**Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau
on behalf of the Generation Connect - Europe Youth Group**

Contribution on behalf of the Generation Connect - Europe Youth Group on
"Declaration on Regional Priorities for Europe Towards 2025"

Agenda item:

Item 8

Summary:

The ITU Youth Strategy aims to improve and have a real impact on the lives of young people around the world, and to ensure meaningful participation of youth in ITU as key stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In line with the Strategy, European Youth have been called upon to contribute to the preparatory process for WTDC-21, in particular the Regional Preparatory Meeting (RPM) for Europe, through the establishment of the "Generation Connect - Europe Youth Group".

The Members of the Europe Youth Group, consisting of 24 youth aged between 18 and 24, have been tasked to develop a document providing their views on the regional priorities of relevance to the Europe region, as an input to the RPM for Europe. Members of the Group have been selected through a competitive process and worked in their own capacity as individuals.

The Declaration developed by the group, and set out in this document identifies five thematic priorities as primary (capacity development, policy and regulation, cybersecurity, environment, and digital inclusion) while recognizing the importance of several other thematic priorities.

Expected results:

RPM-EUR is invited to examine this document and the proposal contained therein, and take actions as appropriate.

References:

WTDC Resolutions 17 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) and 76 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017)
PP Resolutions 140 (Rev. Dubai, 2018), 198 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) and 200 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)
Outcomes of the UN World Summit on the Information Society, UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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RPM-EUR21

Generation Connect - Europe Youth Group

Declaration on Regional Priorities for Europe Towards 2025

Preamble

We, the Generation Connect – Europe Youth Group, are united in bringing key objectives to the attention of the ITU stakeholders, providing a cohesive view of the present and offering solutions for the future.

Through digitalisation the role of the youth is becoming increasingly important, as the younger generations become the drivers of social change. In accordance with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN World Summit of Information Society (WSIS) outcomes, and the ITU Connect 2030 Agenda we recognise the strategic role of meaningful connectivity for sustainable development. Taking into account the challenges and opportunities of this century in the context of Europe region, we believe special attention should be given to five thematic priorities, including capacity development, policy and regulation, cybersecurity, environment, and digital inclusion. In addition, we also recognize the importance of other thematic priorities as listed below in the declaration.

From a capacity development perspective, we are anxious about the growing digital skills gap and educational resource inequalities, particularly for those entering the job market. Many jobs created by digital markets favour ad-hoc work, and there are fears over the corrosion of traditional career paths. Despite this, remote working, co-working spaces and digital entrepreneurship are exciting opportunities. Tech-driven innovations such as community-led learning and massive online courses allow like-minded people to self-organise and innovate. More generally, we support the involvement of a greater number of stakeholders in digital development, especially in developing digital education curricula to support digital literacy.

Given that people tend to be sceptical towards digital novelties, policy and regulatory frameworks provide the opportunity to overcome such distrust. Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including the youth, will lead to the creation of knowledge networks and greater collaboration in the future. A human-centric approach needs to be enshrined in law in order to raise trust in emerging technologies. Although policies can potentially build bridges between innovation and society, regulations are often difficult to understand, especially for those who do not work with legal documents on a daily basis. We are convinced that a more accessible language is needed to communicate policies in an effective way and to reach the youth.

Equipped with such knowledge, young people are prepared to make their voices heard. Year after year, youth activists lobby world leaders to develop sustainable policies and move towards a greener circular economy. Emerging technologies offer tremendous potential in working towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but only if such environmentally sound technologies are distributed across Europe. However, they have an environmental impact that needs to be taken into account.

Digital connectivity is the main facilitator of communication in society. The digital divide causes huge disparities not only between members of different communities, but even within a community that includes marginalised groups and other minorities. Without access to digital technologies, those individuals are in an undermined social and political position compared to those who are connected.

This constitutes a crucial challenge that we seek to address: ensuring equality of access and effective use of digital platforms by all groups in society.

Finally, our youth is a generation of digital natives, the first of many to come. And yet, a large part of the youth population lacks even the most basic cybersecurity awareness. As the ranks of malicious actors grow in size and complexity almost exponentially, our defences are underprepared. We are unable to educate qualified professionals at the same rate at which new vulnerabilities are arising. By exploiting the fact that we are entirely unaware of these threats, hostile actors wreak havoc and dismay on our digital presence.

We need to strike at the heart of our digital problems. By committing to the actions outlined in this declaration, we will equip today's youth to become the future specialists and defenders of our digital world. In this context, we look forward to the outcomes of the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2021 and implementation of actions towards 2025.

Declaration

1.   Capacity Development

Capacity development continues to provide empirical and technical challenges and opportunities for young people, at both an educational and employment level. In a continent where more than a fifth of young people fail to reach a basic level of digital skills, young people are particularly concerned about entering into a job market without the necessary skills to cope in it. Fortunately, through community-based learning and online courses, the online world provides just as many educational opportunities as they do challenges. There is a desire among young people to involve a greater number of stakeholders in digital development, especially from an educational perspective. There are similar responses when it comes to the labour market- the varied nature of which we indicated in the preamble to this declaration. These represent the fundamental challenges and opportunities that we the Youth face with regards to capacity building. We recognise that technological issues are responsibilities shared by both the public and private sectors and call for a variety of stakeholders to recognise their own potential for improvements in these fields.

Actions:

1.1.   We propose that the ITU facilitate a bottom-up multi-stakeholder advisory group to develop a digital skill curriculum and teaching guidelines to be rolled out across Europe for various educational institutions.

1.2.   We recommend that the ITU create an online 'Buddy System', a social platform where young people can come together and learn from each other about diverse digital skills. This will foster dynamic learning over formal structured courses.

1.3.   We seek a Europe-wide mentorship scheme to connect young people with experts in various digital skills. This should foster the motivation in informal learning about digital skills.

1.4.   We propose that digital learning processes are adapted to be made more enjoyable and approachable to people with a non-technical background. In particular, formal educational institutions should focus on creating practical and fun ways to acquire digital skills.

1.5.   We advocate for high quality free online courses with certificates included, available in various European languages and accessible for those who are auditory-impaired, to increase digital literacy but also meet the needs of the current labour market.

1.6.   We call for the ITU to do more outreach work, including marketing campaigns and developing contact points all over Europe, to attract young people towards the ITU Academy Portal.

1.7. We encourage closer links between industry and academia on technological affairs to protect academic spinouts, encourage greater community-led learning, create R&D centres, and transfer university-developed ideas to start-ups.

1.8. We propose that European governments support ITU creation of cooperative mechanisms alongside youth representatives to develop action plans with measurable goals to equip young people with the digital skills needed to succeed in the future of work which includes automation and job losses in traditional sectors.

2.   Policy and Regulation

Policies and regulations can have a big impact on the youth. Unfortunately, there are only few opportunities for the youth to be involved on exchange and knowledge platforms that have an influence on ICT policies and regulations. There is often little awareness among the youth about the possibilities that do exist to make their voices heard, thus preventing sharing of their experiences, opportunities and concerns. The involvement of the youth can lead to an increased youth dimension in the creation of policies, which is of great importance as there currently is only little attention regarding the impact that policies have on the youth and their future. They are often exposed to different difficulties than other groups of persons, and therefore it is important to specifically focus on them. Furthermore, the youth are often unaware of ICT policies and regulations that exist, because these policies and regulations are difficult to access and difficult to understand. However, ICT policies and regulations bring forward different rights and duties, and for this reason it is very important that persons can understand them. Increased communication and awareness-raising may lead to a generation that is well aware of policies and regulations, and the rights and duties that flow from these regulatory documents.

Actions:

2.1. We propose to increase the involvement of the youth on high-level exchange and knowledge platforms that are aimed at the creation and evaluation of ICT policy and regulatory frameworks. This would allow the youth to share their ideas and concerns, and to have an influence on the creation of ICT policies and regulations.

2.2. We propose to create clearer ICT policies and regulations, which are easier to understand through the use of simpler language within the policy or in supporting documents. Furthermore, these documents should be better accessible to the general public, for example through easy-to-digest communication campaigns on policies and regulations that are targeting the youth. This can lead to an improved communication regarding ICT policies and regulations.

2.3. We propose to create new and improved educational programs for the youth regarding ICT policies and regulations in order to create more awareness about these regulatory documents among the youth. This could be done during classes, but also through educational fairs, TV shows and applications for kids.

2.4. We propose that there should be more of a focus on the youth-dimension in the content of ICT policies and regulations. Stakeholders should give more attention to the creation of ICT policies and regulations on subjects that concern the youth and their future, such as teleworking, e-health and Artificial Intelligence.

3.   Cybersecurity

As we steadily move our jobs, hobbies, interests, relationships, memories, and lives, from the real world to the online world, we tend to forget the numerous digital threats present. As a society we

are entirely unaware of menaces posed by threat actors wreaking havoc and dismay on our digital presence. By 2021, damage done by cybercrime is forecasted to cost the world trillions. By modernizing and investing in cybersecurity education, we will raise the necessary awareness of the competencies covering cybersecurity fundamentals and educate future specialists and defenders of our digital world. However, there is a lack of government funding for cybersecurity measures, and educational systems are severely outdated in not focusing on this field to prepare young citizens.

We are concerned that there is a lack of cybersecurity skills and knowledge among young people,such as for example on how to protect our digital identity. In this context, the absence of efficient formal capacity-building mechanisms is preventing from reducing these cybersecurity gaps. Users are currently not educated well enough on how much information should be disclosed online and what should be kept private. A very specific threat is concerning vulnerable groups, including women, who are underrepresented in the field of cybersecurity and are even less well represented in providing security leadership. The underrepresented perspectives of women are critical in addressing cyber risks. Young people are also bombarded with news and information and need to understand how to distinguish facts from lies. Another important point is that youth need to learn how to avoid harm from cyberbullying and other forms of digital aggression. These threats have been recognised by various stakeholders who are creating job opportunities for young people in the cybersecurity sector. It is vital that people become aware of both risks and opportunities in order to become truly literate digital citizens.

Actions:

3.1.   We propose to continue establishing Safer Internet Centres in non-EU European countries and strengthening capacities to inform children and young people on digital questions as well as assist victims of cyber-attacks and online child sexual abuse.

3.2.   We call upon the ITU to raise awareness and educate the youth about cybersecurity by organizing educational cybersecurity competitions and events targeting students, university graduates, and non-ICT professionals. This can be achieved through partnerships with universities, organizations or experts.

3.3.   We encourage the ITU to promote media literacy on cybersecurity at the European level to ensure young people are taught about cybersecurity, cybersecurity skills, and the opportunities that the cybersecurity field can offer to them in terms of future professional development.

3.4.   We call for increasing governmental funding for cybersecurity measures and investing in education and research on emerging cyber threats.

3.5.   We suggest to establish common cybersecurity capacity-building standards for European countries with cross-sectoral cybersecurity skills curriculum guidelines promoting skills related to multiple sectors, such as law, psychology, social sciences, economics, security and risk management, diplomacy etc.

3.6.   We call for closer cooperation with the activities relating to the follow up process to the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation as well as the international youth community, such as for example Youth IGF.

4.   Environment

The youth are currently and prospectively bearing the largest burden coping with the consequences from climate change as a result of actions and decisions taken by all stakeholders. While needing to

reduce its very own ecological footprint, ICT can play a key role to mitigate climate change. By including youth in this process, this potential can be further leveraged. In addition, as the biggest user group of Internet and mobile devices in Europe, the youth itself can change its consumption behaviour with respect to hardware and software to trigger a shift towards less ecological impact of ICT. Advanced education on how to use ICT for environmental issues can promote sustainable development and circular economy. By abstaining from greenwashing, which youth is exposed to predominantly, and committing to true sustainability principles, ICT companies can re-establish trust among youth and contribute to a necessary ecological shift in production. Enhanced cooperation between youth at the international level can allow the sharing of best practices. Furthermore, the youth can work together to solve local environmental problems that pile up on a global level. Finally, due to its unparalleled positive implications for youth, we encourage governments to take every necessary action to meet the objectives of the Paris Climate Act. Instead of it being considered a strategic political measure, we invite governments to commit to its fulfilment, while empowering, entrusting, and supporting intergovernmental organisations, led by the UN organisations, with sufficient authority to coordinate and oversee these efforts.

Actions:

4.1.   As the youth are particularly affected by environmental changes, all decisions with respect to climate action on ICT should hear and include their voices. Due to the additional expertise they can bring to the debate, we propose to always establish an inclusive structure for young supporters in projects supporting sustainable development. The combination of knowledge backgrounds from both environmental activists and young ICT professionals, can bring up original, creative solutions that wouldn't otherwise be thought of.

4.2.   We propose that governments should support the ICT innovation start-ups, NGOs, research institutions, and other initiatives working towards combating climate change, where youth is a driving force. For instance, youth-involved projects can collect and repair no longer used devices, to give them a second life.

4.3.   We recommend the collaboration of youth with the ICT industry to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of other sectors and minimize its own ecological footprint. For this, a circular economy including ICT industries and devices is crucially needed.

4.4.   We encourage the introduction of additional regulations on the operation of data centres and especially the training of machine learning applications that consume an unacceptable number of resources.

4.5.   We invite European lawmakers to encourage producers to transition to manufacturing of sustainable products. This includes the extension of the legal warranty in order to enforce device longevity, prohibition of intended breaking points and unified handling of e-waste. A system of penalties for actors of the private and public sector will ensure compliance with these rules. In addition, we recommend a universal environmental impact index for ICT products and services adopted by all nations. To enable consumers to make an informed decision, the index would visibly indicate the short and long-term consequences arising from their manufacture, usage, and disposal for the environment.

4.6.   Where not yet the case, we encourage to refrain from the import of conflict materials from regions outside Europe that are acquired for the production of ICT devices such as smartphones or computers and that stem from regions in conflict over these resources, especially when child labour or worker exploitation is present.

4.7.   We propose large-scale advocacy campaigns to inform ordinary citizens and youth in particular about the impacts of ICT devices and applications on the environment. Campaigns should take place in schools and in public spaces supported by NGOs, national governments, and activists, which further the cause to mass media and additional channels of communications.

4.8.   We propose that European governments should create an e-learning platform aimed to raise the awareness of the environmental issues among youth and children. During IT classes in school more time and resources should be spent on developing awareness concerning the proper use of the Internet. In addition, children from the beginning of their education should have classes devoted to forming the habits supporting sustainable development in general, focusing on providing the practical skills, rather than theoretical knowledge.

4.9.   We encourage governments to create roles, educational paths, university programs, and grants for young people to specifically support the sustainable development through technology. These might include roles of sustainability engineers, environmental AI researchers and many more.

5.   Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion aims to ensure that all individuals can participate equally in the digital sphere. Crucially, this effort must include underserved groups of people who may experience exclusion based on their age, gender, ability, geographical location, socioeconomic status or language skills. We, the youth, stand for the development of regional, multi-stakeholder policy approaches to promoting digital inclusion in Europe region. To facilitate change, governments, research institutions, civil society, and industry must work in partnership to ensure equality of access and use of digital platforms and services. The barriers which prevent equal participation in the digital sphere often result from factors beyond the control of individuals, such as social and economic background, gender, and disability. This inequality results in a digital divide which leads to large disparities between and within societies. This constitutes the main challenge that the youth seek to address through the actions outlined hereafter, namely, ensuring equality of access to and effective use of digital platforms and services by all groups in society.

Actions:

5.1.   We propose that youth leaders and activists from marginalised communities drive debate and advocacy to facilitate a bottom-up approach to digital inclusion by representing the interests of their communities and bringing more youth voices into the decision-making process. For instance, organisations targeting young people in these communities can ensure youth integration into policy-making mechanisms.

5.2.   We propose that research institutions and government organisations produce research and policy papers on challenges faced by youth in a digitalised society. This could improve monitoring of the accessibility and affordability of digital services, and of the capability of youth to use them. An in-depth understanding of these issues would allow for effective and adequate regulations.

5.3.   We propose that governments and industry stakeholders guarantee inclusive digital technology design for all, particularly those with specific needs. For example, for people with disabilities, individuals with lower digital skills, and non-English speakers, it is crucial to introduce solutions that facilitate access to new technologies.

5.4.   We recommend that Member States subsidise the cost of internet connectivity for low-income households and provide free Internet in public places to promote affordability and

equality of access to digital services. Furthermore, Member States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, should ensure high-speed connectivity for all educational facilities, such as schools and libraries, and provide greater access to digital services, particularly among youth.

5.5.   We suggest that Member States identify marginalised groups in society that are disproportionately affected by the digital divide and ensure protection for these groups against the consequences of digital exclusion. This can be achieved by introducing actions that foster digital education and ensure access to devices and the Internet. It is recommended to monitor statistics on underrepresented groups of Internet users.

5.6.   We recommend that Member Statesensure regulatory compliance of industry partners in providing accessible digital services and platforms for people with disabilities, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other applicable accessibility frameworks, including the European Accessiblity Act.

Other thematic priorities

We, the youth, also recognize the importance for Europe region of other thematic priorities that will help countries in accelerating the digital transformation to achieve the goals set by the Intenational community.

6.   Networks and Digital Infrastructure

Networks and digital infrastructure have great potential to shape our future by facilitating daily life. A variety of different services can be provided in a simple and easily-accessible way through platforms and networks. However, a well-functioning digital infrastructure is required to ensure that everybody has the possibility to take advantage of such services.

Actions:

6.1.   We propose that all European countries provide easy-access, protected digital citizen services such as platforms for schools and universities, city portals, certified e-mailing, and petition and political action platforms. These will increase the democratic attitude of young people and their affiliation towards new technologies while protecting from harmful services.

6.2.   We propose that infrastructure is developed in such a way that it is accessible to everyone, even persons in rural and remote areas. We recommend to include legal provisions to ensure universal service to rural and remote areas.

7.   Emergency Telecommunications

Each year, more and more natural disasters take place around the globe. Technologies that find, connect and aid humans in the scenario of a natural or man-made disasters to rebuild and continue their life are paramount. Few actors from the public and private sectors have managed to develop secure telecommunications in case of a disaster. It is a struggle to create a start-up lead by young people developing technologies that are not consumed frequently, but that are vital in case of a calamity. Investments in such start-ups are essential. Areas around the globe do not have internet access which prohibits the inhabitants not only from general development to communicate, to research, to developbut also from responding to and recovering from emergencies. Young students cannot communicate with their teachers, cannot access classroom materials and cannot read more on subjects they are interested in due to the lack of connectivity. In case of a disaster, the educational process is completely interrupted.

Actions:

7.1.   We propose to establish programmes for young graduates to develop ICT-based aid for emergency situations. These programmes would also offer the possibility to engage with stakeholders in the business and NGO community working on emergency telecommunications.

7.2.   We invite governments to ease regulation with the aim to support emergency communications and to incentivize ICT companies to deploy easy-access wireless internet access in areas where emergencies happen or the connections are interrupted.

7.3.   We encourage governments to establish early warning systems based on standardized and privacy-respecting digital applications.

8.   Digital Innovation Ecosystems

Digital innovation ecosystems directly affect the efficiency of innovation and competitiveness of economies at the regional and global level. It requires a systemic approach involving all stakeholders. Innovation ecosystems should provide effective incentives for youth to conduct research and transform results into marketable innovations while securing intellectual property rights.

Actions:

8.1.   We call for cooperation between national, local authorities and youth councils to establish start-up centres to encourage young people, especially those in developing countries who face higher rates of unemployment, to explore digital entrepreneurship opportunities.

8.2.   We call to put entrepreneurship at the centre of national and regional innovation policies and strategies. Entrepreneurs should in a position to benefit from special programmes creating the opportunities for youth engagement.

9.   Statistics

Statistics play an important role in policy-making processes, particularly for supporting evidence-based approaches of different stakeholders. It is important to use holistic methods to measure ICT access and interaction, specifically to generate in-depth data for the youth. We, the youth, acknowledge that global and regional stakeholders are already taking actions to collect a variety of data on the usage of ICTs. However, for the youth, some types of data may be more representative than those collected on other groups or on populations as a whole, and key to understanding young people's needs and challenges.

Actions:

9.1.   We propose that Member States, in collaboration with youth-led researchers, collect new types of data on how youth access and interact with ICTs, in order to allow benchmarking and better digital policies and education strategies. This could play an important role in identifying the key priority indicators to be collected.

9.2.   We suggest that Member States improve transparency of data, by leveraging digital technologies like blockchain, to allow for shared management of databases and to provide free access. Ensuring an open data repository that is maintained by everyone sets a good base for cooperation.

10.   Digital Services and Applications

Digital services and applications are one of the most important tools to the youth. These give the youth access to the online space. In the era of "apps", accessing services such as

education,healthcare, government, as well as expand the possibilities for social engagement, enables socio-economic participation and empowerment of the youth. Moreover, as these tools can substantially reduce inequality and improve lives worldwide, youth access is of utmost importance.

Actions:

10.1. We call for the provision of tech devices and development of educational platforms in schools to avoid increasing social inequality. Programmes should be established to supervise the implementation of these initiatives to ensure all youth can leverage devices and platforms for their individual growth.

10.2. We encourage European countries to create closer connections between the private and public sectors and provide the job opportunities for the youth while creating career schemes in the field of digital services and applications.

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