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| **Council Working Group on International Internet-related Public Policy Issues Fifteenth meeting – Virtual meeting, 27-28 January 2021** |  |
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**Contribution by the United Kingdom**

Topic for the next Council Working Group open consultation

1. The United Kingdom is pleased to submit this contribution to the Council Working Group (Internet). We welcome the opportunities the Group provides to share experiences and perspectives on international Internet-related public policy issues and we look forward to future discussions. We invite the Council Working Group to consider the following topic for its next open consultation: **The role of the internet in mitigating the impact of Covid-19 and possible future pandemics.**
2. Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on the social, economic and physical wellbeing of individuals and communities around the globe. The Internet has played a crucial role in mitigating these impacts. According to the ITU’s [Measuring Digital Development](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx) report, international bandwidth usage is estimated to have grown globally by 38 per cent during the pandemic. The Internet has enabled citizens to continue to work, trade, shop, communicate and learn during social distancing restrictions. It has been an invaluable tool for people to access information and guidance and vital public services, such as online medical consultations and job support programs.
3. There is still a lot that we can learn, however, about how better to harness the potential of the Internet to mitigate the impact of possible future pandemics. In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the impact of inequalities in Internet access across the globe and the risks of digital exclusion, with half of the world’s population still unconnected. An open consultation on this topic will allow us to hear the perspectives of different stakeholders and learn from one another’s experience. We would propose the following questions for the next open consultation:

**The role of the Internet in mitigating the impact of Covid-19 and possible future pandemics:**

* ***How has the Internet helped to mitigate the social and economic impacts of Covid-19?***
* ***How has the Internet helped to mitigate the health impacts of Covid-19?***
* ***What lessons can we learn for how the Internet could help mitigate the impact of possible future pandemics*?**

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