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| Contribution by Malaysia | |
| COMMENTS ON THIRD DRAFT OF THE REPORT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL | |
| **Purpose**  This contribution provides Malaysia’s comments on the third draft of the report by the Secretary-General. Specifically, Malaysia offers input on the section addressing the theme of "Bridging Digital Divides, Particularly on Gender, Age, Skills, and Connectivity".  **Action required**  The Informal Expert Group on WTPF-26 is invited to consider Malaysia’s comments and recommendations, which should be incorporated into the next version of the Report by the ITU Secretary-General for the Seventh World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2026.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  ***References***  [*3rd Draft of the Report by the Secretary General*](https://www.itu.int/md/meetingdoc.asp?lang=en&parent=S24-WTPF26PREP-R-0003) | |

General Comments

The third draft of the Secretary General’s Report (‘this Draft Report’) underscores the importance of bridging digital divides, particularly regarding gender, age, skills, and connectivity. This is a critical step in ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of achieving Universal and Meaningful Connectivity (UMC). Malaysia acknowledges and supports the comprehensive approach laid out in the report and agrees with its emphasis on inclusivity, where no group is excluded from the benefits of digital technologies.

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

Building on the background provided in this Draft Report and the valuable contributions from all participating countries, recent ITU Facts and Figures publications, particularly those focusing on LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS, highlight the critical need to understand the unique developmental challenges faced by different country groupings. This understanding is essential when advising on policies and strategies that can effectively support the goal of achieving UMC.

The background and questions raised in this report have been comprehensively compiled, drawing from the UMC framework, digital literacy and skills, and the inclusivity of target populations. However, two important aspects remain underemphasized: the **affordability of digital devices and Internet access** and the **ethical dimensions of digital access**.

While efforts to bridge digital divides focus on improving connectivity, the affordability of digital devices and Internet access is one of a significant barrier, particularly in developing countries. High costs for smartphones, laptops, broadband and other essential digital tools prevent many people, especially in rural and underserved areas, from fully accessing the benefits of connectivity. As highlighted in the Third Draft Report, the lack of affordable devices and Internet access may have contributed to approximately 2.6 billion people remaining offline. Without affordable access to digital devices and Internet, many individuals, especially marginalized groups, are unable to engage in education, healthcare, or the digital economy. Ensuring affordable access to devices and Internet is just as crucial as improving Internet infrastructure itself.

In addition to addressing device and broadband affordability, equal emphasis must also be placed on promoting digital responsibility and ethics as part of efforts to bridge the digital divide. While increased connectivity offers significant socio-economic benefits such as enhanced communication, improved access to education, and greater participation in the digital economy, unrestricted and unguided access to online platforms can also result in unintended negative consequences. These may include overexposure to inappropriate content, increased screen dependency, online harassment and the emergence of harmful digital behaviors, particularly among vulnerable populations.

Malaysia believes that, alongside digital skills development, digital responsibility and digital ethics must be an integral part of the conversation. It is essential that connectivity initiatives be accompanied by digital literacy programs, awareness campaigns, and policy frameworks that encourage safe, responsible, and ethical use of ICTs.

*Proposed questions to be considered in this Draft Report*

1. How can policymakers and educators ensure that digital ethics are integrated alongside digital skills development for target participants?
2. What strategies can policymakers adopt to lower the cost of digital devices, ensuring equitable access for all citizens, particularly in developing countries?
3. How can international organizations, the private sector, and governments collaborate to subsidize the cost of devices, enabling access to affordable technology for underserved communities?

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