

# Background Paper

World Telecommunications Development Conference (WTDC) 2022

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## Summary

Delegates will gather this June in Kigali, Rwanda, for the 9th ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-2022) to set the development agenda and priorities for ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) for the 2022 to 2025 study group period. The Conference was postponed by a year due to the Covid-19 Global Health Pandemic, which subsequently put connectivity at the top of the agenda, making this conference timely to harness the political will that has been demonstrated over the last two years to address the digital divide. Along with the date change, the conference location was moved from Ethiopia to Rwanda<sup>1</sup>. WTDCs are intended to accomplish a certain set of objectives defined in the ITU's global treaty, its ITU Constitution and Convention, and in relevant ITU Resolutions, most notably its Strategic Plan (Resolution 71). Preparations for some of the WTDC tasks began well over a year ago, with the goal of holding a conference focused on the development topics. WTDC-2022 in Kigali will serve as a discussion forum on the opportunities and challenges of closing the digital divide, as well as a catalyst for partnership and investment in infrastructure development.

## About WTDC-22

WTDC is a conference hosted by the ITU every four years which sets the development agenda for the next four-year period (2022-2025). WTDC is a non-treaty conference, and does not provide regulatory outcomes. Rather, the Member States adopt a four-year action plan for the membership to focus on to realize the Development Sector's goal of closing the digital divide. The conference provides a forum for discussion on some of the telecommunication/ICT trends and development issues such as the cost of International Internet Connectivity, digital inclusion, affordable broadband access, and emergency telecommunications.

WTDC-22 will take place in Kigali, Rwanda, from June 6 to 16, 2022. The theme is "**Connecting the Unconnected to Achieve Sustainable Development**," including a focus on Partnerships, Inclusion, Financing, Innovation, Leadership, and Youth.

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<sup>1</sup> ITU circular letter CL-22/006 in February 2022, the Secretary General announced that following invitation from the Government of Rwanda that the ITU Council approved convening WTDC in Kigali, Rwanda from June 6-16. WTDC-22 preparatory documents and events prior to this announcement reflect Addis Ababa such as the Draft Declaration and Action Plan.

## Who Attends?

The membership of the ITU is generally comprised of government delegations, or Member States, private industries and other approved organizations that participate as Sector Members or Associates, and Academia. As a United Nations specialized agency only Member States have voting rights. While Sector Members participate in ITU conferences and assemblies, they do so as Observers. There are 193 Member States and over 700 Sector Members and Associates. Sector Members may participate in the activities of the Sector to which they join including leadership positions of the Sector Study Groups and Sector Conferences. Associates participate in only one study group in a sector.

Other non-statutory events will be held under the WTDC framework and will be open to all stakeholders, such as: [the Partnet2Connect](#) for Digital Development event, which takes place June 7-9, and [the Generation Connect Global Youth Summit](#), which takes place June 2-4.

## Activities and Main Outcomes of WTDC-22

WTDC's mandated activities are stated in Article 16 of the ITU Convention. They include:

- Defining the work program which helps in formulating ITU-D study group questions.
- Considering whether to maintain, terminate, or establish new study groups.
- Appointments to management positions: Vice-Chair and Chair of study groups.
- Establishing the Study Group's Terms of Reference.
- Receiving reports on ITU-D's activities for the last study group period.

The ITU observes the sovereignty rule where decisions can only be taken by Member States at WTDC. However, the preparations on the outcome documents that define the ITU-D's focus for the next four years are the culmination of efforts by government officials, private sector, and non-profit organizations. The three main outcome documents are as follows:

- [WTDC-22 Declaration](#) renders solidarity and support for the main conclusions of WTDC including the Strategic Objectives of ITU-D.
- ITU-D contribution to the [2024-2027 Strategic Plan](#) which will be adopted at the next [Plenipotentiary Conference](#), 26 September to 14 October 2022;
- [WTDC-22 Action Plan](#) serves as the operational plan for ITU-D, providing direction for the work program and activities in accordance with the WTDC's priorities. It is organized

around thematic priorities, which are areas of focus for ITU to accomplish its strategic goals, as well as products and services that support the thematic priorities.

## TDAG Working Groups for the Preparation of WTDC-22

The Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG) acts between WTDCs and ITU-D, examining priorities, strategies, operations, and financial matters for ITU-D and advises the Director of the Development Sector on the progress of the implementation of the WTDC Action Plan. TDAG meetings established three working groups for the preparation of WTDC-22:

- **TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations:** tasked with considering proposals for reform of the WTDC and making recommendations for preparatory events prior to WTDC and recommendations that enhance preparations for the conference such as the Conference theme, thematic tracks, and stakeholders.
- **TDAG Working Group on Strategic and Operational Plans (TDAG-WG-SOP):** tasked with preparing a draft new ITU-D contribution to the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan.
- **TDAG Working Group on WTDC Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities (TDAG-WG-RDTP):** its main task is to streamline WTDC resolutions, align thematic priorities among other aspects of the ITU-D work and make recommendations for the draft declaration.
  - The WTDC-22 draft Declaration focuses on connectivity and the sustainable development goals, urging governments to commit to innovative approaches to connectivity, partnerships, and investment in infrastructure to bridge the digital divide.
  - ITU-D Thematic Priorities for the 2024-2027 ITU Strategic Plan. WTDC-22 will determine whether to have three or four thematic priorities:
    1. Infrastructure and services thematic priority
    2. Applications thematic priority
    3. Enabling environment thematic priority
    4. Cybersecurity (remains in square brackets because some believe it is a cross-cutting issue covered by the other three priorities, while others want it to be a standalone thematic priority).

## WTDC-22 Regional Preparatory Meetings

Regional Preparatory Meetings (RPMs) were held in each of the ITU regions prior to the conference. The RPMs facilitated regional coordination and preparation for WTDC-22. They also allowed Member States to report on the progress of the regional initiatives from the last Study period.

The main outcome of the RPMs is the Chairman's Report that summarizes:

- Progress on the implementation of the WTDC-17 Action Plan including ITU-D work program/activities, regional initiatives
- Identifies regional priority areas
- Draft Regional Initiatives for 2022 to 2025.
- Common Proposals related to work of the Study groups e.g. proposals for new or modifications to Study Groups, working methods, Rules of Procedures, new/revised questions; Resolutions and recommendations
- Consolidation of regional inputs for inclusion in Action Plan

The Regional Telecommunication Organizations held similar preparatory meetings to agree on and finalize the common regional proposals for WTDC-22. Some of the proposals reflect new/revised study group questions, new/revised WTDC Resolutions, draft recommendations, etc.

### Regional Preparatory Meetings (RPM)

- Regional Preparatory Meeting for WTDC for Europe (**RPM-EUR**), 18-19 January 2021.
- Regional Preparatory Meeting for WTDC for Asia and the Pacific (**RPM-ASP**), 9 to 10 March 2021.
- Joint ITU/ATU Regional Preparatory Meeting for WTDC for Africa (**RPM-AFR**), 29 to 30 March 2021
- Regional Preparatory Meeting for WTDC for Arab States (**RPM-ARB**), 7 to 8 April 2021
- Regional Preparatory Meeting for WTDC for CIS Region (**RPM-CIS**), 21 to 22 April 2021
- Regional Preparatory Meeting for WTDC for the Americas Region (**RPM-AMS**), 26 to 27 April 2021)

### Interregional Meetings

The purpose of the Interregional meetings (IRMs) for WTDC-22 preparations was to facilitate the sharing of regional priorities, common positions, and key issues for WTDC-22 with the goal

of building consensus on common areas. Three meetings were held: 11 March 2021, 13-14 December 2021, and 10-11 March 2022.

## Main Focus Areas

- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** discussions at WTDC will revolve around expanding meaningful and affordable access for those unconnected with a focus on Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) due to additional barriers to connectivity faced by countries in these unique geographies. Additionally, there will also be discussions about generating investment and building collaborative partnerships to develop and improve ICT network infrastructure in developing countries to facilitate smart technologies for a range of services such as smart agriculture, e-health, digital financial services.
- **Cybersecurity<sup>2</sup>:** this issue is expected to be a top priority at WTDC-22 where developing countries may want to prioritize capacity building efforts such as providing technical and financial assistance for the development of National Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs). Other priorities are assistance with developing national strategies for Child Online Protection and expanding ITU-D's cybersecurity activities to include emerging technologies. Concerns about spam and its proliferation are to be expected, with proposals likely for technical solutions to combat spam, among other things.
- **Global Cybersecurity Agenda (GCA):** the GCA is an initiative within the ITU-D Cybersecurity program. It is referred to in the WTDC cybersecurity related resolution, and hence proposal(s) on extending the GCA are likely. It is a contentious issue, with Member States divided on whether to maintain the current scope, terminate it or expand it to consider the current security landscape. The GCA was established in 2007 by the ITU Secretary General as a platform for international cooperation aimed at promoting cybersecurity and enhancing confidence and security. A proposal to revise and update the GCA and give the ITU a role in developing an international mechanism on cybersecurity was not accepted at Plenipotentiary 2018. The ITU Council was tasked with

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<sup>2</sup> The Tunis Agenda WSIS Action Line C5, "Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs," defines the scope of the ITU's cybersecurity activities. Furthermore, in several Plenipotentiary Resolutions on security. Within the development sector, the ITU's cybersecurity activities are focused on capacity building, training, and assistance to Member States, such as developing policies, best practices, and tools to strengthen national cybersecurity capabilities, such as National Cybersecurity Strategies and National CIRTs.

examining how the GCA was being used and submit a report to the next Plenipotentiary. As a result, consultations were held culminating in the development of draft guidelines for utilization of the GCA where sharp disagreements persist.

- **Privacy/Consumer Protection:** as emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence become more mainstream and integrated into business functions and systems, several challenges have arisen, among them is concern about data privacy, which at WTDC will be discussed in the context of consumer protection. Privacy is a difficult issue, with debate frequently centred on whether such policy aspects are related to international communications or national jurisdictional matters.

## Internet Society's Objectives at WTDC-22

The Internet Society (ISOC) advocates for a globally connected, secure, and trustworthy Internet. To realize this goal, our strategic objectives are focused on expanding Internet access to everyone who wants it. Further, we strive to make the Internet stronger and more resilient so that people can trust that their communications are secure and can enjoy the benefits it provides.

ISOC is a Sector Member of ITU-D; thus will participate at WTDC-22. We look forward to engaging participants in the development agenda by sharing our experiences and collaborating closely to advance the priorities that address the digital divide.

In Kigali, we want to deliver our messages on Internet growth. We will promote innovative policies to connect the unconnected and for the local Internet ecosystem to thrive. We will focus on promoting policies that enable the emergence of complementary connectivity solutions to bridge the digital divide, such as community networks. These are local initiatives proven to be effective in connecting those who need it the most. They empower unconnected and underserved communities to gain access to government services, complementary education, enhance local business opportunities, and address social challenges including enabling women and girls to break through gender barriers.

At the same time, we will work with Members to promote transparent policy and regulatory processes that foster sustainable peering infrastructure. This includes promoting local investment, collaboration with content providers, data center operators, Internet exchange points (IXPs), and local technical communities with the aim of developing local conditions to attract investment and growth in locally accessible content.

Furthermore, we will continue to promote and encourage constructive dialogue among delegates about the Internet's role in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the importance of preserving the critical properties that support a globally connected Internet to ensure that it remains accessible to all and a resource to help achieve the SDGs.

Throughout the forthcoming study group period, ISOC will continue to collaborate with all members including governments, provide our expertise, and share our experiences on connectivity solutions to expand affordable and reliable Internet access.

## Looking Ahead to Plenipotentiary 2022

The WTDC outcomes will set the development sector's work program for the next 4 years. The sector's inputs to the 2024-2027 Strategic and Financial Plan will be submitted to the Plenipotentiary. During the conference, unresolved issues are typically forwarded to Plenipotentiary.

Cybersecurity is one issue that is expected to be brought before the Plenipotentiary. States with varied goals continue to disagree sharply on cybersecurity. Some favour maintaining the current ITU-D cybersecurity activities, where the emphasis is on capacity building and building cyber resilience capabilities. Some want to go beyond and widen the scope of ITU-D's cybersecurity work by studying the security challenges posed by new technologies. Furthermore, develop frameworks that can aide governments as they develop their national cybersecurity strategies. The challenge is that when such differences carry over into the Plenipotentiary, they may be leveraged into discussions and negotiations.