



USCIB Submission to ITU Council Working Group on the Internet
20 August 2021

[The role of the Internet and international Internet-related public policy in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and possible future pandemics](#)

CWG-Internet invites all stakeholders to submit contributions on international Internet-related public policy issues relating to the role of the Internet and international Internet-related public policy in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and possible future pandemics.

The U.S. Council for International Business (USCIB) is pleased to take part in this public consultation.

Telecommunication/ICTs have fostered a vibrant Internet and driven rapid response, connectivity, social interactions and economic continuity in face of the Covid-19 pandemic. These Internet-enabling technologies, in turn, will be increasingly important in shaping a sustainable recovery from the crisis. Looking ahead, global policy makers should prioritize telecommunication/ICT innovation and public-private partnerships toward that end and support a multistakeholder governance approach that best ensures a stable, resilient, secure, and interoperable Internet. We elaborate on these and other policy elements foundational to greater economic resilience and preparedness as well as societal well-being.

Importance of multistakeholder engagement on telecommunications/ICT policy issues – USCIB believes that the multistakeholder model for Internet governance continues to be the best method to enable whole-of-society/whole-of-government consideration of Internet policy issues that is grounded in democratic values and the principles of transparency, accountability, and consensus. Given the rapid pace of technological change, governments need the perspectives provided by business, the technical community, and civil society to better understand what policies are commercially viable, technically feasible, and offer adequate user protections. The inputs of all stakeholders produce a flexible policy environment critical to empowering the rapidly evolving digital economy.

Importantly, such stakeholder inclusion can lower the risk of unintended consequences and increase legitimacy and adoption of policies. Top-down government-imposed policies and regulations often cannot keep pace with technological breakthroughs and can serve as a drag on development, investment, and innovation.

The turbulent economic and political backdrop caused by the COVID-19 pandemic makes such multistakeholder participation even more important to ensure that Internet policy remains grounded in sound commercial and technical expertise. We appreciate that this public consultation, in effect, recognizes that multistakeholder dialogue best ensures telecommunication/ICT-related policy outcomes that are practicable and key to a well-functioning Internet.

Investment in Innovation – We need to create an enabling environment for private investments in broadband infrastructure and technology solutions that will drive global connectivity. The ITU should promote the consideration of the totality of the policies – R&D incentives, direct government support, public-private partnerships -- that would foster new uses of cutting-edge technologies so they are more

affordable and easily deployed in developing countries lagging in connectivity. This will have the collateral benefit of aiding pandemic recovery.

Financing and Affordability – The financial conditions of citizens throughout the world as well as the market realities that can undermine private sector investments to connect under-served communities certainly challenge our efforts to deliver the full benefits of broadband networks – including pandemic mitigation. The ITU should encourage government policies to address the broadband gap, which recognize that government policies that enable private investment combined with subsidization may be necessary for industry to bring broadband to less densely populated areas and low-income customers. Such support will enable greater access to Internet-enabled services, be they educational, healthcare-related, commercial, or e-government services.

Promote public-private partnerships and an integrated telecommunication/ICT policy approach – As evidenced by COVID-19, telecommunications/ICTs and issues relating to connectivity are cross-cutting. Business-led innovation is driving solutions and supporting economic and social continuity across disciplines such as health, employment, education, manufacturing, and supply chains. Public-private partnerships reinforce the development and deployment of telecommunication/ICTs technology benefits. The ITU should formally recognize and promote such voluntary collaborations as integral to COVID recovery.

Regulatory approaches should support innovation -- The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the potential of telecommunications/ICTs and the Internet to sustain economic and social activity, which reinforces the urgency to advance the uptake of Internet-related innovations. Importantly, regulatory frameworks and processes should foster the development and use of telecommunications/ICT-related technologies and infrastructure as foundational to recovery from the pandemic – not hamper these efforts via burdensome, top-down approaches.

Digital Inclusion – Addressing technology skills gaps, online safety, the gender technology divide, and other challenges will be necessary to fully realize the benefits of broadband connectivity and Internet access. In particular, the ITU-D could be a productive body through which ITU members can help implement and grow technology literacy programs that empower under-resourced populations to develop and capitalize on critical ICT skills. Successful inclusion programs will incorporate and leverage capacity-building investments in local communities, particularly in education, health care, and other social services. The ITU should support such programs that lead to telecommunication/ICT skills development and proven outcomes for previously excluded populations.