

RESOLUTION 139 (REV. BUCHAREST, 2022)

Use of telecommunications/information and communication technologies to bridge the digital divide and build an inclusive information society

The Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union (Bucharest, 2022),

recalling

- a) the Preamble (No. 1) of the ITU Constitution, "fully recognizing the sovereign right of each State to regulate its telecommunication and having regard to the growing importance of telecommunication for the preservation of peace and the economic and social development of all States";
- b) Resolution 71 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of this conference, on the strategic plan for the Union for 2024-2027;
- c) Resolution 200 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of this conference, on the Connect 2030 Agenda for global telecommunication/information and communication technology (ICT), including broadband, for sustainable development;
- d) Resolution 16 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), on special actions and measures for least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states (SIDS), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and countries with economies in transition;
- e) Resolution 30 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of WTDC, on the role of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), taking into account the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

- f) Resolution 37 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of WTDC, on bridging the digital divide;
- g) Resolution 92 (Rev. Geneva, 2022) of the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA), on enhancing the standardization activities in the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) related to non-radio aspects of international mobile telecommunications (IMT);
- h) Resolution 44 (Rev. Geneva, 2022) of WTSA, on bridging the standardization gap between developing¹ and developed countries;
- i) Recommendation ITU-T D.53, on international aspects of universal service;
- j) Resolution 23 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of WTDC, on Internet access and availability for developing countries and charging principles for international Internet connection;
- k) Resolution 191 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of this conference, on strategy for the coordination of efforts among the three Sectors of the Union,

recognizing

- a) that the digital divide can be associated with a lack of connectivity to broadband networks and low utilization, in particular within developing countries;
- b) that there is a need to enhance affordability and availability and promote investment in connectivity and relevant infrastructure, in particular in developing countries;
- c) that a low utilization of broadband connectivity can be associated with some factors, including affordability, digital literacy and related skills;
- d) that the social and economic underdevelopment of a large part of the world is one of the most serious problems affecting not only the countries concerned but also the international community as a whole;

¹ These include the least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

- e)* that the benefits of the advancement in ICTs can create opportunities for digital services in developing countries, and enables digitalization of the infrastructure which underpins the economy, including the digital economy;
- f)* that the new technologies of telecommunication networks show potential for offering more efficient and economic telecommunication and ICT services and applications, particularly for unserved and/or underserved areas;
- g)* that WSIS highlighted that the ICT infrastructure is an essential foundation for an inclusive information society, and called for the commitment of all States to placing ICTs and ICT applications at the service of development;
- h)* that the WSIS+10 High-Level Event (Geneva, 2014), an expanded version of the WSIS Forum, held by ITU in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), recognizes in its WSIS+10 Statement on the implementation of WSIS outcomes that, since the Tunis Phase of WSIS was held in 2005, the uses of ICTs have developed considerably and become a part of everyday life, accelerating social and economic growth, sustainable development, increasing transparency and accountability, where applicable, and offering new opportunities for both developed and developing countries to leverage the benefits of new technologies;
- i)* that, in turn, the WSIS+10 Vision for WSIS beyond 2015 reaffirms that the objective of WSIS is to bridge the digital, technology and knowledge divides and create a people-centric, inclusive, open and development-oriented information society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge;

j) that telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications are essential for political, economic, social and cultural development, that they play an important role in poverty alleviation, job creation, environmental protection and the prevention and mitigation of natural and other disasters (in addition to the importance of disaster prediction), and that they must be placed at the service of development in other sectors; and that, therefore, opportunities offered by new ICTs should be accelerated and fully exploited in order to foster digital inclusion towards sustainable development;

k) that, even prior to WSIS, in addition to ITU activities, various activities were being executed by many organizations and entities to bridge the digital divide;

l) that the use of ICTs enhances social, economic, cultural and environmental growth, contributes to sustainable development, encourages transparency and accountability, and offers new opportunities for developed and developing countries to take advantage of the benefits offered by new technologies;

m) that there is a need for affordable broadband and digital services in developing countries, which are enabled by the ICT revolution;

n) that Resolution 70/125 of the United Nations General Assembly, on the overall review of the implementation of the WSIS outcomes, recognizes that speed, stability, affordability, language, local content and accessibility for persons with disabilities are now basic aspects of quality, and that a high-speed broadband connection is now a factor in facilitating sustainable development,

considering

a) that, even with all the developments described above and the improvement observed in some respects, in numerous developing countries telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications are still not affordable to the majority of people, particularly those living in rural or remote, unserved and underserved areas;

b) that each region, country and area must tackle its own specific issues regarding the digital divide, with emphasis on cooperation with others in order to benefit from experience gained;

- c) that many countries may not have the necessary basic infrastructure, long-term plans, laws, regulations and such like in place for the development and management of telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications;
- d) that LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs and countries with economies in transition still face particular problems in bridging the digital divide, including transit of telecommunication traffic through neighbouring countries in the case of LLDCs, and would benefit from special measures for the development of telecommunications/ICTs and to improve their connectivity;
- e) that it is necessary to study and analyse the social, demographic, economic and technological context of the communities in which it is necessary to deploy telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and services, as well as to implement plans for capacity building, training and digital skills development, in particular for persons with disabilities, persons with specific needs and indigenous peoples;
- f) that implementing policies that promote access to telecommunication/ICT services in unserved and underserved areas has proven to be a crucial tool for bridging the digital divide;
- g) that it is important to identify sustainable best practices to deploy high-speed broadband networks to help developing countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- h) that quality of broadband access will promote inclusion and support the vision of an information society;
- i) that IMT systems as well as other technologies contribute to bridging the digital divide and promote affordable broadband connectivity, in particular in developing countries,

considering further

- a) that telecommunication/ICT facilities, services and applications are not only the consequence of economic growth, but a prerequisite for social, cultural and environmental development, including economic growth;

- b)* that telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications are an integral part of the national, regional and international development process;
- c)* that a favourable environment, which includes the necessary policies, skills and technical capacities to use and develop technologies, is considered to be as important as infrastructure investments in telecommunications/ICTs;
- d)* that recent progress, and particularly the convergence of telecommunication, information, broadcasting and computer technologies and services, in some countries, are agents of change for the information and knowledge societies;
- e)* that there is a continuing need in most developing countries for investment in various development sectors, while giving priority to investment in the telecommunication/ICT sector, in view of the pressing need for telecommunications/ICTs as a basis for growth and development in other sectors;
- f)* that, in this situation, national digital e-strategies should be linked to overall development goals;
- g)* that it continues to be necessary to provide those responsible for developing standards with relevant and timely information on the role and general contribution of telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications to overall development plans;
- h)* that past studies undertaken at the initiative of the Union for assessing the benefits of telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications in the sector have had a salutary effect in other sectors and are a necessary condition for their development;
- i)* that the use of terrestrial and space services to give access to rural or remote areas without increasing connection costs due to distance and other geographic characteristics must be considered an extremely useful tool for bridging the digital divide;
- j)* that terrestrial and space broadband services make it possible to provide cost-effective communications solutions with great connectivity, speed and reliability in metropolitan, rural and even remote areas, becoming an essential engine for the economic and social development of countries and regions;

k) that the development of low-cost equipment is important for network deployment in unserved and/or underserved areas;

l) that the use of telecommunications/ICTs creates opportunities and benefits for the economy, including the digital economy;

m) that the sharing of telecommunication infrastructure could be an effective means of deploying telecommunication networks, in particular in unserved and/or underserved areas,

stressing

a) the important role played by telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications in the development of e-government, labour, agriculture, health, education, transport, industry, human rights, environmental protection, trade and transfer of information for social welfare, among others, and in the general economic and social progress of developing countries, especially for people living in rural, remote, unserved and underserved areas;

b) that telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and applications are central to achieving the goal of ensuring digital inclusion for all, enabling sustainable, ubiquitous and affordable access to information,

mindful

a) that some Member States have applied their national strategies and regulatory frameworks to help bridge the digital divide at the national level;

b) that various ITU Member States have developed national strategies and programmes to encourage investment in implementing projects to deploy telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and networks, especially in unserved and underserved areas,

appreciating

a) the various studies that have been carried out as part of the programme of technical cooperation and assistance activities of the Union;

b) that ITU, in keeping with its duties and mandate, is helping to bridge the digital divide at the national, regional and international levels by facilitating the connectivity of telecommunication/ICT networks and services, in order to follow up on and meet the key goals and objectives of WSIS,

resolves

- 1 that implementation of Resolution 37 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) should continue;
- 2 that the Union should continue to organize, sponsor and conduct necessary studies in order to highlight, in a different and changing context, the contribution of telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications to overall development, including promoting innovation;
- 3 that the Union should continue to act as a clearing-house mechanism for the exchange of information and expertise in this regard, within the implementation of the Kigali Action Plan and in partnership with other appropriate organizations, and implement initiatives, programmes and projects aimed at overcoming the digital divide, especially by enabling accessible and affordable connectivity, enabling digital literacy and skills development, and promoting connectivity to telecommunications/ICTs and ICT applications;
- 4 that the Inter-Sector Coordination Group on issues of mutual interest along with the Inter-Sectoral Coordination Task Force, in close collaboration with the Directors of the Bureaux, coordinate the work of the Sectors with respect to bridging the digital divide, including accessible and affordable connectivity, digital literacy and skills development;
- 5 that ITU, in cooperation with Member States and relevant organizations, continue its task of preparing adequate ICT reference indicators for measuring the digital divide, collecting statistical data, measuring the impact of ICTs and facilitating a comparative analysis of digital integration, which will continue to be a fundamental need in support of economic growth;
- 6 that ITU continue its work and activities to support Member States, upon request, in strengthening their regulatory and policy frameworks through sharing information on national programmes in respect of best regulatory practices for unserved and/or underserved areas within their territories;
- 7 that ITU facilitate and promote the development of high-speed broadband infrastructure, either by terrestrial or space-based solutions, including relevant programmes to extend access;

8 that ITU foster the development of activities that promote the planning and execution of strategies that allow the use of emerging technologies to improve access to telecommunications/ICTs,

continues to invite

the administrations and governments of Member States, agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, regional telecommunication organizations, financial institutions and providers of telecommunication equipment and services and ICTs to extend their support for the satisfactory implementation of this resolution,

continues to encourage

all agencies responsible for development aid and assistance, including the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), UNDP and regional and national development funds, as well as donor and recipient Member States of the Union, to continue to attach importance to ICTs in the development process and to accord high priority for resource allocation to this sector in a way that enables access to affordable financing in developing countries,

instructs the Secretary-General

1 to bring this resolution to the attention of all interested parties including, in particular, UNDP, IBRD, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS), the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, and regional funds and national development funds for cooperation in implementing this resolution;

2 to take the measures necessary to carry out the tasks described in *resolves 4* above;

3 to report annually to the ITU Council in consultation with the Directors of the three Bureaux on the progress made in the implementation of this resolution, including any impediments to furthering its objectives, and any recommendations for further action;

4 to arrange for wide dissemination of the findings resulting from the activities carried out in accordance with this resolution;

5 to further develop and deepen relationships within the United Nations system and with other international organizations relevant to this resolution, including UNESCO in relation to digital literacy and skills development, and UN-OHRLLS to address the needs of developing countries,

instructs the Secretary-General and the Directors of the three Bureaux, in line with the mandates of their respective Sectors

to work with the ITU membership to raise awareness and support information-sharing and capacity-building activities, in close coordination with other relevant standards-development organizations and forums, related to disaggregated, open and interoperable network technologies and solutions, such as Open Radio Access Networks (Open RAN) and others, with the objective of promoting affordable connectivity and bridging the digital divide, in particular in developing countries, and encouraging competition, innovation and technology neutrality,

instructs the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, in coordination with the Directors of the other Bureaux, within their respective mandates

1 to ensure access to and increase the prominence of up-to-date repositories of best practice and expertise for bridging the digital divide so that all relevant resources are more easily available to the members of the Union and other stakeholders, for example on a dedicated area of the ITU website;

2 to continue to assist Member States and Sector Members in developing a policy and regulatory framework for ICTs and ICT applications that serves development;

3 to continue to assist Member States and Sector Members with strategies that expand access to telecommunication/ICT infrastructure, particularly for rural or remote or unserved and underserved areas;

- 4 to continue to assist Member States and Sector Members with strategies to improve digital literacy and skills, including by regularly updating the existing Digital Skills Toolkit;
- 5 to evaluate challenges to, and models for, affordable and sustainable systems for access to information in rural, remote or unserved and underserved areas, and to communications and ICT applications on the global network, based on studies of these models;
- 6 to review, compile and disseminate best practices and regulatory experiences on national and regional strategies employed to promote investment in telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and services, affordable connectivity, digital literacy and skills development in unserved and/or underserved areas, utilizing possible means within countries and/or regions, which may include universal service funds in certain countries, where appropriate;
- 7 to support sharing national experiences and information, such as case studies, and support enabling environments for the use of affordable technologies for bridging the digital divide, such as current and emerging telecommunication/ICT infrastructure, including telecommunication/ICT complementary access networks and solutions;
- 8 to continue to conduct, within available resources, case studies concerning the development of telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and services, in particular within unserved and/or underserved areas, such as rural and remote areas, as far as possible;
- 9 to compile and disseminate guiding principles that bring together best practices for the sharing of telecommunication network infrastructure, as appropriate;
- 10 to promote and facilitate collaborative actions between the different Sectors of the Union to carry out studies, projects and interrelated activities identified in action plans of the Sectors, aiming to complement the development of national telecommunication networks;

11 to continue to support Member States by providing a database of experts in the required field, and to fund the necessary actions for bridging the digital divide for developing countries within the resources allocated under the financial plan;

12 to strengthen cooperation and coordination with the relevant international and regional organizations, in particular those of the developing countries, in activities related to bridging the digital divide;

13 to provide assistance on capacity building and training for individuals in digital skills and digital literacy, creating a culture of learning and collaboration, on how to navigate and extract benefit from the new industrial revolution, by building programmes or joint programmes in fields relevant to bridging the digital divide, in accordance with the SDGs and WSIS action lines, within the mandate of ITU,

instructs the Director of the Radiocommunication Bureau

to implement actions, in coordination with the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, in order to support and share information about studies, tools and projects and, at the same time, promote joint activities aiming to build capacities for increasingly efficient use of the orbit/spectrum resource, with the purpose of expanding affordable access to broadband, including through space and terrestrial services and facilitating connectivity between networks, and between different zones, countries and regions, especially in developing countries,

instructs the ITU Council

1 to allocate adequate funds, within approved budgetary resources, for the implementation of this resolution;

2 to review the Secretary-General's reports and take appropriate measures to ensure the implementation of this resolution;

3 to submit a progress report on this resolution to the next plenipotentiary conference,

invites Member States

- 1 to continue providing relevant case studies and to share best practices in respect of effective policies and regulatory approaches with the relevant ITU-D study groups, taking into account the objectives of this resolution;
- 2 to conduct consultations with the beneficiaries of telecommunication/ICT infrastructure plans, programmes and investment, considering current differences stemming from the social conditions and dynamics of the population, so as to ensure suitable appropriation of ICTs;
- 3 to establish an enabling regulatory and policy environment that stimulates expansion of affordable connectivity and that promotes digital literacy and the adoption and deployment of new technologies, especially in unserved and underserved areas;
- 4 to consider facilitating an environment for sharing national experiences for bridging the digital divide, as appropriate, using affordable technologies, such as current and emerging telecommunication/ICT infrastructure, including telecommunication/ICT complementary access networks and solutions, according to national regulations;
- 5 to study the causes of the digital divide, and their impacts, that are prevalent at the national level, and to consider how to overcome these issues, including measures to enhance the affordability and availability of telecommunication/ICT equipment integral to bridging the digital divide, and to share information about their experiences with the relevant ITU-D study groups,

invites all Member States and Sector Members

- 1 to promote activities and share information on disaggregated, open and interoperable network technologies, such as Open RAN and others, with the objective of promoting affordable connectivity and bridging the digital divide, in particular in developing countries;
- 2 to foster an enabling environment for disaggregated, open and interoperable network technologies, such as Open RAN and others, and to promote reliable and interoperable broadband access at an affordable cost.

*(Antalya, 2006) – (Rev. Guadalajara, 2010) – (Rev. Busan, 2014) – (Rev. Dubai, 2018)
– (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*
