

Partnerships for inclusive and sustainable digital development

Roundtable on SDG 9 & 17

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Roundtable on SDG 9 and 17 “Partnerships for inclusive and sustainable digital development”

UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Outcome Report

Information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital development are not only at the core of SDG 9 and 17, but are also key to ensure that the overall 2030 Agenda is realized. Partnerships across different stakeholders, sectors, countries and governance levels are necessary to ensure a prosperous digital development and avoid widening divides due to disparities in the speed of adoption of new technologies. The catalytic role of the UN system in supporting digital development at the national, regional and global level is critical. Such means like [UN Digital Development Toolbox](#), together with constant diagnostic through [Digital Development Country Profiles](#) may help in strengthening One UN approach on digital and its critical role for rescuing achievement of SDGs by 2030.

Lack of resilient digital infrastructures and the rural-urban digital divide, including unequal school connectivity, remain a major challenge. Landlock countries particularly struggle to provide internet connectivity. More investment in digital infrastructure together with adequate policies and regulations are needed to boost access to the internet. Broadband mapping systems are essential to provide knowledge on the reach and quality of digital networks and services. It allows for efficient decision-making process for regulators to assess market competitions and gaps in coverage requiring allocation of funds and allow citizens to select their service providers. Affordability of internet access and devices require special attention. Initiatives like [Partner2Connect](#), established in close cooperation with the UN Tech Envoy Office, provides a platform to catalyze investment and to harness partnerships for sustainable and inclusive digital development, offering the mechanism for acting at large scale

with the impact on the ground.

With the growth of the information society, countries aspire to become innovation-driven digital economies but often lack human and institutional capabilities to integrate ICT innovation. Initiatives such as the [Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance](#) can support bridging those gaps. The ICT sector is particularly reliant on innovation. Yet, lack of access to finance for enterprises, in particular SMEs, limit the ability of businesses to invest in new technologies and innovate, and hinder competitiveness. Access to finance, grants and voucher systems at all stages of business development can effectively support the development of ICT sectors. Digital government services are a prerequisite for a successful roll out of digital transformation. They are essential for delivering efficient and effective public services to citizens. To provide digital public services, it is essential to develop resilient e-government ecosystem. Providing digitization as a service to service providers through a front-office digitalization platform is an effective way to digitize public services in a quick, standardized, cost-effective, and scalable manner. Adopting the perspective of users when designing services and providing services into local languages is needed to ensure inclusive and accessible services.

Digital development should be human-centered, in particular considering new and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. Special attention should be paid to the nexus between human rights, good governance and new technologies. Institutions lack capacities to provide adequate safeguards to address new risks and negative impacts brought by such technologies, such as negative social norms, data privacy breaches, cyber harassment and bullying, among others. Countries should establish normative frameworks and update existing legislation to provide safety against these impacts, in particular looking at women and girls. Digital tools and services should by design address the needs of all women and girls. Gender should be mainstreamed in digital policies to remove barriers to equal access. Stakeholders need to foster a policy of zero tolerance for online gender-based violence occurring through or amplified by the use of technology. Both public and private sector entities should prioritize prevention and elimination. Overall, the Commission on the Status of Women's recommendations should be translated into actions.

Civil society is concerned by the digital restrictions such as blocking and restricting access to information resources and recommend to develop a Digital Bill of Rights in consultation with CSOs. Renewed efforts are needed to build digital literacy and digital skills, particularly older people and vulnerable groups, including on data protection and privacy, to build trust and confidence, minimize the negative impact or misuse of disinformation and promote digital inclusion. New technologies are also pivotal to strengthen democratic institutions, improve transparency and accountability, civic participation and decentralization, and can lower barriers and reduce inequalities.

Digital development should hold a tripartite dimension to ensure that it is environmental sound, socially trust, and economically prosperous. The ICT sector must continue to become more circular and sustainable to tackle, among others, electronic waste, energy consumption, GHG emission and be compatible with the Paris Agreement. Effective policies and actions by governments are key to address critical raw materials crisis. The demand for earth metals such as graphite, lithium and cobalt is rising rapidly. Legislative measures should define and set criteria for green public procurement of ICTs. Standardization of digitalization, transparency and interoperability of data and investment in tools to measure and disclose the environmental and carbon footprint of technologies are essential. Authorities lack competencies to use proper analytical tools to predict the cost and use of the circular and low-carbon digital transition. Yet, data collection and storage is needed to support decision-making processes and provide political leverage. Collaboration between Environmental and ICT regulatory authorities is fundamental. They hold the complementary technical knowledge required to assess the entire lifecycle and different criteria of digital devices to make precise measurements and projections.

Space data (including satellite imagery), IoTs and other new and emerging technologies help tracking biodiversity, implement climate mitigation and adaptation measures and provide more accurate forecast of extreme weather events. Early Warning Systems, using a combination of radar, satellite, and weather station data, deliver early-warnings to extreme weather events and protect populations, including in humanitarian crisis context. The Early Warning for All initiative can support countries in deploying such systems. Space data also support greener transportation systems through enabling autonomous automobile that will help reducing energy consumption, by providing real-time data on traffic and road conditions and ensure that automobile are being interconnected through internet connectivity, including in areas without ground infrastructure.