

Committing to sustainable digital development worldwide

The internet and digital technologies can help the world realise the sustainable development goals. We have been hearing this ever since the adoption of the Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. [Back then](#), 3.2 billion people were using the internet globally, 2 billion of them in developing countries. [Fast forward to 2021](#), the number of internet users reached 4.9 billion, leaving 2.9 billion people – one third of the world’s population – offline. Digital divides and inequalities persist – and sometimes widen – within and between countries, across income, urban–rural, gender, generation, and education lines. Even where access is available, this does not always translate into meaningful use, due to challenges such as infrequent coverage, reduced speeds, and lack of adequate skills.

If digitalisation is indeed to drive sustainable development worldwide, then digital inequalities must be overcome. And while the world agrees on

this goal, achieving it has proven to be a challenging task. It is against this backdrop that the [World Telecommunication Development Conference \(WTDC-22\)](#) was convened in June 2022, to ‘develop innovative approaches and new models of collaboration’ to connect the unconnected. Part of the conference was the first [Partner2Connect Digital Development Roundtable](#), which saw governments, the private sector, international organisations and other entities commit to closing digital divides through over 360 pledges taking the form of financial plans, tangible policies, and advocacy plans.

This issue of the SDC Digital Watch Newsletter looks back at the WTDC, gives an overview of its main outcomes, and explores commitments made by countries in terms of supporting sustainable digital development abroad.



ITU (2021)

The SDC Digital Watch Newsletter is prepared 4 times a year by DiploFoundation. It harnesses insights from comprehensive research, training and analysis on digitalisation and society conducted by Diplo and the Geneva Internet Platform (GIP).

Consult additional resources on [training opportunities](#), research on [digitalisation](#) and [AI](#), [International Geneva](#), and many other topics. If you need more information on Diplo and the GIP or if you have suggestions for topics coverage by the SDC Digital Watch Newsletter let us know at diplo@diplomacy.edu.

WTDC-22: Key outcomes



Every four years, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) holds a World Telecommunication Development Conference to outline the priorities and action plans for its Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D). Held in Kigali, Rwanda, between 6 and 16 June, WTDC-22 had ‘Connecting the unconnected to achieve sustainable development’ as its overarching theme, highlighting the need for strengthened cooperation towards bridging digital divides and empowering individuals and communities worldwide to unleash the development potential of digital technologies.

Kigali Declaration and Kigali Action Plan

The main outcomes of WTDC-22 are [the Kigali Declaration](#) and [the Kigali Action Plan](#), both dedicated to enabling ITU-D ‘to foster meaningful universal connectivity and sustainable digital transformation around the world in the period 2022–2025’.

While the Declaration outlines main conclusions and priorities established by the conference, the Action Plan is a package of new and revised resolutions, regional initiatives, and new and revised Questions to be discussed in [ITU-D study groups](#). Below is a non-exhaustive overview of several key themes tackled in the two documents. Where possible, we emphasise elements related to support for developing countries and calls for strengthened international cooperation.

1. Access and connectivity. Through the Declaration, member states commit to accelerating the expansion and use of efficient and up-to-date *digital infrastructures*, and to mobilising financial resources to enable universal, secure, and affordable broadband connectivity for all. Policy and regulatory initiatives, as well as alliances between public and private sectors, international funding agencies, and other stakeholders are envisioned to help achieve these goals. *Affordable connectivity* is also among the ITU-D priorities outlined in the Action Plan. Moreover, a revised Resolution 11 highlights the need for continued and coordinated efforts – by private and public actors, nationally and internationally – to facilitate effective *deployment of telecom/ICT services* in rural, isolated, and poorly served areas of the world. A revised Resolution 37 calls for strengthened cooperation between international organisations, financial institutions, donors agencies, and the private sectors in the shaping and implementation of projects aimed at bridging *digital divides*.

2. Skills and capacity development. Without digital literacy, the digital divides will continue to widen. Aware of this challenge, member states commit to adopting effective plans to develop and enhance *digital capacities and skills*. These relate not only to abilities to use digital technologies meaningfully in day-to-day life, but also to skills for the changing world of work, and capacities to engage in shaping the digital future. The Action Plan lists *inclusive and secure telecom/ICTs for sustainable development* as priority, with focus areas including digital literacy and public awareness on cybersecurity issues, access for all to training programmes in digital skills, and strengthened skills for the digital economy. A revised Resolution 40 encourages the Group on capacity-building initiatives – tasked with assisting ITU-D in implementing capacity development activities – to coordinate efforts with, and leverage the expertise of, organisations and professionals active in this field.

3. Gender. Addressing *gender inequality*, including through innovative tech solutions, and empowering women and girls to take full advantage of digital technologies are seen as essential components of overall diversity and inclusion priorities outlined in both the Declaration and the Action Plan. Equally important is to promote a *greater participation of women and girls in digital transformation initiatives*, as noted in a revised Resolution 37. Another revised Resolution – 55 – calls for support for projects and programmes in developing countries and countries with economies in transition to tackle the *barriers that women and girls encounter in access to and use of ICTs*.

4. Digital services. Implementing *human-centred digital solutions* to empower individuals and businesses, as well as providing platforms and networks for activities such as *e-commerce, teleworking, remote learning, telemedicine, and digital financial services* are among the priorities highlighted in the Declaration. Also envisioned is support for developing countries, LDCs, LLDCs, and

SIDS in advancing the *digitalisation of sectors such as government services, agriculture, education, health, and finance*. The development of applications and *services to empower people* and societies for sustainable development is also part of the ITU-D *digital transformation* priority. A new resolution on fostering digital innovation ecosystems calls for (a) continued technical assistance to developing countries in developing policies for digital entrepreneurship, and (b) coordination among international and regional organisations and actors stakeholders in the deployment of entrepreneurship driven innovation projects that advance digitalisation and digital transformation across the economy.

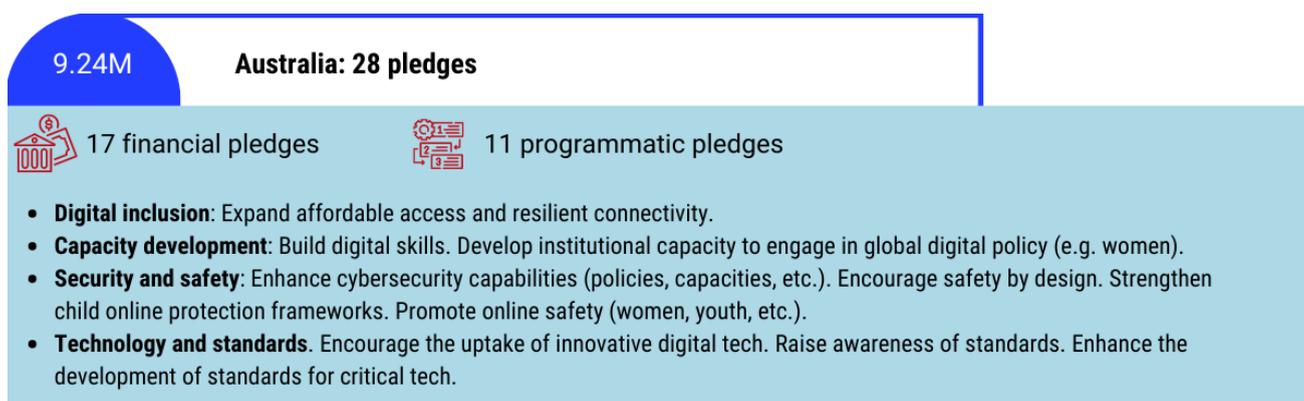
5. Environment and climate change. The Declaration envisions cooperation between ITU, policymakers, regulators, the private sector, and users to (a) implement *telecom/ICT tools to mitigate the impact of climate change*, and (b) *address the impact of telecom/ICTs on the environment*. A revised Resolution 66 highlights the importance of assisting developing countries in strengthening their *human and institutional capacity* in tackling issues related to ICTs and climate change. It calls for cooperation among relevant organisations to optimise the use of resources.

6. Disaster and risk reduction. The role of digital technologies in mitigating the impact of disasters is recognised in the Declaration, which notes the need for countries to *build digital resilience* through innovative plans and recovery strategies. Similarly, strengthening the capacity of member states to use telecom/ICTs for disaster risk reduction and management is envisioned under the overall ITU-D priority of advancing affordable connectivity. A revised Resolution 34 further calls on countries to integrate disaster risk reduction and disaster mitigation, relief, and resilience into telecom/ICT development plans, as well as to foster the training of actors involved in the implementation and maintenance of telecom/ICT systems intended to be used in emergencies.

7. Good governance/enabling environments. *Sound, open, transparent, collaborative, innovative, and future-proof policies, strategies, and regulations* – accompanied by *evidence-based decision-making* – are essential for facilitating digital transformation and promoting increased digital inclusion. This is acknowledged in the Declaration, while the Action Plan notes the importance of fostering an enabling policy and regulatory environment – an ITU-D priority – conducive to sustainable digital development.

Partner2Connect: What do countries commit to?

In September 2021, a multistakeholder [Partner2Connect Digital Coalition](#) was launched to foster meaningful connectivity and digital transformation globally. Led by the ITU in cooperation with the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology, the coalition offers a platform to mobilise and announces new resources, partnerships, and commitments to achieve universal connectivity. Since the launch of the coalition and up to date, 12 governments have made pledges (be they of a financial, programmatic, policy, or advocacy nature) to support sustainable digital development efforts beyond national borders, with a total estimated value of almost USD140 million. The infographic below highlights financial and programmatic pledges by these 12 governments.



<p>0.04M Czech Republic: 2 pledges</p> <p> 2 programmatic pledges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development: Advance consumer empowerment. Develop institutional capacity on spectrum monitoring. 	
<p>n/a Estonia: 2 pledges</p> <p> 1 programmatic pledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security and safety: Support for improving cyber and data security capabilities. 	<p>US\$9.39M Finland: 1 pledge</p> <p> 1 programmatic pledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital transformation: Provide technical assistance to support human-centred digital transformation.
<p>US\$10M Germany: 1 pledge</p> <p> 1 financial pledge</p> <p>Digital public goods. Support digital public good initiatives.</p>	<p>US\$2.2M Japan: 1 pledge</p> <p> 1 programmatic pledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development: Develop institutional capacity in policy and technology.
<p>US\$1.02M Lithuania: 2 pledges</p> <p> 2 programmatic pledges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital transformation/infrastructure: Empower communities and build digital ecosystems. Rebuild the telecom sector. 	<p>n/a UAE: 4 pledges</p> <p> 1 programmatic pledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development: Build digital skills and empower communities.
<p>US\$0.25M Slovenia: 1 pledge</p> <p> 1 financial pledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure: Provide assistance in ICT equipment. 	<p>n/a Switzerland: 1 pledge</p> <p> 1 programmatic pledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital inclusion: Support GIGA's efforts to connect schools worldwide to the internet.
<p>US\$50.29M UK: 7 pledges</p> <p> 4 financial pledges  3 programmatic pledges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital inclusion: Support digital ID programmes. • Capacity development: Develop institutional capacity to engage in global digital policy. • Digital transformation: Support inclusive, responsible, and sustainable digital transformation. Foster the sharing of best practices. • Security and safety: Encourage international cooperation to address malicious cyberactivity. 	
<p>US\$57.4M USA: 8 pledges</p> <p> 5 financial pledges  2 programmatic pledges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital inclusion: Enable improved internet access for women. • Digital economy: Investments in last-mile connectivity providers and fintech enterprises. • Capacity development: Develop institutional capacity to establish ICT policy and regulatory frameworks. • Infrastructure: Expand connectivity in rural areas. • Digital public goods: Support digital public goods. 	