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| Contribution by Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | |
| DRAFT OPINION ON BRIDGING DIGITAL DIVIDES, PARTICULARLY ON GENDER AND AGE AS WELL AS SKILLS AND CONNECTIVITY | |
| **Purpose**  Draft Opinion on Bridging Digital Divides, particularly on Gender and Age as well as Skills and Connectivity.  **Action required**  The Informal Expert Group on WTPF-26 is invited to **consider** this document. | |

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 Resolution 70/1 on transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in particular, Sustainable Development Goals 5 on Gender Equality and 9 on Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure;

*b)* United Nations General Assembly Resolution 70/125 on the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society;

*c)* Resolution 70 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference on mainstreaming a gender perspective in the ITU and promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through telecommunications/information and communication technologies (ICTs);

*d)* Resolution 71 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union on strategic plan for the Union for 2024-2027;

*e)* Resolution 198 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference on empowerment of youth through telecommunication/ ICTs;

*f)* Resolution 44 (Rev. Geneva, 2022) of World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly, on bridging the standardization gap between developing and developed countries;

*g)* Resolution 55 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference on mainstreaming a gender perspective in the ITU to enhance women's empowerment through telecommunications/ICTs;

*h)* Resolution 37 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of World Telecommunication Development Conference, on bridging the digital divide,

recognising

*a)* the continuing disparity between those who have and those who do not have access to telecommunications/ ICTs, cannot afford them or do not have the skills to use them, referred to as the "digital divide";

*b)* that globally women and girls are less likely to have meaningful access to the Internet, access to telecommunications/ICTs and are under-represented in the STEM sector and that this can be referred to as the digital gender divide;

*c)* the existence of the digital gender divide limits the ability of women and girls to fully benefit from digital transformation and sustainable development;

*d)* the invaluable role that civil society play in reach historically unserved and underserved communities;

*e)* that a lack of digital skills is a barrier to the uptake and effective use of the telecommunications/ ICTs including Internet;

*f)* that age-related barriers can impact access to telecommunications/ICTs and use of the Internet;

*g)* the digital divide can also be associated with a lack of connectivity to broadband networks and low utilization, in particular within developing countries;

*h)* that accelerating broadband development is a considerable challenge, especially in hard-to-reach, rural and remote areas where topography and demography make the return-on-investment challenging;

*i)* it is necessary to build partnerships with a range of stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community and academia in order to address digital divides,

considering

*a)* that telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications are essential for political, economic, social and cultural development, as they play an important role in poverty alleviation, job creation, environmental protection and the prevention and mitigation of natural and other disasters;

*b)* that digital literacy programs can empower women, older adults, and underserved communities by providing essential skills for the digital age and that such programs can enable participants to thrive in the digital world, help bridge the digital divide, create economic opportunities, and foster social inclusion;

*c)* that the ITU plays an important role in connecting the unconnected and promoting gender equality particularly through STEM education and careers through initiatives such as Girls in ICT Day,

is of the view

1 that investment in infrastructure, in particular in broadband and 5G infrastructure, plays a fundamental role in promoting affordable connectivity;

2 that digital skills can help to leverage telecommunication/ICT services and technologies for sustainable development;

3 that implementing targeted digital literacy and skills training programs, including those for women and older adults, can help bridge the digital divide and that the benefits of these programs can include enhanced employability, social inclusion, and continuous learning;

4 that civil society and community groups can make an important contribution to supporting women and older adults to access and use telecommunications/ICTs;

5 that stakeholders should work together to ensure universal access to high-speed Internet;

6 that within its mandate, the ITU should continue to collaborate closely with other UN agencies, international organizations, and other stakeholders concerning connectivity and, bridging digital divides, particularly on gender and age-related issues;

7 that governments pursuing digital transformations by adopting new and emerging telecommunication/ICTs services and technologies should also take into account accessibility needs as well as age and gender-related considerations;

8 that creating policies that promote gender equality and support the inclusion of older adults in the digital world can help promote sustainable development;

9 that collaborations between governments, the private sector, and civil society can drive initiatives to provide affordable digital access and that Public-Private Partnerships can leverage the strengths of government agencies, private companies, and civil society to provide affordable digital access and training;

10 that these collaborations may include pooled resources, combining technological innovation with regulatory support, and scale initiatives effectively and that incentives for the private sector and supportive regulations can further enhance the effectiveness of PPPs in bridging the digital divide,

invites Member States

1 to mainstream gender and consideration of age-related issues into relevant policies and strategies such as ICT, STEM or telecommunications policies;

2 to support research into gender-related barriers to accessing ICT/telecommunications and meaningful use of the Internet;

3 to support research into age-related barriers to access ICT/ telecommunications and meaningful use of the Internet;

4 to collect high-quality gender- and age-disaggregated data including on Internet access and use and participation the telecommunications/ICT sector;

5 to work with stakeholders from private sector, civil society, the technical community and academia to consider how best to ensure all groups in society have equitable access to training, education and jobs in telecommunications/ICTs;

6 to adopt regional, local and national strategies, in consultation with stakeholders, for tackling digital divides and ensuring connectivity for all;

7 to promote digital literacy policies and mechanisms, as a means to help bridge the digital divide, and to participate actively in regional and global collaborative forums;

8 to identify gaps in digital skills curricula in education, apprenticeships and other youth and adult job skills development programmes;

9 to consider adopting policy and regulatory measures that facilitate infrastructure deployment in rural and isolated areas,

invites the Secretary-General

to support the effective implementation of the relevant the ITU capacity building programs and activities that bridge the digital divide with a particular focus on gender and age as well as skills and connectivity.

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