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| **Council Working Group on WSIS and SDG 37th meeting – Virtual meeting, 22-23 September 2021** |  |
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|  | **Document CWG-WSIS&SDG-37/12-E** |
| **23 August 2021** |
| **English only** |
| Contribution by the Secretariat | |
| High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development | |
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| **Summary**  This document provides an overview of the highlights the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2021 and highlights the contributions of ITU.  **Action required**  Members are requested to note the information.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **References**  [UNGA Resolution A/RES/70/125](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/125); [UNGA Resolution A/RES/70/1](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1); [www.wsis.org/forum](http://www.wsis.org/forum); [High-Level Political Forum 2021 (HLPF 2021)](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021) |

# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Overview**

The high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) took place from Tuesday, 6 July to Thursday, 16 July 2021 (including the three ministerial days of the forum held from 13 — 15 July and final ECOSOC adoption), under this year’s theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective Path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

The HLPF took stock of the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs and provided political leadership, guidance and recommendations on how to ensure that the recovery from the pandemic is sustainable, resilient and inclusive and puts the world on track to realize the 2030 Agenda during the Decade of Action and Delivery.

The HLPF also reviewed in-depth some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are most closely related to the pandemic, while maintaining a balance between economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The HLPF reviewed SDG 1 on No poverty, SDG 2 on Zero hunger, SDG 3 on Good health and well-being, SDG 8 on Decent work and economic growth, SDG 10 on Reduced inequalities, SDG 12 on Responsible consumption and production, SDG 13 on Climate action and SDG 16 on Peace, justice and strong institutions, and as done every year, SDG 17 on the Global partnership for development.

In addition, the SDG targets that have 2020 as an end date were discussed, among these are targets 2.5, 3.6, 6.6, 8.6. 8.b, 9.c (universal and affordable access to the Internet in LDCs), 12.4, 13.a, 14.2, 14.4, 14.5, 14.6, 15.1, 15.2, 15.5, 15.8, 15.9, 17.1, 17.8, 18.6 4.

The HLPF was also informed by the findings of the Voluntary National Reviews. Forty-two countries presented their VNRs at the 2021 HLPF: 8 first timers, 24 second timers and 10 third timers ([see table below](#Table)). All country reports made references to the critical role of ICTs and the digital transformation for achieving the SDGs ([see table of ICT references in the 2021 VNRs).](https://www.dropbox.com/s/1h2lzw3urolnxkb/2021%20HLPF%20VNR%20Table%20of%20ICT%20references.docx?dl=0)

This year, the general debate of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment, which also serves as the general debate for the HLPF, was conducted through pre-recorded videos and the submission of written statements. ITU Secretary-General submitted his statement via a pre-recorded message.

A number of special events, side events, VNR Labs and exhibitions also took place, as in previous years. These events were conducted virtually.

The HLPF adopted a [Ministerial Declaration](https://undocs.org/en/E/2021/L.26) with substantial references to the critical role of ICTs and the digital transformation. Among these, were the following:

* §15: We also recognize the need to reduce the negative environmental impacts of food systems by designing and implementing policies for resilient food systems while also supporting livelihoods, and encouraging farmers to adopt the most advanced and **appropriate information technology** to increase their resilience, productivity and incomes and to enhance the sustainable agriculture and food security.
* §17: We will promote a sustainable and inclusive recovery of our economies, create conditions for decent work for all, including for those in the informal economy, support structural economic transformation, including **expanding digital and mobile banking services and inclusion**, support and facilitate access to finance for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and build their capacity, to continue their operations and to help restore jobs and incomes.
* §18: COVID-19 has shown that digital technologies are a vital component of resilient financial and public services, including health-care services and education, but also demonstrated the persistent digital divide undermining access to affordable, safe and secure information and communications technologies. We recognize that digital inclusion, when implemented in a sustainable and secure manner as an integral part of social and economic inclusion in order to ensure that the digital transformation does not widen inequality within and between countries or the gender digital divide.
* §21: Inclusive and equitable delivery and access to public services, including health care, education and social services, **including through digital cooperation**, is key to building greater public confidence and trust in government.
* §22: We stress in this regard, that further support is needed from developed countries, especially regarding the transfer of technology, capacity-building and financing to developing countries. **We commit to strengthening cooperation to close the digital divide within and among countries.**
* §34: We recognize that building sustainable, inclusive, equitable and resilient societies must begin with investing in all children, and youth, safeguarding their rights and ensuring that from early childhood they grow up in a safe and healthy environment free from poverty and hunger, and free from all forms of violence, neglect, bullying, abuse and exploitation**, both in person and in digital contexts** and through the elimination of all harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, paying specific attention to children affected by armed conflict.
* §39: We will invest in reducing hazard exposure and vulnerability to disasters, strengthening multi-hazard disaster risk governance at all levels and sectors **information and communication networks,** resilient infrastructure, **early warning systems,** and evidence-based policymaking.
* §40: We will continue to strengthen the science-policy interface through evidence-based policy making, support for research and development, particularly harnessing science, technology and innovation, promoting voluntary technology transfer on mutually agreed terms, leveraging technologies to promote inclusive digital economy and connectivity and build resilience across sectors. We commit to enhance and promote digital capacity-building, infrastructure, connectivity and technical assistance initiatives as well as innovation and technologies towards advancing the Goals and targets, with special focus on developing countries. We encourage international cooperation, supporting statistical capacity-building and data access in developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable countries, which face the greatest challenges in producing, collecting, analyzing and using high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data and statistics. We recognize that emerging technologies and their applications such as artificial intelligence, big data, and blockchain will undoubtedly transform production and business, and stress the need to take actions to bridge the digital gap to ensure this transformation will reduce inequalities among countries. We commend the individual scientists, technologists and innovators across the world whose work is creating pathways out of the pandemic but also note the manifest inequalities in countries’ capacities and experiences. We acknowledge the findings of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism and the STI forum on learning from the experience of the pandemic to better deploy STI for the SDGs, including through improved international cooperation, for consideration at the next HLPF. We take note of the Secretary General’s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. We also stress the importance of strengthening meaningful digital accessibility and affordability of digital skills and media and information literacy and to provide training to support data processing, transmission, and storage and underline that the same human rights that people have offline must be protected online We must also build public trust in science and official statistics. We further welcome the holding of the sixth Multistakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals and take note of the recommendations provided.
* §45: We acknowledge that any consideration of tax measures in response to the digital economy should include a careful analysis of its implications for developing countries, taking into account their inputs, with a special focus on their unique needs and capacities. We call upon the United Nations, and all other relevant international organizations, to support countries, particularly developing countries, in building policy and administrative capacity for the effective and efficient taxation of the digital economy.
* §48: We commit to significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries.
* §50: They should also support and work with programme countries in a coherent and collaborative manner in implementing, with urgency, sustainable solutions and catalyzing partnerships, leveraging digital technologies where appropriate including with civil society, financial institutions and the private sector for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the post-COVID-19 era.

**OVERVIEW OF ITU CONTRIBUTIONS TO HLPF-21**

**ITU inputs:**

* [ITU Council](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=2713&menu=3170" \t "_blank)
* [Partnership on measuring ICT4D](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=2721&menu=3170" \t "_blank)
* [UNGIS](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=2733&menu=3170" \t "_blank)
* [WSIS Forum](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=2730&menu=3170)
* [Broadband Commission](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=2769&menu=3170)

**Statements/interventions under agenda items**

* General Debate statement by the ITU Secretary General (pre-recorded video)
* Mobilizing science, technology and innovation and strengthening the science-policy-society interface (ITU Secretary General was invited to deliver a keynote)
* Looking at the 2020 targets: implementation and review (BDT/T. Geiger submitted short statement)

**Side and Special Events**

* ITU/Russian Federation side event with the engagement of the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) – with the participation of ITU DSG. Lead content organizer: G. Sah
* ITU side event “[Digital Partnerships for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from COVID-19](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=20000&nr=7602&menu=2993)” ([Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gde2eFbJA54)) – with the participation of the BDT Director. Lead content organizer: J. Ponder
* Business and Industry Major Group Side event: [Private sector partnerships and contributions to the SDGs](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=20000&nr=7644&menu=2993) - Keynote by the BDT Deputy Director.

**Inputs to UN Reports:**

* [UNSDG’s Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG_SDG_Progress_report_2021.pdf)
* [2021 Financing for Sustainable Development Report](https://developmentfinance.un.org/sites/developmentfinance.un.org/files/FSDR_2021.pdf)
* [IATT - STI Forum 2021 Report](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-STI-Forum-summary-advance_1.pdf)
* [Synthesis of voluntary submissions by functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums](https://undocs.org/en/E/HLPF/2021/4)

**IATT – Background Thematic papers on:**

* [The SDGs in time of crisis: A sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 as an opportunity to realize the SDGs](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28042BN_HLPF2021_Time_of_Crisis.pdf)
* [Ensuring that no one is left behind How do we protect the poorest and most vulnerable from the crisis and empower them to realize the SDGs?](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27871BN_HLPF_2021_LNOB.pdf)
* [Progress summary for SDG targets with a 2020 deadline](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/2020%20targets_update.pdf); [Review of SDG 9 from ITU](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/2021%20target%209C%20HLPF%20-%20202010622.pdf)
* [How do we get on track for building more peaceful, equal and inclusive societies? (SDGs 3, 10, 16, 17 and interlinkages among those goals and with other SDGs)](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27965BN_HLPF_2021__3_10_16_17.pdf)
* [How do we revamp and transform consumption and production and address and mitigate climate change? (SDGs 12, 13, 17 and interlinkages among these goals and with other SDGs)](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27880BN_HLPF_2021__SDG_12_13_17.pdf)
* [Mobilizing science, technology, and innovation and strengthening the science-policy-society interface](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27892BN_HLPF_2021__Science_technology_and_innovation.pdf)

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| **HLPF 2021 – VNR Countries by ITU Regional Presence** | | | | | |
| **Africa** | **Americas** | **Arab states** | **Asia and the Pacific** | **Commonwealth of Independent States** | **Europe** |
| 1. **Angola** 2. **Cabo Verde\*** 3. **Chad\*** 4. **Madagascar\*** 5. **Namibia\*** 6. **Niger\*\*** 7. **Sierra Leone\*\*** 8. **Zimbabwe\*** | 1. **Antigua and Barbuda** 2. **Bahamas\*** 3. **Bolivia** 4. **Colombia\*\*** 5. **Cuba** 6. **Dominican Republic\*** 7. **Guatemala\*\*** 8. **Mexico\*\*** 9. **Nicaragua** 10. **Paraguay\*** 11. **Uruguay\*\*** | 1. **Egypt\*\*** 2. **Iraq\*** 3. **Tunisia** 4. **Qatar\*\*** | 1. **Afghanistan\*** 2. **Bhutan\*** 3. **China\*** 4. **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** 5. **Indonesia\*\*** 6. **Japan\*** 7. **Lao People's Democratic Republic\*** 8. **Malaysia\*** 9. **Marshall Islands** 10. **Thailand\*** | 1. **Azerbaijan\*\*** | 1. **Cyprus\*** 2. **Czech Republic\*** 3. **Denmark\*** 4. **Germany\*** 5. **Norway\*** 6. **San Marino** 7. **Spain\*** 8. **Sweden\*** |
| ICT references available here: [Table of ICT references in the 2021 VNRs](https://www.dropbox.com/s/1h2lzw3urolnxkb/2021%20HLPF%20VNR%20Table%20of%20ICT%20references.docx?dl=0) | | | | | |