

## Annex 6. Inputs received from GCYE Europe Region

### Declaration of the ITU Generation Connect Europe Youth Envoys on Regional Priorities for Europe Towards 2030

*November 2024, Geneva*

#### ***Preamble***

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We, the Generation Connect Youth Envoys from Europe, are glad to share our views on some key challenges with ITU stakeholders. This contribution builds upon the work of the previous cohort of Youth Envoys and aims to further advance their initiatives in light of recent developments.

The European Youth can offer a meaningful and unique contribution to the ongoing challenges and opportunities of Information and Communication Technologies. Youth participation in policymaking is made imperative by the scale of the risks and the richness of opportunities we face.

As Europeans, we welcome ongoing efforts at the EU level to promote youth participation through the European Year of the Youth as well as through the work of the designated EU Commissioner on Youth, especially the Youth Policy Dialogues to be held within the first 100 days of the new Commission's terms. We also take note of the important work on youth participation occurring at the Council of Europe level.

We are deeply committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN World Summit of Information Society (WSIS) outcomes, and the ITU Connect 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, we commit to respect, protect and promote human rights in the digital space. Our goal is an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for all.

We must consider the environmental impact and other collective costs associated with digital activities. Reducing energy consumption, promoting responsible uses of technology and manufacturing sustainable products is crucial in this regard.

Since 2030 is approaching fast, we want to utilise our voice to push our main priorities forward and make a positive contribution to Europe and the World. The recent adoption of the Pact for the Future and its annexes, the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations have created an important momentum for the discussions around digital governance as well as youth participation. The upcoming WSIS+20 Review and the GDC implementation process present important opportunities to enhance Youth's position.

There is still progress needed to shift from a passive perception of youth to significant engagement. One opportunity to do this would be a dedicated Youth Action line to be established during the [WSIS+20 review process](#).

We look forward to the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-25) and ITU Global Youth Summit 2025 to present our priorities and engage in upcoming policy discussions. Furthermore, we want to shed additional light on the [2022 Generation Connect Youth Call to Action: My Digital Future](#), as a great vision for youth participation and demands.

Our proposals are structured around four pillars: Cybersecurity, Safety and Social Resilience, Digital Public Infrastructure, Digital Inclusion and Innovation, Artificial Intelligence. Each of these

pillars is crucial for Europe to stand for a safe inclusive, sustainable and empowering digital future for all.

### ***Cybersecurity, safety and social resilience***

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As our societies become increasingly digitised, the need for robust cybersecurity infrastructure grows. Young people must be equipped with knowledge and practical skills to navigate everyday cybersecurity threats. Demystifying cybersecurity for young people and adopting a citizen-focused approach is key to making cybersecurity relatable and empowering everyone to protect themselves online.

With a persistent shortage of cybersecurity professionals across Europe, investing in cybersecurity training for young people is essential. This training must actively encourage career paths in cybersecurity and focus on reducing gender disparity by promoting these opportunities to young women and girls.

The security of our society is particularly dependent on the ability of the youth to thrive, offline and online. Young people are continuously threatened by the spread of false information, which has an impact on their decision-making, social perceptions, and mental health. In order to counter this, it is important to equip young people with the knowledge and abilities needed to separate fact from fiction and train resilient online citizens. In this regard, we appreciate efforts of the European Union to create a safe online environment through the AI Act and the Digital Services Act.

While the 2020 Child Online Protection Guidelines have made strides by focusing on digital literacy and resilience for children, recent developments into the European online landscape show that education alone is insufficient to ensure long-term societal well being. Current efforts on policy and education should aim at better understanding and fighting risks for children connected to misinformation, online grooming, and exposure to harmful content, including pornography and addictive app features, places an ever-increasing number of children in Europe at risk.

**Key Action point:** To this end, we invite European governments to strengthen their cybersecurity resilience by building increased capacity also considering long-term costs, privacy implications, and risks of dependency, as well as to significantly invest into human resources and education on cybersecurity. Moreover, the effort for a safer online environment for children and young people has to continue by widening the scope and resources of present programs and regulations.

### ***Digital public Infrastructure***

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The development of digital infrastructure has the potential to positively impact the lives of all citizens. However, without careful and inclusive implementation, it will exacerbate existing inequalities. It is crucial to ensure that digital infrastructure development enhances democracy and citizen's empowerment by prioritising accessibility, inclusivity, and sustainability.

We believe that digital infrastructure can be further and better deployed at the State and European EU level to enhance progress.

To advance digital government infrastructure deployment across Europe, we encourage member states to share successful strategies and frameworks, particularly in digitization of administrative procedures, e-government platforms, open data initiatives and open source principles. Open government not only fosters trust and transparency but is also a driver to citizens' empowerment and economic opportunities.

Digital government infrastructure and services must be accessible to everyone, including minority groups, people living in rural areas, the elderly, and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This requires providing not only the necessary infrastructure but also digital literacy training to ensure effective use. Systems should also be designed with accessibility for people with disabilities in mind.

**Key action point:** Build upon present participatory practices and consultative bodies to ensure that the policies concerning public digitalisation take into account the interests and values of different groups of society. Build capacity across unions, research institutions and civil society as a whole to critically engage with technology and effectively advocate in the realm of digital policy

### ***Digital Inclusion***

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Digital inclusion is essential to ensure that everyone has the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to thrive in the digital world. Unequal access to digital training, disparities in digital skills, and insufficient safeguards continue to leave many vulnerable. Addressing these challenges is fundamental to building a fair and inclusive digital future.

To empower young people, it is crucial to foster a socio-technical understanding of digital technologies. This includes teaching foundational skills and notions including coding, algorithm structure or social media business models. Digital education must emphasise the impacts of technology on social and personal well-being, covering issues like deskilling, privacy, surveillance, and the risks of online radicalization. By integrating these aspects into all-public general digital education courses we can build a generation that is both digitally skilled and critically aware.

Girls face unique challenges in digital spaces because of online sexism and cyber harassment. Such violent behaviour can limit their engagement and deter them from pursuing ICT careers. To address these challenges, we call for specific initiatives that contribute to create a safe, respectful, and supportive online environment. Encouraging skills development for girls in digital fields is equally important, ensuring they have the confidence and opportunities to consider careers in ICT. Such efforts are crucial to close gender gaps and build a diverse talent pipeline for the future. Additionally, most programming languages are only available in English, creating a language gap in programming.

**Key action point:** Focus on the technical education of girls to address the gender imbalance in the tech sector and empower young women with essential technical skills. Make the educational offer on digital technologies more diversified in terms of languages, targets and type of contents.

### ***Artificial Intelligence***

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We recognize international, regional, national and multi-stakeholder efforts under way to advance safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems. International cooperation is required to promote coordination and compatibility of emerging artificial intelligence governance frameworks.

Innovation in emerging technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI), is transforming society at an unprecedented pace. As young people, we are aware of both the opportunities and challenges these technologies present. We invite policymakers to involve youth voices in AI policy discussions to ensure that these technologies are developed in accordance with human rights law, responsibly and ethically. We are attentive to concerns around inequality, environmental impact and surveillance coming with AI. However, we also recognize the potential for these technologies to

advance societal well-being. In this regard we would like to play an active part in ITU's AI for Good Summit.

Sustainable AI should be prioritised, recognizing the environmental impacts of AI-driven infrastructure, as data centres and intensive computational processes. AI has an immense potential to support Europe's resilience in tackling climate change. By leveraging data and technology, we can enhance our understanding of environmental shifts and better govern the green transition. Open data practices for environmental data should be prioritised to foster transparency, drive research, and encourage sustainable technological advancements.

We also encourage educational initiatives that equip young people with AI literacy, enabling them to critically engage with these technologies and use them to drive positive change. Education to human rights and ethical consideration is also needed for young people in the technical sector.

Creating mentorship programs that connect young innovators with experienced professionals can also foster a supportive environment for growth, especially considering the rise of new, groundbreaking technologies such as generative AI. We need to be forward thinking with regard to emerging technologies and innovation and consider the impacts on youth. In this regard we echo the Kigali Action plan's call for increased ICT innovation in the ICT ecosystem.

Key action point: Member states should fund and prioritise sustainable AI, recognizing the environmental impacts of AI-driven infrastructure, as data centres and intensive computational processes. We encourage deepening the commitment to the inclusion of young people in the AI age by forms of policy participation and high quality AI literacy.

## **Conclusion**

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In conclusion, we, the European Youth, stand ready to engage as active partners in shaping a digital future that is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient. By prioritising cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, inclusion, innovation, emerging technologies and AI, we aim to address the complexities of our increasingly interconnected world. Let youth voices be a force for progress, pushing for equitable digital transformation that safeguards rights, empowers communities, and builds a prosperous world for generations to come.

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