

ITU Regional Development Forum for CIS (RDF-CIS) 2026

Universal, meaningful and affordable connectivity for inclusive and sustainable digital future

29-30 September 2026 | Dushanbe, Tajikistan

RDF-CIS 2026 was organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and co-hosted by the Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. The Forum was held back-to-back with the RCC Ministerial Board meeting on 29 September 2026.

DRAFT OUTCOME REPORT

(Any comments should be directed to itu-ro-cis@itu.int no later than 15 October 2026)

1. Introduction

The ITU Regional Development Forum for CIS (RDF-CIS) 2026 was held on 29–30 September 2026 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The Forum was organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and co-hosted by the Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan.

The Forum was held under the theme “Universal, meaningful, and affordable connectivity for an inclusive and sustainable digital future”. Discussions addressed regional digital development priorities, including the implementation of the Baku Action Plan and the ITU Regional Initiatives for CIS (CIS1–CIS5), following the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-25).

The Forum brought together 143 participants from 14 ITU Member States, including all countries of the CIS region.

The programme was comprised of six thematic sessions, a special event on LLDCs and partnership announcements. The RCC Ministerial Board meeting followed the first-day programme on 29 September.

2. Participation

RDF-CIS 2026 brought together 143 participants, including 128 attending in person and 15 online. Fourteen ITU Member States were represented, including all countries of the CIS region. Participants also included representatives of ITU-D Sector Members, academia, United Nations agencies, regional organizations and other stakeholders.

3. Contributions, Documentation and Outcome

A total of 10 written contributions were received in preparation for RDF-CIS 2026 from ITU Member States and other stakeholders. The contributions addressed satellite connectivity in remote areas, connectivity for schools, skills development in 5G and emerging technologies, AI based on regional languages, digital public infrastructure, cyber resilience and digital safety, affordability of international roaming, digital verification tools for trusted field reporting, and the draft Dushanbe Call to Action for LLDCs. The written contributions informed the thematic sessions. Together with the outcomes of the discussions, they provided a basis for the Forum’s conclusions and follow-up under the Baku Action Plan and the CIS Regional Initiatives (CIS1–CIS5).

The programme and Forum materials are available [on the official RDF-CIS 2026 webpage](#).

4. Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of the ITU Regional Development Forum for CIS included welcoming addresses by high-level representatives of ITU, the host country, RCC and the United Nations system. The addresses outlined regional digital development priorities and emphasized the role of cooperation in ensuring universal, meaningful and affordable connectivity.

Opening remarks were delivered by:

- H.E. Mr. Isfandiyori Sadullo, Head of Communications Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan
- Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT)
- Mr. Alexey Borodin, Director General, RCC
- Ms. Parvathy Ramaswami, UN Resident Coordinator in Tajikistan
- H.E. Mr. Khurshed Mirzo, Director, Agency of Innovation and Digital Technologies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

In his opening remarks, H.E. Mr. Sadullo emphasized that digital transformation should deliver practical benefits, including for people living in rural and remote areas. Priorities included affordable and high-quality connectivity, digital public services and skills, AI applications, protection of digital systems and critical infrastructure, reduction of digital inequalities and stronger regional cooperation. "Tajikistan is ready to continue to actively participate in this work, strengthen cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union, countries of the region, international organizations and all partners interested in jointly promoting the digital agenda", Mr. Sadullo said.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, emphasized the need to translate the outcomes of WTDC-25 and the Baku Action Plan into practical regional implementation. The five ITU Regional Initiatives for CIS for 2026–2029 were identified as the main framework for further work on next-generation infrastructure and spectrum management, digital education and skills, cybersecurity, enabling regulatory environments and artificial intelligence. Emphasis was placed on using the Partner2Connect initiative to match national and regional needs with partners' resources and investment opportunities. In closing his remarks Dr. Zavazava stressed: "The digital divide remains a reality. More than 2 billion people worldwide are still offline. In this region and across other regions, while progress is significant, divides between urban and rural areas, and between different social groups, persist. We must leave no one behind. Together, we can build a digital future that delivers sustainable prosperity and well-being for all including across the CIS."

5. Appointment of the Chair of the ITU Regional Development Forum for CIS

H.E. Mr. Isfandiyori Sadullo, Head of the Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, was appointed Chair of RDF-CIS 2026.

6. SESSION ONE: State of digital development and trends: Challenges and opportunities

The session focused on the state of digital development in the CIS region, key trends, persistent challenges and opportunities to advance universal, meaningful, and affordable connectivity.

Setting the stage:

Ms. Natalia Mochu, ITU Regional Director for CIS

Moderator:

Mr. Alexey Borodin, Director General, RCC

Panelists:

- H.E. Mr. Isfandiyori Sadullo, Chairman, Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan
- H.E. Mr. Jamol Makhsudov, Deputy Minister of Digital Technologies of the Republic of Uzbekistan

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- Mr. Damir Seisembekov, Chairman of the Telecommunications Committee, Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan
 - Mr. Altynbek Toktorbaev, Chairman of the Communications Regulation and Supervision Service of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The ITU Regional Director for CIS presented an evidence-based overview of digital development in the CIS region. According to the presentation, Internet use reached 93% in 2025. G5 Benchmark data showed progress in digital governance: the share of countries at the initial level declined from 44% in 2021 to 11% in 2025, while 22% reached the advanced level. Gaps nevertheless remain in deployment of next-generation infrastructure, digital skills and access in rural and remote areas. Priorities included stronger cybersecurity, human capacity development and timely, comparable national data. The ITU Regional Office for the CIS then presented an overview on the work of the ITU Regional Office for the CIS Region, including ongoing projects, national and regional activities and supported global initiatives.

National interventions presented different approaches to expanding connectivity and advancing digital transformation. Mr. Sadullo highlighted implementation of Tajikistan's Communications Sector Development Strategy to 2040, development of 5G and satellite connectivity, human capacity and the Digital Village initiative. Mr. Makhsudov reported that more than 99.5% of settlements are covered by mobile Internet, 98% have access to fibre-optic lines and more than 200 public services have been digitalized; further priorities include computing infrastructure, data centres, network resilience, AI and human capital. Mr. Seisembekov presented Kazakhstan's diversified use of terrestrial and satellite technologies, including the connection of around 2,000 schools through a Starlink pilot, development of an NGSO regulatory framework and use of Cell Broadcast. Mr. Toktorbaev highlighted the construction of around 3,500 km of fibre-optic lines, connectivity for around 99% of settlements and the use of satellite solutions to address remaining coverage gaps in mountainous areas. Mr. Sadullo requested ITU technical support for implementing Tajikistan's Communications Sector Development Strategy to 2040, developing the Digital Village initiative and preparing its feasibility study.

In the conclusion, participants considered areas for cross-border cooperation. Mr. Sadullo proposed further work on a mechanism to improve the affordability and quality of international roaming across Central Asia and the CIS region. Mr. Makhsudov and Mr. Seisembekov presented approaches to public early-warning systems, including the potential for future cross-border integration. Different views were expressed on roaming, including the need to take account of the growth of eSIM, OTT services and new market models.

Emphasis was given to the following:

- Despite the region's high overall level of digital connectivity, infrastructure and territorial gaps remain, particularly in rural, mountainous and remote areas.
- Further expansion of universal and meaningful connectivity requires a combination of fibre and mobile infrastructure, satellite systems and new technological solutions.
- Countries in the region are moving from expanding basic connectivity towards comprehensive digital transformation, including digital public services, computing infrastructure, AI, human capital development, cybersecurity and network resilience.
- Enabling regulatory environments, timely and comparable national data and capacity development are important for the deployment of new technologies, investment and the measurement of progress.
- Regional cooperation can be strengthened in cross-border connectivity, international roaming, interoperable emergency warning systems and the exchange of technological and regulatory practices.

7. Partnership announcement

The partnership between the Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau to contribute to bridging the digital skills divide was announced.

Under the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition, and in support of South-South cooperation, the Government of Kazakhstan pledged to provide 100 training places in digital technologies,

programming and artificial intelligence for participants from African countries, with particular attention to least developed countries and landlocked developing countries. With an estimated value of CHF 100,000, the initiative will be implemented in phases through Kazakhstan's digital education ecosystem, including Astana Hub and the alem.ai International Centre for Artificial Intelligence. Self-paced online courses will be available immediately, with flexible start dates, while in-person intensive training programmes in Kazakhstan will be offered from 2027, subject to the terms and admission requirements of the respective programmes. The initiative will be implemented in partnership with BDT, which will coordinate outreach and participant selection.

8. Special event on landlocked developing countries (LLDCs)

The special event built on the WSIS Forum 2026 High-level Dialogue “Connectivity as Catalyst: Delivering the Awaza Programme through Digital Transformation”. It focused on practical approaches to strengthening resilient, affordable and diversified digital connectivity for landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), with particular attention to cross-border connectivity, investment, satellite solutions, enabling regulation and regional cooperation.

Opening remarks, host-country perspective and moderation:

Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, opening remarks;

Mr. Parviz Noriyon, First Deputy Head of the Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, host-country perspective;

Ms. Natalia Mochu, ITU Regional Director for CIS, moderator.

Panellists:

- Mr. Altynbek Toktorbaev, Chairman of the Communications Regulation and Supervision Service of the Kyrgyz Republic
- Ms. Kristine Gyonjyan, Director, Union of Operators, Armenia
- Ms. Isabelle Mauro, Director General, GSOA
- Mr. Dmitry Konarev, Senior Solutions Architect, Huawei.

Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava highlighted three interlinked priorities for landlocked developing countries: expanding digital access, developing digital skills and building trust through data protection, cybersecurity and inclusive digital governance. He emphasized regional coordination and the preparation of projects for financing.

Mr. Parviz Noriyon highlighted six areas for cooperation: resilient and diversified connectivity; lower-cost digital transit; green digital corridors and data centres; financing and preparation of bankable projects; artificial intelligence; and shared digital public infrastructure, including electronic trade documents and cargo-tracking solutions. Mr. Noriyon stressed that route diversification and redundancy are development priorities for LLDCs rather than purely technical choices.

Mr. Noriyon presented the draft “Dushanbe Call to Action on Resilient Digital Connectivity for Landlocked Developing Countries, 2026–2034” for consultation and voluntary partner commitments. The initiative is open to governments, development banks, companies, universities, educational institutions and youth. The draft sets out six pillars of action, an open commitments registry and concise annual reporting, without creating new institutions or legal obligations. Mr. Noriyon proposed nominating national coordinators by the end of November 2026, submitting initial partner commitments by the end of December 2026 and holding a first coordination meeting in Dushanbe in the first quarter of 2027.

Mr. Altynbek Toktorbaev highlighted the cost and maintenance challenges of extending terrestrial infrastructure across mountainous and remote areas. Fibre-optic lines have been deployed to almost all settlements, while satellite connectivity is being piloted as an alternative for hard-to-reach locations. The Digital Code was highlighted as a regulatory foundation for further digital transformation, while the remaining connectivity gap is concentrated in a small number of remote settlements.

Ms. Kristine Gyonjyan noted that full mobile population coverage does not automatically mean that high-capacity fixed connectivity is available or financially sustainable in rural areas. Difficult terrain,

the cost of middle-mile infrastructure and small customer bases were identified as key constraints. The discussion emphasized combining infrastructure deployment with digital skills, entrepreneurship, online safety and locally sustainable business models, including the role of smaller operators in remote communities.

Ms. Isabelle Mauro stressed the particular importance of satellite connectivity for countries dependent on international transit routes and without direct access to submarine cable systems. Regulatory approaches discussed included more enabling licensing regimes, simplified authorization of user terminals, appropriate spectrum pricing, reduced barriers to importing equipment and the possible use of universal service funds to support satellite deployment in underserved areas.

Mr. Dmitry Konarev highlighted digital transit through Internet exchange points and edge data centres, autonomous and energy-efficient network solutions for remote areas, and the use of artificial intelligence to optimize energy consumption, spectrum utilization and network operations.

Emphasis was given to the following:

- Resilient LLDC connectivity requires diversified cross-border routes and a complementary mix of fibre, mobile and satellite infrastructure.
- Enabling regulation, project preparation and sustainable financing models are as important as technology in closing remaining connectivity gaps.
- The draft Dushanbe Call to Action proposes a voluntary framework for translating LLDC priorities into specific partner commitments and follow-up actions.

9. SESSION TWO: Partner2Connect (P2C) matchmaking roundtable: Matching the country and regional needs with stakeholders' interests to support digital development across the CIS region

The session focused on completed and ongoing Partner2Connect (P2C) pledges, as well as country and regional needs that could inform new partnerships. The discussion sought to move from identified needs and commitments towards implementable projects, measurable milestones and sustainable partnerships.

Setting the stage:

Mr. Paul Kasera Demba, Special Initiatives Program Manager, ITU

Moderator:

Mr. Tair Ismailov, Regional Director, Eurasia, GSMA

Speakers:

- Mr. Ozodkhon Davlatshoev, CEO, TCell, Tajikistan
- Ms. Kristine Gyonjyan, Director, Union of Operators, Armenia
- Ms. Elina Sakkarava, Digital Competencies Expert in Digital Transformation and the Public Sector, Kyrgyzstan
- Mr. Seymur Bayramov, Head of International Cooperation Department, Innovation and Digital Development Agency, Azerbaijan (virtual)
- Mr. Andrei Kirillovich, Director of the Department of Strategy, Marketing and Business Development, Intersputnik.

ITU presented information about the four focus areas of the P2C Digital Coalition: access, adoption, value creation and acceleration. The P2C portfolio targeting implementation in the CIS region comprised 68 pledges with an estimated value of USD 2.29 billion from 43 entities. Implementation information had been reported for 19 pledges (28%) and 16 entities (37%). Discussions focused on defining needs and project readiness, matching them with partner offers, assigning responsibility and resources, and establishing measurable implementation milestones.

Mr. Seymur Bayramov presented digital transformation as an ecosystem combining digital government, digital identity, trusted data exchange, cybersecurity, digital skills, innovation and artificial intelligence. The MyGov application, with more than five million users, was cited as an example of more integrated and proactive public services. International cooperation was

highlighted as a means of supporting knowledge-sharing and creating opportunities for technology companies and startups.

Ms. Kristine Gyonjyan presented practical results from partnerships supporting rural connectivity and digital inclusion. Since 2022, seven underserved rural communities have been connected, more than 40 km of broadband infrastructure has been deployed to reach around 1,000 households, schools and community institutions, and more than 500 people have participated in digital skills, entrepreneurship and online-safety activities. The experience was presented as evidence that meaningful connectivity requires both infrastructure and the capacity to use it.

Ms. Elina Sakkarava presented work on a national digital competency framework for public and municipal servants. The framework links categories of public-service positions with the competencies required for daily work in a digitally transforming public sector. The practical sequence presented covered five steps: position category, required competencies, assessment of existing skills, identification of gaps, and development needs. Current work is mapping these needs to available learning opportunities, including the ITU Academy and other international skills platforms.

Mr. Ozodkhon Davlatshoev highlighted experience in mobilizing financing for connectivity and digital access, while linking commercial viability with social-development indicators. The intervention also highlighted the use of Big Data for smart solutions and social and urban development, partnerships in cybersecurity, and the potential for green, lower-cost data-centre infrastructure supported by Tajikistan's energy resources.

Mr. Andrei Kirillovich highlighted capacity development as a practical form of regional partnership. Cooperation with ITU has supported specialized training on satellite regulation and emerging satellite technologies, including seminars in Almaty, Baku and Bishkek. The Youth Far Beyond Borders initiative has provided international experience to more than 100 young specialists from 16 countries, and a future technical satellite seminar in Dushanbe was discussed as a possible follow-up.

Emphasis was given to the following:

- P2C is most effective when countries define concrete needs and partners respond with implementable service-delivery solutions, resources, owners and milestones.
- Reporting and updating existing pledges is essential for measuring impact and converting commitments into delivery.
- Partnerships should combine infrastructure investment with skills, innovation, trusted digital services and sustainable business models.

Potential follow-up discussed during the session included Ms. Gyonjyan's proposal to establish a formal cooperation agreement with ITU, defining themes and dates for a future satellite training seminar in Dushanbe, and continued reporting and updating of P2C project milestones by Member States and pledgers.

10. SESSION THREE: Next-generation ICT infrastructure and emerging technologies (RI CIS1)

The session focused on strategies for the coordinated implementation of Regional Initiative CIS1 and opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-sharing on next-generation ICT infrastructure and emerging technologies.

Moderator:

Mr. Farid Nakhli, Programme Coordinator, Regional Office for CIS, ITU

Speakers:

- Mr. Orzu Naimi, Head of the International Relations and Investment Attraction Department, Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan
- Mr. Tair Ismailov, Regional Director, Eurasia, GSMA
- Ms. Barchyn Tuzabaeva, Chief Specialist, Radio Frequency Spectrum Department, Communications Regulation and Supervision Service, Kyrgyz Republic
- Ms. Isabelle Mauro, Director General, GSOA

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- Dr. Maksim Pylinskii, Dean, Doctor of Science, Professor, Belarusian State Academy of Communication, Belarus
 - Mr. Azat Zhamanbalanov, Director of Strategic Projects, JSC Kazakhtelecom, Kazakhstan
 - Ms. Luda Bujoreanu, Senior Digital Specialist, World Bank Group.

The discussion examined implementation of Regional Initiative CIS1 through four interrelated dimensions: enabling conditions for mobile infrastructure and early-warning systems; satellite connectivity for remote and hard-to-reach areas; research and skills for next-generation networks; and large-scale backbone infrastructure and financing. Participants stressed that terrestrial, mobile and satellite technologies should be treated as complementary components of resilient connectivity.

Mr. Tair Ismailov highlighted that predictable and investment-friendly regulation is a core condition for network expansion. Mr. Ismailov presented regional analytical and capacity-development tools, including the Mobile Economy Eurasia report, the GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index covering 173 countries across 32 indicators, and training on 5G, artificial intelligence and other network topics. In Tajikistan, GSMA and ITU are carrying out analysis of early-warning arrangements, including the potential use of Cell Broadcast, and invited relevant stakeholders to contribute to this work.

Ms. Barchyn Tuzabaeva presented the use of satellite connectivity to address remaining coverage gaps in mountainous and remote areas. The Digital Code was highlighted as providing a modern legal basis for digital development and the introduction of innovative technologies. A pilot project has already provided high-speed satellite Internet to a high-mountain school in Issyk-Kul Region that previously had no Internet access because of difficult terrain and the absence of terrestrial telecommunications infrastructure. Capacity building for specialists in satellite technologies was also emphasized.

Ms. Isabelle Mauro presented satellite systems as critical infrastructure for extending meaningful connectivity beyond the footprint of terrestrial networks and for enabling services such as satellite IoT in agriculture, logistics, energy, water management, emergency communications and early warning. The discussion stressed the need for fit-for-purpose regulation, including open-sky approaches, blanket licensing for user terminals, cost-recovery-based spectrum fees rather than auction models, proportionate taxes and import duties, and more effective use of universal service funds for underserved areas.

Dr. Maksim Pylinskii presented research on improving the efficiency of IMT-2020/5G systems, including spectrum use, interference management and spectral efficiency, as well as its long-standing cooperation with ITU on education and capacity development. Examples included ICT training resources for persons with hearing impairments, regional seminars and activities on digital development. Proposed follow-up areas included research and methodological guidance on the use of AI and digital skills for persons with disabilities, AI training for public officials, and further professional-development activities.

The Belarusian State Academy of Communication's written contribution also identifies a planned workshop on the use of AI in public officials' professional activities in Minsk on 21–22 October 2026.

Mr. Azat Zhamanbalanov presented the Trans-Caspian fibre-optic cable project between Aktau and Sumgait, implemented jointly with AzerTelecom International. According to Mr. Zhamanbalanov, the approximately 380-km link comprises 32 fibre pairs and has a design capacity of at least 400 Tbit/s. The project is intended to provide an additional, geographically diversified data route between Asia and Europe. Mr. Zhamanbalanov reported that marine cable laying had been completed in August 2026, with commercial launch remaining the next implementation stage.

Ms. Luda Bujoreanu presented the World Bank's digital-development approach around four areas: access, affordability of devices, development of national digital ecosystems, and AI readiness and adoption. Ms. Bujoreanu highlighted a global ambition to provide enhanced Internet connectivity to 600 million people, digitally enabled services to 400 million people, and connectivity benefits to 300 million women and girls. In Central Asia, examples included a USD 92 million project in Kazakhstan supporting connectivity in underserved regions through competitive grants to Internet service providers; digital-inclusion and job-creation activities in Uzbekistan; the Digital Foundations

project in Tajikistan, including school connectivity, training for up to 28,000 people, a national data centre and shared government infrastructure; and a new USD 80 million digital operation under preparation in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Potential follow-up cooperation between the World Bank, ITU and regional stakeholders included workshops on satellite regulation, AI and skills development, a cybersecurity implementation accelerator, and stronger coordination to shape investable digital infrastructure projects.

Emphasis was given to the following:

- Next-generation connectivity requires an integrated mix of backbone infrastructure, mobile networks, satellite systems, early-warning technologies and digital platforms.
- Fit-for-purpose regulation, effective spectrum policy and predictable investment conditions are essential for scaling emerging technologies and attracting infrastructure investment.
- Infrastructure deployment should be accompanied by skills development, inclusion measures and institutional capacity so that connectivity translates into meaningful use and public value.
- Regional cooperation with industry, academia and development partners can accelerate implementation of RI CIS1 through capacity building, investment coordination and the preparation of bankable projects.

Separately, written contributions submitted to the Forum addressed a regional coordination mechanism to improve the affordability and transparency of international roaming, as well as digital verification tools to strengthen trust and accountability in field reporting, including in low-connectivity settings.

11. SESSION FOUR: Innovation, capacity building and human-centric digital development (RI CIS2 and CIS3)

The session focused on coordinated implementation of Regional Initiatives CIS2 and CIS3, including innovation, capacity building, human-centric digital development and opportunities for regional cooperation.

Setting the stage:

Mr. Mohamed Ba, Head of Digital Innovation Service, ITU (online)

Moderator:

Ms. Irina Divakova, Project Officer, Regional Office for CIS, ITU

Speakers:

- Mr. Bakhtiyar Mammadov, Deputy Head of the Administration of the Ministry of Digital Development and Transportation of the Republic of Azerbaijan (online)
- Ms. Nazila Madatli, Project Manager, Innovation and Digital Development Agency, Azerbaijan
- Mr. Udo Folkers, Project Manager, Professional Green Skills for Central Asia (PROGRESS), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Germany
- Mr. Nazarbek Zhunusaliev, Head of Projects Implementation Department, Kyrgyz State Technical University named after I. Razzakov, Kyrgyzstan

ITU introduced the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development, launched in 2023 to strengthen innovation ecosystems and place entrepreneurs at the centre of digital transformation. The Alliance combines strategic foresight, ecosystem development, co-design of projects, support to entrepreneurs and SMEs, and policy experimentation. Its delivery model includes the Digital Innovation Board, the Digital Transformation Lab and a network of locally anchored, nationally owned centres. More than 100 experts support the Alliance, with 36 high-level Board members and 14 acceleration centres at different stages of operationalization. In the CIS region, a Regional Acceleration Centre has been established in Azerbaijan, while additional centres are being developed in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Mr. Bakhtiyar Mammadov presented digital transformation as a national development priority and highlighted practical measures in digital government, artificial intelligence and innovation. The MyGov platform provides access to almost 430 digital services and documents, while the SIMA biometric signature serves more than five million users and is used across more than 365 public

and private information systems. Mr. Mammadov also reported implementation of Azerbaijan's 2025–2028 National AI Strategy, development of an AI Academy, work on an Azerbaijani-language large language model, and localization of international AI standards. The Regional Acceleration Centre established in Baku was highlighted as a mechanism for connecting startups and innovators with international expertise, mentoring, partnerships and financing.

Ms. Nazila Madatli presented the vision of the Regional Acceleration Centre as a trusted innovation hub connecting startups, academia, industry and international partners across Azerbaijan and the wider CIS region. Eight priority areas were outlined, including AI and cybersecurity, regional entrepreneurship, practical AI and LLM use cases, international scale-up of startups and SMEs, policy dialogue, a regional digital innovation platform, open-source AI and local-language LLM solutions, and a cross-border regulatory sandbox. Ms. Madatli noted that the Centre intends to measure success not only by activities delivered, but by startups and SMEs supported, partnerships created, international opportunities generated and solutions developed and scaled.

Mr. Udo Folkers highlighted the importance of combining digital and green skills as part of the green and digital transition. The Green and Digital hackathon, implemented with ITU and the Kyrgyz State Technical University named after I. Razzakov, involved teams from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan working on energy, water management, waste management and climate-data solutions. Up to 130 teams participated across the national and regional stages, and at least 12 teams were identified as ready to engage with investors and move towards the market. One example was an AI-based solution using weather and soil data to improve irrigation recommendations and water efficiency. Proposed follow-up included incubation and acceleration of promising teams, further work on AI and e-waste, and stronger support for women entrepreneurs.

Mr. Nazarbek Zhunusaliev emphasized that human capital is central to digital transformation and presented practical work in green digital solutions, inclusion, AI and cybersecurity. As an example, the ICT4All Makeathon applied a co-design methodology in which persons with disabilities participated as co-developers and experts; it brought together more than 100 participants, including 15 experts with disabilities, and resulted in five functional hardware prototypes. The Digital Kyrgyzstan cyber-exercise trained more than 300 public- and private-sector specialists through practical simulations involving threats to critical infrastructure.

Mr. Zhunusaliev also presented the establishment of an Applied AI and Cybersecurity Research and Innovation Centre. Mr. Zhunusaliev noted that the Centre is expected to focus on training, applied research for the real economy and public administration, and AI algorithms adapted to the linguistic and cultural context of Central Asia. As possible regional cooperation formats, Mr. Zhunusaliev proposed joint R&D laboratories, cross-border hackathons and cyber-exercises, and support for scaling green and inclusive technology startups.

Emphasis was given to the following:

- Innovation ecosystems require coordinated participation by government, academia, industry, investors, startups and international partners, with locally anchored institutions able to translate regional priorities into practical programmes.
- Human capital, entrepreneurship and applied skills are essential for converting digital infrastructure and emerging technologies into economic and social value.
- Regional acceleration mechanisms can support startups and SMEs through access to expertise, markets, financing, policy dialogue and experimentation environments, including regulatory sandboxes.
- Digital and green transitions are increasingly interconnected; hackathons and other challenge-based formats can serve as entry points for incubation, acceleration and investment in practical solutions.
- Inclusion, cybersecurity and locally relevant AI should be integrated into capacity-building programmes, with universities serving as regional platforms for research, skills development and cross-border cooperation.

12. Partnership announcements

The Forum featured the following partnership announcements:

- Partnership with ITU Academia member Kyrgyz State Technical University named after I. Razzakov on development of ITU Academia members regional cooperation platform and advancement of regional research and innovation.

The partnership aims to turn the scientific potential of the region into concrete practical results in three key areas: bringing together scientists and research resources in the region to conduct joint applications in the field of next-generation networks, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, creation of the 5G regional laboratory as an open practical platform for testing pilot projects and direct technology transfer to the real sector of the economy, training of engineers of a new level and active involvement of the academic community of the CIS countries in the development of international standards and ITU recommendations.

- Regional cooperation on strengthening digital transformation of public administration and digital services development.

Regional cooperation in the field of digital transformation of public administration and the development of digital services builds on the ITU regional project on this topic under implementation in 2025-2026 and aims at advancing the exchange of experience and practices in this area between the e-government operators of the countries of the region.

13. SESSION FIVE: Measures to enable digital transformation: policy and regulatory environment and cybersecurity (RI CIS3 and CIS4)

The session focused on measures to enable digital transformation, including the policy and regulatory environment and cybersecurity, in the context of Regional Initiatives CIS3 and CIS4.

Setting the stage and moderation:

Ms. Kristine Gyonjyan, Director, Union of Telecom Operators, Armenia

Speakers:

- Mr. Dauren Rakhimzhanov, Managing Director, Digital Initiatives Directorate, Eurasian Development Bank (online)
- Mr. Adilet Aisautov, Director, SDU Big Data Department, JSC National Information Technologies, Kazakhstan
- Ms. Irina Divakova, Project Officer, Regional Office for CIS, ITU
- Mr. Arseny Plossky, Vice-Chairman of TDAG and Rapporteur on ITU-D Study Group 1 Question 4/1; Ms. Uliana Stoliarova, Vice-Chairman of ITU-D Study Group 2, Vice-Rapporteur on Questions 1/1 and 5/2, CIS Youth Envoy and member of the ITU Secretary-General's Youth Advisory Board, Russia
- Mr. Valeriy Zubanov, Managing Director of the Regional Office in Kazakhstan, Central Asia and Mongolia, Kaspersky
- Dr. Afrooz Kaviani Johnson, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF (online)

The discussion examined how policy and regulatory frameworks, cybersecurity, regional cooperation and practical implementation mechanisms can jointly enable digital transformation under Regional Initiatives CIS3 and CIS4. Speakers highlighted the value of reusable digital government components, stronger cyber resilience, demand-driven technical assistance, international knowledge exchange and safeguards for users, including children.

Mr. Dauren Rakhimzhanov presented the role of the Eurasian Development Bank's Digital Initiatives Fund in supporting projects with regional and integration effects. The Fund combines grants, credit financing and institutional instruments and seeks to scale successful technologies and practices across countries rather than support isolated national solutions. A regional digital-government approach based on standardized, interoperable components that can be adapted and reused across countries was presented as one mechanism for knowledge and technology transfer. Priority areas for further regional cooperation included human capital, artificial intelligence and responsible AI practices, cybersecurity and protection of critical digital infrastructure, and digital platforms and data exchange supporting cross-border processes. The discussion also emphasized the complementary roles of ITU technical and policy expertise and development-bank financing, analytics and project support.

Mr. Valeriy Zubanov presented cyberthreat trends based on incident-response and threat-monitoring data. Government and industrial organizations were identified among the main targets of targeted attacks. According to the data presented, exploitation of vulnerabilities in Internet-facing applications accounted for 47% of initial access vectors in 2024. Stolen credentials and compromise through suppliers and trusted relationships also remained significant risks. The presentation highlighted increasing use of AI for phishing, synthetic identities and reconnaissance. Recommended measures included vulnerability management, cyber hygiene, protection against targeted attacks and skills development, including cyber-exercises for senior management.

Mr. Adilet Aisautov presented practical experience in data-driven government and the reuse of digital public solutions. The Smart Data Ukimet integrates data from 125 government information systems and provides a centralized environment for analytics and AI applications. The Digital Family Card, drawing on more than 30 government data sources, was presented as an example of proactive social policy and more targeted delivery of support. The presentation also highlighted work on a regional mechanism for cooperation on digital government and the GovStack approach to sharing proven open-source components. Countries were encouraged to document mature national solutions in the regional repository and, where appropriate, advance them to the global repository so that other administrations can reuse both the technology and implementation experience.

NITEC's written contribution envisages preparing technical documentation for Smart Data Ukimet and the Digital Family Card for consideration for inclusion in the global GovStack repository.

ITU presented the Expertise on Demand pilot in Tajikistan as a new model for rapid, country-requested technical support. Tajikistan is one of six pilot countries, with ITU implementing the digital-transformation component in coordination with the UN Resident Coordinator Office and the Agency of Innovation and Digital Technologies under the President of Tajikistan. The work covers analysis of the regulatory and policy framework and capacity development in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, digital public infrastructure and innovation, as well as support for the concept of the Regional AI Centre in Dushanbe. The project began in August 2026 and is expected to conclude by the end of November 2026; national training on AI policy and cybersecurity was conducted in September, with DPI and innovation training planned for October and November. The experience highlighted the value of short, focused interventions that can mobilize international expertise without lengthy project preparation, while requiring close coordination and high responsiveness from national partners.

Mr. Arseny Plossky and Ms. Uliana Stoliarova explained how regional initiatives, projects and international study work can reinforce one another. Study Groups provide a platform for comparing regulatory approaches, assessing constraints and indicators, and drawing on experience from countries with different market and infrastructure conditions. Regional project results can in turn become inputs to Study Group work. Participants from the CIS region were encouraged to submit more contributions describing the original problem, the approach taken, implementation constraints and measurable results. Regulation, statistics, new technologies, economic aspects and security were highlighted among the areas of particular regional interest.

Dr. Afrooz Kaviani Johnson emphasized the need to incorporate children's rights and online safety into cybersecurity policy and digital regulation. Recommendations included safety, security and privacy by design; technical and child-rights impact assessments before launch and after material changes; accessible mechanisms for reporting harm and obtaining support; and effective regulatory oversight. The presentation also highlighted coordination between digital platforms, law enforcement and child protection services. In Tajikistan, UNICEF is commissioning a national assessment of child online safety institutions and AI safeguards to identify gaps and inform recommendations for further national action.

Emphasis was given to the following:

- Regional digital transformation can be accelerated by combining interoperable and reusable digital public components with financing, technical assistance and mechanisms for cross-border knowledge transfer.

- Cybersecurity should be treated as an enabling condition for digital transformation, with systematic vulnerability management, protection against supply-chain and AI-enabled threats, and continuous skills development.
- Rapid, demand-driven technical assistance and stronger participation in ITU-D Study Groups can help countries translate national challenges and project experience into practical regional and international solutions.
- Digital policy and regulation should embed safety, privacy and rights by design, including child-rights impact assessment, accessible reporting and remedy, and clear institutional responsibility.

14. SESSION SIX: Artificial intelligence for digital development and innovation (RI CIS5)

Session Six examined how artificial intelligence could support digital development and innovation under Regional Initiative CIS5, combining long-term industry scenarios with practical examples of AI research, local-language models, telecommunications applications and open-source tools for AI-enabled public services.

Setting the stage and moderation:

Mr. Farid Nakhli, Programme Coordinator, Regional Office for CIS, ITU

Speakers:

- Mr. Dmitry Konarev, Senior Solutions Architect, Huawei
- Ms. Anna Abramova, Head of the Artificial Intelligence Center, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), Russia
- Mr. Yerbol Absalyamov, Executive Director, Institute of Smart Systems and Artificial Intelligence, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan
- Mr. Valijon Rakhimov, Director, Telecom-Zehn, Tajikistan
- Mr. David Manset, Senior Advisor on Digital Government Infrastructure and Open Source, ITU.

Mr. Dmitry Konarev presented a 2035-oriented industry outlook in which AI becomes an increasingly fundamental part of digital infrastructure. The presentation organized the expected transformation around three characteristics: personalization, predictive capabilities and autonomy, supported by a recurring cycle of perception through sensors and data, model-based understanding, action through agents and continuous optimization. Examples were discussed across healthcare, education, mobility, manufacturing, energy and urban management. These figures and scenarios were presented as Huawei forecasts rather than as established outcomes.

Ms. Anna Abramova presented a pilot index designed to compare factors that enable AI development. The methodology uses 80 indicators grouped into four areas and draws on open-source data, an ensemble of five major AI models and expert assessments. A key limitation identified was the lack of complete, comparable and regularly updated statistics, particularly on the labour market. Planned next steps include applying the methodology to the CIS and BRICS+ regions to identify strengths, gaps and possible areas for cooperation.

Mr. Yerbol Absalyamov presented the work of the Institute of Smart Systems and Artificial Intelligence at Nazarbayev University on language models, computing infrastructure and open research. Mr. Absalyamov reported that datasets, pretrained models, algorithms and code from its projects are made publicly available. Demonstrated technologies included the Oylan multimodal model, MangiSoz translation system, Qolda compact multimodal model and ISSAI Voice Studio. Mr. Absalyamov emphasized computing infrastructure, protection of sensitive data and AI development reflecting national languages, cultures and contexts. Partners from Tajikistan and other CIS countries were invited to collaborate on local language models.

Mr. Valijon Rakhimov provided examples of AI already being applied in telecommunications. The NAVS platform consolidates network, energy and traffic data for real-time monitoring and analytics, while UChat provides first-line customer support in Tajik, Russian and English and handles up to 30% of first-line requests without an operator. The presentation emphasized domestic data processing, Tajik-language AI, skills for developers and public officials, integration of fragmented data into common platforms and the use of concrete pilot projects that can be scaled.

ITU presented GENIE.ai, an open-source framework coordinated by the Telecommunication Development Bureau to help governments develop AI-enabled public services that they can govern, adapt and sustain. The approach combines reusable technical components, access to trusted information, governance and auditability tools, advisory support, capacity building and local implementation. Indicative planning estimates presented for GENIE.ai were USD 35,000–60,000 for a pilot and around USD 100,000 for a typical country minimum viable product. ITU noted that actual costs depend on scope, infrastructure and integration requirements. The framework is designed to support local languages, country-controlled data environments, human oversight and adaptation to national requirements.

The discussion referred to a potential pathway for regional cooperation through shared training, language evaluation, reusable approaches to trusted government information and locally owned public-service use cases. ITU noted that the Regional Acceleration Centre in Azerbaijan could be explored as a platform for discussing a regional GENIE.ai project, as an idea for further discussion.

Special emphasis was given to the following:

- AI deployment should be linked to concrete public-service and industry use cases, with clear ownership, measurable outcomes and a path to sustainable operation.
- Local-language capabilities, domestic or country-controlled data processing, computing infrastructure and human expertise are important for trustworthy and context-relevant AI.
- Open-source and reusable components can support regional knowledge-sharing while allowing countries to adapt solutions to their own institutions, languages, privacy requirements and governance frameworks.
- Regional cooperation can support shared training, research, local-language model development and practical pilot projects under Regional Initiative CIS5.

15. Presentation of the RDF summary by the Chair

The Forum summary was presented on behalf of the Chair, outlining the main discussions and outcomes, including implementation of the five CIS Regional Initiatives, partnerships, P2C and LLDC priorities.

The Forum discussions highlighted the following key conclusions and areas for further work on implementing the Baku Action Plan and Regional Initiatives CIS1–CIS5:

- Participants noted that universal, meaningful and affordable connectivity remains the foundation for inclusive and sustainable digital development in the CIS region.
- The Forum underscored the need to advance digital transformation through a coordinated approach combining next-generation infrastructure, innovation and skills, enabling policy and regulation, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.
- **CIS1.** Next-generation networks require a combination of fibre, mobile and satellite connectivity, effective spectrum management and conditions that attract investment. Priorities for regional cooperation include connecting remote areas, diversifying cross-border routes, early warning and preparing infrastructure projects for financing.
- **CIS2.** Infrastructure investment should be accompanied by digital skills development and accessible educational resources. Proposals included joint professional training, training in satellite communications, 5G and AI, and cooperation among academic institutions. Particular attention was given to the participation of persons with disabilities and other groups facing barriers to digital access.
- **CIS3.** Cyber resilience requires protection of critical infrastructure, stronger incident response, professional training and exchange of experience, including joint cyber-exercises. Children's rights, online safety, privacy and accessible support mechanisms should be reflected in digital policy and service design.
- **CIS4.** Regulation should support emerging technologies, competition and investment while ensuring user safety. Areas for further work included NGSO and AI regulation, affordable international roaming, comparable national data and exchange of regulatory practices. Reusable digital-government components and demand-driven technical assistance can support implementation of national priorities.

- **CIS5.** Practical AI deployment should address specific public-service and industry needs, supported by models for regional languages, professional skills and reliable data and computing infrastructure. Potential regional cooperation includes shared training, research, open-source components and pilot projects. The idea of a regional GENIE.ai project requires further discussion.
- Through Partner2Connect, participants emphasized a practical implementation model based on clearly defined country needs, partner matching, ownership, resourced milestones and regular reporting on delivery.
- **The special event on LLDCs** highlighted route diversification, affordable digital transit, green digital infrastructure, financing, artificial intelligence and shared digital public infrastructure. The draft Dushanbe Call to Action was presented as a voluntary framework for translating these priorities into partner commitments and follow-up.

The Forum was informed that the Secretariat would prepare a draft outcome report and publish it on the Forum webpage on 2 October 2026. Participants were invited to submit comments by the end of the day on 15 October 2026 to itu-ro-cis@itu.int. The final report would be published on the RDF-CIS webpage following consideration of the comments received and agreement with the Forum Chair.

16. Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony of RDF-CIS began with an address by Mr. Parviz Noriyon, First Deputy Head of the Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, on behalf of the Forum Chair, H.E. Mr. Isfandiyori Sadullo. He thanked partners and participants for their substantive exchange of experience and constructive proposals. Mr. Noriyon noted that the Forum had helped deepen understanding of the challenges shared by countries in the region and identify areas for cooperation in digital development. He expressed appreciation for ITU's expertise and emphasized the need to translate the proposals discussed into concrete initiatives and results that expand access to modern technologies and improve connectivity for every citizen.

During the ceremony, Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava presented a certificate of appreciation to the RDF Chair in recognition of his leadership of RDF-CIS 2026.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, thanked the host administration, regional partners and participants for their work at the Forum and noted the contribution of written inputs and discussions in shaping an indicative implementation plan for the ITU Regional Initiatives for CIS. He also emphasized the role of partnerships among Member States, the private sector and academia in implementing WTDC-25 outcomes, considering the needs of landlocked developing countries.

Annex 1.**List of Contributions Submitted**

The Forum received the 10 written contributions listed below, including the draft Dushanbe Call to Action. The Russian and English versions of the draft are counted as one contribution.

- Communications Regulation and Supervision Service, Kyrgyz Republic. "Development of satellite technologies to provide digital connectivity for hard-to-reach territories in the Kyrgyz Republic" (contribution in Russian).
- Institute of Smart Systems and Artificial Intelligence (ISSAI), Kazakhstan. "Building AI for Our Languages: From Kazakhstan's Experience to Regional Collaboration".
- Razzakov Kyrgyz State Technical University. "Strengthening Capacity Building and Workforce Development in Advanced Telecommunications and Emerging Technologies (5G, IoT, AI) across the CIS Region".
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Regional Office for Afghanistan, Central Asia, Iran and Pakistan (UNODC ROCA). "Strengthening Cyber Resilience, Digital Safety and Criminal Justice Responses to Cybercrime in Central Asia".
- Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. "The Last Mile to the Last School: connecting Kazakhstan's rural schools through LEO satellite access, regulatory change and operator partnership".
- National Information Technologies JSC (NITEC), Kazakhstan. "Contribution of Kazakhstan Digital Solutions to the GovStack Ecosystem".
- Belarusian State Academy of Communication. "Education and skills in information and communication technology for safe conduct in a digital environment and professional tasks" (contribution in Russian).
- Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. "Regional Coordination Mechanism for Affordable and Accessible International Roaming in the CIS Region".
- TrustLink, Russia. "TrustLink: Digital Communication Infrastructure for Verified Field Reporting".
- Communication Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. Draft "Dushanbe Call to Action on Resilient Digital Connectivity for Landlocked Developing Countries, 2026–2034" (Russian and English versions).