



Outcome report: The digital divide - The adoption of new generation networks in Rural Areas (ITEC)

Session Date and Time: Session 6, Tuesday, 6 July 2021 (17:30 – 19:00 (CEST)). 90 minutes.

Numer of Participants: The session counted with 135 participants from them we there was 105 participants in average.

Master of ceremony: Pablo Palacios, Programme Officer, ITU Regional Office Chile.

Moderator: Lorena Torres López, Senior Consultant, BlueNote Management Consulting.

Speakers:

- Mercedes Aramendia, President of the Communications Service Regulatory Unit (Ursec), Uruguay.
- H.E. Walid David, Vice-Minister of Connectivity of the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications of Colombia (MinTic).
- Romel Espinoza, Director of Policy and Postal Affairs, Ministry of Telecommunications and the Information Society (Mintel), Ecuador.
- Alejandro Navarrete Torres, Head of the Radio Spectrum Unit, Federal Institute of Telecommunications (IFT), Mexico.
- Jorge Trelles, General Director of Policies and Regulation in Communications Ministry of Transport and Communications (MTC), Peru.

1. Session summary:

This session included a round table for the discussion about the National Plans for the implementation of 5G networks and the possible increase of the national and regional digital divide with the adoption of these new generation networks.

The high-level session analysed how governments can face the differences between urban and rural areas, how they can connect rural communities, and which strategies they are planning to connect the unconnected towards 2030.

Some of the important questions that were discussed:

- What considerations have been incorporated into national levels about reducing the current digital divide and towards the adoption of next-generation networks?
- What are the most determining factors that have contributed to the current digital divide nationally and regionally?
- How are the governments going to face the digital divide with the adoption of new generation networks?
- Which strategies can governments implement to connect the 49% who still does not have access to communications networks?

2. Main outcomes highlighting the following:

- In Colombia of the 49 million inhabitants, they are dispersed across large rural areas, therefore coverage of mobile access was no more than 10% of the rural areas, in terms of access to fixed Internet, there was 52% of homes.
- Uruguay is putting a lot of emphasis on the importance of working as a team across the whole ecosystem, cooperating with various sectors and societies and even within Government, but also looking at Academia, the private sector to ensure we can work in parallel in innovative way and be creative to work on the various areas. It is important for us the digital literacy, people need to learn through online media, with access to telemedicine, e Government and with the pandemic, these things became ever more relevant and it was ever more evident that we needed to have quality connections in order to be able to use it.
- Uruguay is working on building trust and confidence, because we're looking at fundamental rights of people, such as privacy and protection of personal data that has been discussed so much lately.
- Uruguay has divide of connectivity but also has the divide based on geography, urban and rural area, the intergenerational divide. So if we compare older and younger populations, gender is also an area that represents a divide.
- It is very important that we work together and to carry out various actions in parallel, various plans and actions to every boy, girl, adolescent in public education have access to a computer.
- Uruguay approved a new digital agenda to the year 2025 and is pioneer in many aspects to incorporate ICTs into everyday life.
- Ecuador has defined two services, Internet services for citizens and advanced mobile services.
- In Ecuador 63% of homes have access, therefore there are still many homes that are not connected.
- In Ecuador 2G coverage is 97%, independently of whether someone has the service or not, they have a possibility of access. 4G coverage is around 60%, it allows users and people and businesses have mobile data access and can access education, telemedicine, e Government, so forth.
- The Ministry of Telecommunications of Ecuador presented the digital agenda for 2020 2021 where we show our priorities to reduce the digital divide.
- Ecuador was able to reduce the tariffs for electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, so people were able to have greater access.
- Mexico has 2 million square kilometers of surface, more than 126 million inhabitants, from them 79% are in urban areas and 21% in rural areas. The mobile penetration rate is 98%, 91.6% are smartphone lines. The Internet users of inhabitants of six years and above, 84.1 million, 72% of the population over the age of six.
- Mexico has a major difference between access in rural and urban areas when looking at mobile Internet penetration. Mexico has a very complex geography and being able to reach the small populations.
- Mexico has various initiatives, one was to set up to establish a national wholesale provider using the 700 megahertz band to cover 92.2% of the population by 2024.
- Mexico is including coverage obligation in spectrum auctions, the Federal Government established an entity to provide Internet access in locations without service.

- Mexico has currently various spectrum auctions and they have assigned and awarded 700 megahertz of spectrum, the largest awardee in the area.
- Peru has in urban areas, 35% of coverage of fixed Internet, for mobile services in urban areas, it is 85% of coverage and rural areas only 40%.
- Peru has two big areas to reduce the digital divide. The first is intervention from the national program for telecommunications, and they have been developing 19 projects for broadband. Seven Regions have them in operation and 12 are undergoing implementation. Peru has two in the jungle areas.
- Peru has projects called the isolated jungle, forest area, in four Regions.
- Currently, Peru has auctions for the 2.3 gigahertz band with the coverage of 500 localities.
- This year, Peru implemented the plan “everyone connected” financed for two years with the budget from our ministry, and access to Internet at 1,151 institutions, 860 of which are in the forest areas. Peru has free Wi Fi to more than 6,500 rural areas and further access to a thousand digital access centers.
- Uruguay needs to connect rural areas, therefore they are mapping the country in order to identify the noncovered areas to elaborate efficient policies. Uruguay is working in the creation of the universal service.
- In South America, we have areas with a lot of mountains, so access to energy, electricity is quite a challenge, therefore at least in Colombia, we are working with an energy company to take advantage of all the investment in order to use their infrastructure to deploy fiber optics.
- In Colombia for the deployment of 5G, we will continue using fiber optics, and when is not possible, then we will use satellite services.
- Ecuador had a study of the benefits of 5G for the productivity of the country, this study was implemented with the support of ITU. We shared the study with the Ministry of Production, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, with the public and private sector. The major benefits for Ecuador with the adoption of 5G will be in agriculture and productivity, therefore we are working with the Ministry of Development to develop digital technologies.
- In Colombia, has digital Government at the national and regional level, they have initiatives such as smart territories, how to make sure areas in departments or states are much more efficient.
- In Colombia there is a program connecting 14,000 rural schools across the country. We want the students help their teachers with Digital Transformation. We're also looking at access in communities and then we're looking at ICT programs.
- Colombia is implementing various centers for digital transformation to ensure small and medium sized enterprises have access to connectivity, but they want to deploy infrastructure and at the same time, offer capacity building to use the ICTs.

3. Panellists contributions to the outcome reports

- All speakers highlighted the challenges that they face for the adoption of new technologies, the challenges with the current digital divide and the increase digital divide that will increase with the adoption of 5G.
- The geography of the American Countries offers big challenges to the governments to reach rural areas, therefore they are considering different technologies to offer ICTs to communities and connect the unconnected.

- All representatives agreed in the need to implement national policies, regulate the auctions for the spectrum for 5G to offer telecommunications services to rural areas.
 - It is not only important to connect rural areas, but is necessary to offer digital literacy to let people access and use the services offered through ICTs.
 - Countries in the Region have implemented studies to determine the industries that need to benefit of the implementation of 5G, initially, and then spread the service to other industries.
 - The auction of the frequency is the current work that countries are doing, since this implies several studies to value the spectrum and determine national plans to implement 5G and reach rural areas.
 - Some countries have invested to deploy national infrastructure of fiber optics, it will help as the basis to implement 5G networks and reach rural areas.
 - The commitment of all countries is to connect the unconnected and offer services to unattended areas, rural communities.
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