Policy Forum 2026 (IEG-WTPF-26).

We support the first draft outline of the report by the Secretary-General (“Report”) and appreciate that it reiterates the framework set out in [Decision 641 (C24)](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0136/en). We encourage the IEG to conduct its work according to this framework throughout the course of the WTPF-26 preparatory process.

To this end, we propose that future drafts of the Report continue to adhere to the structure of the agreed theme and sub-themes; in other words, we recommend that each sub-theme should be incorporated as a standalone sub-section in the Report. We believe that the WTPF theme, with its five existing sub-themes, provides an appropriate and comprehensive framework for the development of the Report and any eventual WTPF outputs, and would not support additional sub-themes in the Report.

Similarly, we propose that the IEG agree to develop at maximum five possible draft Opinions, one for each of the sub-themes. In the U.S. view, this approach reflects the common understanding and underlying motivation behind the relevant discussions at ITU Council. In articulating the sub-themes, ITU Council recognized the importance and timeliness of each topic; therefore, one draft Opinion per sub-theme would provide the necessary balance and avoid favoring any one topic over another. Moreover, one draft Opinion per sub-theme represents a realistic target that would best allow for the development of common viewpoints, a key goal of the WTPF per Resolution 22 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022).

In line with the above, the United States puts forward for consideration the attached initial suggestions for the Report, which aim to facilitate the next steps by helping to outline the potential scope for discussions.

We look forward to productively engaging in the WTPF-26 preparatory process in the spirit of collaboration and consensus.

ATTACHMENT

U.S. comments on first draft outline of the Report by the Secretary-General

First draft Outline of the Report by the ITU Secretary-General  
for the Seventh World Telecommunication/Information   
and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2026

# 1 The Seventh World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2026 (WTPF-26)

1.1 Originally established by the Plenipotentiary Conference (Kyoto, 1994) 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, 2013 and 2021. By its [Resolution 2 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-002-E.pdf), the Plenipotentiary Conference of the ITU resolved to hold the next WTPF in 2026.

1.2 The purpose of WTPF is to provide a venue for exchanging views and information and thereby creating a shared vision among policy-makers worldwide on challenges and opportunities arising from the new and emerging 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. Bucharest, 2022)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-002-E.pdf)).

1.3 By its [Decision 641 (C24)](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0136/en), the ITU Council decided that the theme for WTPF-26 is as follows:

“***Accelerating an inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and innovative digital future***: In this regard, the WTPF-26 will discuss opportunities, challenges and policies to address the following:

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

– green digital transformation: climate change and environmental sustainability

– resilience of telecommunication/ICTs

– space connectivity

– strengthening ICT-centric innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurship”.

1.4 WTPF-26 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. Bucharest, 2022)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-002-E.pdf)).

1.5 All information relating to WTPF-26 is posted on <https://www.itu.int/en/council/Pages/ieg-wtpf-26.aspx>.

# 2 Preparatory process for the ITU Secretary-General’s Report

2.1 Discussions at WTPF-26 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. Bucharest, 2022)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-002-E.pdf)).

2.2 In accordance with [Decision 641 (C24)](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0136/en), the ITU Secretary-General shall convene a balanced, informal group of experts (IEG), each of whom is active in preparing for WTPF-26 in his/her own country, to assist in this process. In this regard, a circular letter ([CL-24/44](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-SG-CIR-0044/en)) has been sent on 14 June 2024 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, calling for nomination of experts to constitute the IEG. The first meeting of the IEG will be held on 7-8 October 2024.

2.3 The preparatory process will be guided by the timetable set out as in Annex 2 of Decision 641 and in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Timetable for the elaboration of the ITU Secretary-General’s Report

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| --- | --- |
| **5 August 2024** | A First Draft outline of the Report by the Secretary-General shall be posted online for comments |
| **26 August 2024** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the First Draft, and for contribution on outlines for possible draft opinions  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 (7-8 October 2024 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 |
| **4 November 2024** | The Second Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, incorporating discussions from the 1st IEG meeting and including outlines of draft Opinions  This draft will also be made available online for open public consultations |
| **20 December 2024** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Second Draft and for contribution on possible draft Opinions  Deadline for inputs from the open public consultations |
| **2nd IEG Meeting (February 2025 during the CWG cluster)** | Second meeting of the group of experts to discuss the Second Draft of the report by the Secretary-General as well as the possible draft Opinions and the comments received, including from the open public consultation |
| **31 March 2025** | The Third Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, incorporating discussions from the 2nd IEG meeting, and including the text of the possible draft Opinions as an Annex  This draft will also be made available online for open public consultations. |
| **16 June 2025** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Third Draft, including the possible draft Opinions  Deadline for receipt of comments from the open public consultation |
| **3rd IEG Meeting (September 2025 during the CWG cluster)** | Third meeting of the group of experts to discuss the Third Draft of the report by the Secretary-General as well as the draft Opinions and the comments received, including from the open public consultation |
| **3 November 2025** | The Fourth Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, incorporating discussions from the 3rd IEG meeting and including the draft Opinions as an Annex |
| **19 December 2025** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Fourth Draft, including the text of the draft Opinions |
| **4th IEG Virtual Meeting (February 2026 during the CWG cluster)** | Fourth meeting of the group of experts to finalize the Draft Report by the Secretary-General, including the final text of the draft Opinions to be submitted to the seventh WTPF |
| **13 April 2026** | The final report of the Secretary-General to WTPF will be posted online, including the draft Opinions |
| **First half of 2026** | Seventh World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum |

# 3 Theme for WTPF

By[Decision 641 (C24)](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0136/en), ITU Council decided the theme of the WTPF as set out in para. 1.3.

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

3.1.1 According to the latest ITU data, an estimated 2.6 billion people (33% of the global population) remain offline. Of those, only 15% remain offline due to a lack of network infrastructure, whereas the other 85% remain offline because of an adoption gap, *i.e.*, they are covered by a mobile broadband network but are not yet using broadband services or technology. Internet use also remains tightly linked to level of development, emphasizing the width of the digital divide between high-income and low-income countries (93% vs. 27%, respectively).

3.1.2 ***Gender and age:*** As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has emphasized, women’s full participation and decision-making in innovation, technological change and digitalization is a pre-requisite for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite important improvements towards closing the gender digital divide, however, a persistent (and growing) gap remains. While women account for roughly half of the global population, they account for a disproportionate (and increasing) share of the global offline population; as of 2023, women outnumber male non-Internet users by 17%, an *increase* from 11% in 2019. Adolescent girls and young women in particular face significant disparities. According to recent findings from UNICEF, for every 100 adolescent boys and young men (aged 15-24) in low-income countries who do use the Internet, only 44 adolescent girls and young women do.

3.1.3 Therefore, in order to promote gender equality, foster economic empowerment, and ensure inclusive development in the digital age, key questions for consideration include:

a) How can the international community best continue its efforts towards bridging the gender digital divide by empowering girls and women in achieving equal access and use of digital technologies, digital skills, and opportunities as ICT leaders?

b) How can ITU Members continue to implement ITU Plenipotentiary Resolution 70 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)?

c) What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing initiatives (*e.g.*, EQUALS Global Partnership, NoW, Girls in ICT Day, etc.)? How can stakeholders leverage these lessons learned to strengthen and improve ongoing efforts towards gender equality and mainstreaming?

3.1.4 ***Skills and connectivity*:** Global stakeholders have become increasingly focused on alleviating disparities in broadband adoption by investing in approaches that emphasize the importance of digital skills and digital literacy to effectively participate in the global economy. There is widespread recognition of the importance of digital skills as a critical enabler for meaningful connectivity. At the same time, however, digital skills gaps intersect with factors such as gender and age, adding further challenges and complexities to bridging these interrelated digital divides. Recent data from the European Union, for example, shows lower digital skills among older age groups for both men and women, yet the contrast among women of different age groups is even more pronounced (*e.g.*, 71% of women aged 25-34 possessed at least basic digital skills, vs. only 25% of women aged 65-74, compared to 69% of men aged 25-34, vs. 34% of men aged 65-74). The lack of multilingual Internet resources, including both Internationalized domain names and localized Internet content, is another contributing factor.

3.1.5 Given this backdrop, questions for consideration include:

a) What strategies and policies best promote and encourage digital literacy, training, and skills development across all levels of the global socio-economic landscape to close the digital skills gap?

b) How can policymakers holistically consider and address the relationship between digital skills gaps and other digital divides, based on gender, age, urban vs. rural, etc.? How can innovative approaches such as community networks help provide meaningful connectivity and connect the unconnected?

c) Building off existing tools like the ITU Digital Skills Assessment Guidebook, how can policymakers identify national skills gaps and requirements and use this data to develop national skills strategies and roadmaps?

## 3.2 Green digital transformation: climate change and environmental sustainability

## 3.3 Resilience of telecommunication/ICTs

3.3.1 According to the Emergency Events Database, there were 399 natural disasters in 2023, impacting more than 93 million people, with economic losses over US$202 billion. As such, the importance of telecommunications/ICTs to build disaster resilience cannot be overstated. Elements like route diversity, redundancy, and protective/restorative measures contribute to telecommunications/ICT networks characterized by high levels of resiliency, thereby minimizing the likelihood of a service outage and managing the risk of disruption.

3.3.2 As such, questions for consideration include:

a) How can administrations put in place technologies and systems to ensure disaster resilience, which enables operational continuity and the rapid restoration of networks that support disaster communications requirements?

b) What steps can policymakers take to foster an enabling environment for more resilient communications networks and for the deployment of emergency communications systems that support disaster preparedness, response and recovery?

c) How can policymakers enable rapid deployment and implementation of telecommunications/ICTs for disaster prediction, detection, monitoring, early warning, response, relief and recovery?

## 3.4 Space connectivity

3.4.1 Satellites play an important role in today’s interconnected world, facilitating seamless communication across vast distances, connecting remote areas to the global internet and enabling international broadcasting. Billions of people rely on satellites for essential services. Fast and stable internet connections expand access to education and enable telehealth services that allow patients in underserved areas to receive medical care remotely. Satellites are also integral to global navigation systems and positioning, navigation and timing, providing location-based services for devices like smartphones, and supporting aviation and maritime operations. Satellites also provide important data like earth monitoring, which assists with fighting climate change and other important missions. In agriculture, satellites monitor crop health and optimize resources, while in disaster management, they deliver real-time data for early warnings and recovery efforts. Satellite technology serves as a valuable complement to existing terrestrial connectivity solutions. By complementing existing infrastructure, satellite solutions enhance overall network resilience and reliability, ensuring uninterrupted service even in challenging conditions. Importantly, during crises when other telecommunications networks fail, satellites can provide additional communication tools for emergency responders. Additionally, they underpin financial transactions, enabling secure, timely exchanges vital to global banking and commerce, and open doors to economic participation by allowing businesses in rural areas to operate and reach global markets.

3.4.2 High-speed satellites, whether geostationary orbit (GSO) or in low or medium Earth orbit (LEO/MEO), are revolutionizing connectivity by delivering high internet speeds and, for LEO/MEO, low latency communications, to even the most remote areas, transforming how people access information and services. These advancements are enabling seamless streaming, real-time communication, and enhanced digital services, bridging the digital divide and opening up new opportunities for education, healthcare, and economic development globally. As satellite technology continues to evolve, it (along with other broadband technologies) is bridging the digital divide and ensuring that more people can benefit from the social, educational, and economic opportunities offered by the digital age, no matter where they are located. It is essential for policymakers to stay informed about these developments to fully capture the potential of space-based connectivity.

3.4.3 To this end, key questions for consideration include:

a) How can recent advances in space-based connectivity contribute to closing digital divides?

b) How can governments and the private sector promote and accelerate connectivity from space and how can the space connectivity help us achieve the SDGs?

c) What can policymakers do to contribute to an enabling environment for space-based connectivity? What recent advances in satellite telecommunications/ICTs are important for policymakers to consider in facilitating innovation and the deployment of space-based services?

## 3.5 Strengthening ICT-centric innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurship

ANNEX

Draft Opinions for the Seventh World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2026

DRAFT OPINION 1

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

DRAFT OPINION 2

Green digital transformation: climate change and environmental sustainability

DRAFT OPINION 3

Resilience of telecommunication/ICTs

DRAFT OPINION 4

Space connectivity

DRAFT OPINION 5

Strengthening ICT-centric innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurship

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