# The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

# 2025 Input to High-level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF)

*As per General Assembly resolution 70/1, the HLPF carries out thematic reviews of SDG progress, including cross-cutting issues. The General Assembly reiterated in its resolution 75/290 B, that the HLPF should consider inputs from intergovernmental bodies and forums, including relevant multi-stakeholder forums, and incorporate findings, research, data and recommendations from the United Nations system. These inputs are summarized in a document titled "Synthesis of submissions by functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums".*

*The 2025 HLPF will focus on the theme* ***"Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science-and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind"****. The 2025 HLPF will review in-depth the following SDGs, without prejudice to their integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature:* ***Goal 3.*** *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;* ***Goal 5.*** *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;* ***Goal 8.*** *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;* ***Goal 14.*** *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; and* ***Goal 17.*** *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.*

## Introduction:

The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development was established in 2010 by ITU and UNESCO with the aim of boosting the importance of broadband on the international policy agenda and expanding broadband access in every country as key to accelerating progress towards national and international development targets. Led by H.E. President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Carlos Slim Helù of Mexico, it is co-chaired by ITU's Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin and UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay. It comprises over 50 Commissioners who represent a cross-cutting group of top CEO and industry leaders, senior policymakers and government representatives, and experts from international agencies, academia and organizations concerned with development.

This high-level platform examines the most pertinent issues relating to global broadband connectivity and develops consensus-driven policy recommendations for achieving its 7 Advocacy Targets and the UN 2030 Agenda. The Commission leverages the strength of its membership and collective expertise to advocate for meaningful, safe, secure, and sustainable broadband communications services as a foundational element to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Commission published its annual, collaborative 'State of Broadband' report and almost 40 Working Groups on thematic areas from health, education and gender equality were established, including recommendations for reaching universal broadband connectivity addressing

different stakeholders. The Commission has also been instrumental in launching number of global initiatives (EQUALS, Giga, etc.) and advocating with its educational campaigns (MSMEs day, SDG Digital etc.), events (WSIS, STI Forum, LDC5, UNCTAD e-week, CSW, HLPF, WEF Davos etc.) and inputs to the UN processes.

**Impacts of multiple and interconnected crises on the implementation of SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body.**

The world has experienced unprecedented turmoil since 2020, with a succession of crises, growing economic instability, conflict, and climate challenges. The global population has increased, from 8 billion in mid-November 2022 to 8.2 billion in 2024 The number of Internet users continues to grow, however, some 2.6 billion people still remain offline, accounting for 32 per cent of the world's population. This is down from the revised estimate of 2.8 billion for 2023, which represents 35 per cent of the population. As new and more advanced services become available, the digital divide is now far from just a numerical disadvantage – powerful new services and opportunities are now available to 'digital haves', compared to 'digital have-nots' in offline populations and communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the deep digital divide that exists globally, significantly affecting economies and exacerbating poverty. Individuals with internet access have been able to adapt to the "new normal" by shifting to remote work, online learning, and utilizing digital services for everyday tasks. However, those without connectivity have been left further behind, widening the poverty gap. The broadband ecosystem has the opportunity to play a positive role in society and economies, strengthening infrastructure, institutions, and systems that not only address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also prepare the world for future disasters. Building back better with broadband, preparing against future shocks, and ensuring universal equitable access is part of the new normal will require an emphasis on digital infrastructure and technologies in the pandemic response, recovery, and resiliency-building efforts.

- **SDG 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**

While telemedicine has been discussed as a breakthrough technology for over two decades, until COVID-19, growth has been slow. A group of medical researchers' remark "a crisis provides an opportunity" with quarantine restrictions combined with advances in digital technology providing the perfect environment for telemedicine to progress. At the same time, the pandemic sharply magnified the consequences of the digital divide. A report from the Broadband Commission's Working Group on Virtual Health and Care (2022) found that the pandemic triggered a giant uptake in virtual health and care services. The pandemic has changed the way health and care are delivered. Between 2020-2022 in particular, we have seen a boom in connecting patients and users with health and care providers remotely. The delivery of health and care services remotely through digital means and technologies, commonly known as virtual health and care, has enabled:

• proactive and preventive health management for individuals and populations through real-time notifications and reminders to prevent and manage health challenges,
• care navigation and support to ensure that patients can locate and access appropriate care,

• telehealth to streamline patient and provider communication and enable continuous remote monitoring, and
• smart diagnostics and digital therapeutics for data-led, evidence-based clinical decisions and actions.

Patients and providers are complementing in-person face-to-face interactions with virtual delivery to increase access and take better-informed decisions about health and care. The increasing trend of delivering several aspects of health and care virtually presents a clear opportunity for policymakers globally to act and realize the benefits of digitization to achieve health and care equity and access for all.

The Broadband Commission's 2021 Working Group on Virtual Health and Care encourages inclusive policymaking that puts the individual at the center of care delivery and planning. The Working Group's report examines virtual health and care in context of the COVID-19 pandemic: the trends, forecasts, key role of policy in influencing adoption, challenges, and ways of overcoming them. Through a comprehensive analysis of global developments, the report recommends policies as well as key stakeholder actions to ensure virtual health and care solutions increase equitable access and outcomes for those facing the greatest barriers to obtaining services, resulting in improved health and care equity and faster achievement of universal health coverage.

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- **SDG 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

The pandemic has exposed digital divides between populations, communities and ethnic groups, and has been a wake-up call that efforts to simply apply more infrastructure and more technology at cheaper prices do not fully address systemic differences between peoples. More targeted interventions that are cognizant of social inequalities, and the complexities of digital disparities are required.

Many of the most affected are women. Women's exclusion from COVID-19 planning and decision-making leaves governments ill-equipped to respond effectively to the gendered social and economic fallout of the pandemic. In total, 214 countries and territories have adopted 1 700 social protection and labour market measures in response to COVID-19. However, only 23 per cent of these measures are gender-sensitive in that they target women's economic security or address unpaid care.

During the pandemic, mobile operators ensured vital connectivity by quickly adapting to the additional demands on networks. But existing digital divides persist and can re-emerge: for example, COVID-19 has

disproportionately impacted women and, after steadily decreasing from 67 per cent in 2017 to 36 per cent in 2020, the mobile Internet gender gap widened to 41 per cent in 2021.

Notable gender gaps in mobile Internet access persist in Low- and Middle-Income countries (LMICs). The GSMA's Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023 found more women in LMICs are using mobile Internet than ever before, but adoption has slowed for the second year in a row and a significant gender gap remains. Today, women are 19% less likely than men to use mobile Internet. Of 900 million women who are still not using it, almost two-thirds live in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where mobile gender gaps are widest. 440 million women in 12 countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America do not have a mobile phone. Gender gaps in smartphone ownership and overall mobile ownership remained unchanged in 2023 at 17% and 7%, respectively. The GSMA concludes that "with the rate of digital inclusion slowing across LMICs, more effort and focus are needed to address the digital divide" and ensure that women are not left behind. The GSMA further observes that "gender inequalities [may be] exacerbated, as economies suffer in the current economic crisis and mobile becomes less affordable". The report offers detailed recommendations for operators, Internet companies, policy-makers and regulators and the development community, concluding that concerted action is needed by all stakeholders to close the mobile gender gap.

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- **SDG 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**

In 2021, when the world reels from the biggest economic shock witnessed in living memory brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) biannual World Economic Outlook (WEO) in April 2021 estimated that the drop in global economic production in 2020, at -3.3 per cent in gross domestic product (GDP) in real terms, is the worst on record, and is a result of a massive decline in other indicators of economic data (losses in trade, transportation, energy consumption, among others). COVID-19 also magnified existing digital gaps.
The shutdowns around the world in 2020, with some continuing in 2021, highlighted the need for robust communications infrastructure, particularly broadband, to continue economic and social activities. The ability for workers to continue employment during the pandemic differed significantly on the basis of the nature of the employment (for example between informal in-person, manufacturing, services or knowledge activities, among others) and the robustness of the communications infrastructure workers have access to. While much economic, learning and even healthcare activity was able to shift online, the pandemic highlighted the importance of effective and robust digital infrastructure.

While the divide in broadband connectivity between developed and developing countries has existed for years, the pandemic put this into sharp focus as many people, mainly in low- and middle-income nations,

were unable to work or learn from home. Further the quality of broadband networks has taken on new importance. Businesses were caught off guard—particularly micro and small enterprises—as they had no online presence. Governments made pandemic-related support payments adding to their debt with implications for future support for access to broadband infrastructure.

There are multiple indicators of the significant economic benefit of MSME connectivity. First, many studies have highlighted the link between general broadband adoption and economic growth. A study shows that a development index of the digital ecosystem, which includes indicators beyond broadband adoption such as enterprise digitalization, is also positively associated with GDP growth. This economic impact is built on the benefits of connectivity for the MSMEs that make up the majority of most economies worldwide. Increased revenues along with lower costs indicate that companies are becoming more productive, which is a key factor driving economic growth.
The benefits of - and need for – MSME connectivity were highlighted by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, restrictions during lockdowns limited business, causing
shutdowns and unemployment. Consumers could not shop in person, employees were not able to report to work, and supply chains were disrupted. The ITC COVID-19 Business Impact Survey showed that nearly two-thirds of micro and small firms reported that the crisis strongly affected their business, compared with 40% of large companies. In terms of geography, the greatest impact was in Africa, whereas in terms of sectors, the greatest impact was in accommodation and food services. Finally, women-led firms were more affected than.
men-led firms. Connectivity can provide resilience and business continuity, as was highlighted during lockdowns related to COVID-19, but can also be relevant during natural disasters and other crises.

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- **SDG 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;**

The multifaceted crises of the pandemic and climate change have shown the need for reliable data and connectivity. Broadband connectivity can support early warning and environmental monitoring systems and public awareness campaigns about climate change. However, without universal connectivity, the digital divide could hinder global efforts towards climate action. Digital and broadband has an important role to play in combating the effects of climate change, including in the sustainable use of the sea, oceans and marine resources. Sustainable solutions for the expansion of access and use of broadband must be considered as the global digital transformation advances. For example:

  - Address environmental impacts of digital infrastructure and the potential of connectivity in addressing the climate emergency
  - ICT companies need to do everything they can to reduce and eliminate their operational GHG emissions. This includes adopting concrete targets in line with the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recommendations for minimizing the rise in temperature to 1.5°C.

- Building resilience. Digital and broadband can demonstrate leadership in targeting the reduced carbon emission – and can actively help build resilience to climate stress.
- Digital and mobile technology can address climate change in seven ways (GSMA, 2021) enabling clean energy and energy efficiency; improving mobility and logistics; improving natural resource management and forestry; improving agriculture; managing waste solutions; improved waste management and circular economy solutions; increased disaster preparedness and effective response.

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- **SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals**

The events of the last few years, with a global health pandemic and the swift international pivot to digital delivery of goods, services, work, and play, have yielded unique insights into just how critical stable, broadband access is - and will continue to be. The challenge of the unprecedented global pandemic in 2020 demonstrated the unquestionable centrality of access to connectivity for all, in order to effect sustainable development, economic growth, environmental sustainability and social inclusion. COVID-19 uncovered and highlighted the inequalities among and within countries, and the urgency of achieving universal access to broadband connectivity. The Broadband Commission remains committed to leveraging information and communication technologies (ICTs) to accelerate interventions for human progress, as exemplified by the considerable beneficial interventions initiated by the Commission's own members during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The achievement of the SDGs will require affordable, ubiquitous and meaningful broadband connectivity with the associated essential competencies and application. Through its consensus-driven policy recommendations, the Broadband Commission can work towards expanding broadband connectivity and digital skills globally to support effective implementation of the SDGs. The Commission also calls for the collaborative effort to ensure that people around the world are not only connected, but that they also have the skills and knowledge to use that connectivity.

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**Three key areas where sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for achieving the SDGs and leaving no one behind are being effectively delivered, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2025, also bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.**

The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development recognizes digital connectivity as the foundational element of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Commission is convinced that achieving affordable universal connectivity is essential for achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and making good on its pledge to Leave No-one Behind.

The online world is evolving rapidly. Broadband and computing infrastructure underpins many current developments, including AI and emerging technologies. Conversely, AI stands to impact the Broadband Commission's targets and SDGs.

- **Universal Meaningful Connectivity:**

Internet access for all remains an elusive goal for one third of humanity, with its benefit unevenly distributed. Internet access is a priority because access to broadband Internet is fundamental to inclusive and sustainable development. The Internet and broadband provide an outlet for digital education, professional development, online business, and global connection. An estimated 5.5 billion people are online in 2024, an increase of 227 million individuals based on revised estimates for 2023. Connectivity continues to increase worldwide but reveal the complexities of reaching communities in low-income countries. While an estimated 68 per cent of the global population is now online and all indicators tracked in the report show improvement, stubborn digital divides persist and about one-third of the world's people remain offline. Efforts are still focused towards making broadband universally available, affordable, and providing fair and equitable access to the benefits and opportunities of digital technologies. However, the rapid evolution of digital technologies is continuing apace. Digital technologies, the relatively well-known sector of telecommunication networks, the evolving domain of data and information, and now the dawning era of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications. As the digital landscape transforms, there are various efforts by many stakeholders to ensure that these changes occur within a collectively agreed ethical framework. The ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission stands ready to support policy-makers as they engage with the development of digital technologies and their impact on the policy landscape.

The Broadband Commission is working with governments, private sector, and civil society, realizing the SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) to advocate for policy recommendations to incentivize and accelerate investments in broadband, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can access the benefits of digital connectivity.

https://broadbandcommission.org/publication/state-of-broadband-2024/

- **Develop Digital skills/capacity for digital inclusion and economy**

The development of digital skills is a key component of sustainable development and achieving the SDGs. Without the necessary skills to navigate the digital world, people are unable to fully participate in

the digital economy, engage in virtual education, work remotely or use online resources to improve their lives. Digital literacy is one of the main causes of digital exclusion and often among the top answers when people are surveyed about why they do not use the Internet.

Despite the importance of digital skills in leveraging ICTs for economic prosperity, human rights, peace and social well-being, data remain very scant. Only 83 countries provide this data to international surveys, and rarely for all skill areas. Based on this limited dataset, skills linked to information/data literacy are the most prevalent, with a median of 56% and an average between 33-69% for most countries. The Broadband Commission convened a Working Group on Data on Learning chaired by UNESCO to discuss the double-edged nature of data for learning along three thematic areas: (1) infrastructure and architecture of education data ecosystems, (2) data skills and competence frameworks for life and work, and (3) governance, regarding ethics, national sovereignty and cross-border data flows. The Working Group published its report in 2023, which called for critical data literacy and skills to be strengthened at all levels of the education ecosystem to facilitate improved regulation and innovation through effective implementation and monitoring of education data policies and practices.

The Broadband Commission is committed to advocating for school connectivity, child online safety MSMEs connectivity and digital capacity building programs and resources to ensure that everyone, regardless of age or background, can acquire the necessary digital skills to participate in the modern world and global digital economy.

The Broadband Commission's Working Group on School Connectivity's outcome report: The Digital Transformation of Education: Connecting Schools, Empowering Learners introduced a methodology and framework for connecting primary and secondary schools to the Internet based on a four pillars approach: map schools, connect schools, finance school connectivity and empower learners. This working group also led to the launch of other collaborative initiatives that are working to advance digital skills and connectivity worldwide. Innovative Initiatives like Giga, a partnership incubated in the Broadband Commission, have led the way in mapping and connecting schools to provide learners with connectivity and in some cases become a connectivity hub for communities.

- **Global Digital Collaboration**

Achieving the UN Agenda 2030 will depend on commitment to our common responsibility to collaborate, partner and develop more inclusive and sustainable models. It is essential that all stakeholders are involved along the process to leverage the power of digital to leave no one behind. To mobilize efforts to bring the life-changing benefits of digital transformation to everyone and to reach SDGs, the Broadband Commission puts broadband connectivity at the forefront of global policy discussions. For more than a decade, the Commission has advocated for universal, meaningful and affordable connectivity with a commitment to:

- Contributing thought leadership, advocacy efforts, knowledge and learning resources related to the SDGs, including on education/skills, health, gender equality etc; (The Commission contributes annually to many UN & non-UN led processes and key industry meetings to provide the holistic perspective of its members)
- Leveraging its collective expertise and collaborative solutions to generate policy, regulation and technology recommendations for harnessing the power of digital connectivity to leave no-one

behind; (The Broadband Commission has convened almost 40 Working Groups on the socioeconomic impact of ICTs and issues the annual flagship State of Broadband Report, that analyzes global connectivity challenges and successes, and tracks progress toward achieving its 7 Advocacy Targets)

- Fostering and catalyzing public-private partnerships. (For example, the Commission has been an incubator for many high-impact initiatives such as UNICEF/ITU Giga, Equals and the Child Safety Online Declaration. Several impactful initiatives have been incubated such as Giga, EQUALs, and the Child Online Protection Declaration.)

The Broadband Commission is an example of an effective cross-sectoral platform bringing together a diverse group of 50+ world leaders to discuss the impact of broadband and connectivity for achieving the Commission's seven targets and the UN 2030 Agenda. The Commission calls for collaborative effort to ensure that people around the world are not only connected, but that they also have the skills and knowledge to use that connectivity.

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**Three examples of measures to accelerate progress towards SDGs through well-coordinated actions in key transitions to bring progress to scale (food security, energy access and affordability, digital connectivity, education, jobs and social protection, climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution), building on interlinkages between SDGs to ensure cohesive progress.**

The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development is committed to advocating for sustainable, resilient, and innovative solutions that build on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving the SDGs.

- **Strategies and policies to enable broadband adoption and accelerate digital inclusion:** To eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda, it is crucial to prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive national broadband policies. Such policies should focus on ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable, and high-quality broadband services. This aligns with the Commission's Advocacy Target 1, which calls for all countries to have a National Broadband Plan or strategy, or to include broadband in their Universal Access and Service Definitions. This policy-level commitment is the first critical step towards enabling digital

inclusion and harnessing the power of broadband for sustainable development. But digital policy-making continues to evolve. The speed of technological developments continues to accelerate and expand to all aspects of life. Policy-makers are looking beyond regulating network infrastructure to broader questions around the digital economy. Policy debates about communication services and network infrastructure have evolved into debates about regulation of other activities and services, as the use of digital technologies continues to expand. AI adds a new dimension to policy-making, and policy-makers are racing to catch up. With the roll out of more AI systems, policy-makers may be faced with growing questions of how AI is used, as well as the societal and economic impacts of those uses. Regulators and policy-makers are racing to identify all-important considerations in governance, policy and standards, for the ethical use of AI tools and applications, as well as the data used to train them.

- **Innovative Financing Models for Universal Connectivity:** Achieving the SDGs will require significant investment in digital infrastructure. As such, the Broadband Commission advocates for innovative financing models and partnerships that can mobilize the necessary resources. This is in alignment with the Broadband Commission's Advocacy Target 2 of making broadband affordable in developing countries by 2025, and Advocacy Target 3, of getting everyone online, directly contributing to SDGs in review.

Recommendations for innovative and inclusive of financing and funding connectivity models are outlined in the Broadband Commission Working Group Report on 21st Century Financing Models Executive Summary, the State of Broadband Report 2023 and other recommendations:

  - Broaden contributor base and implement creative funding approaches, including incentivizing infrastructure funding, reforming Universal Service and Access Funds (USAF) approaches
  - Alignment and incentivizing funding contributors is key for government connectivity plans, mobilizing all sectors' pools of capital by removing challenges and barriers to network infrastructure investment
  - Build network infrastructure policies to last with sustainable and agile plans

- **Digital Capacity Building:** Digital skills are fundamental to fully leveraging the potential of broadband connectivity to achieve the 2030 Agenda, in line with the Advocacy Target 4 on digital skills development. The Broadband Commission believes in the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in this area. By bringing together governments, the private sector, civil society, and educational institutions, we can develop comprehensive strategies for digital skills development. This includes improving access to devices, providing digital skills training to civil servants, teachers and students, collecting data and integrating digital skills and the use of data into formal education curriculums. The recent Broadband Commission report on Data for Learning calls for stakeholders to take three actions to improve the digital education ecosystem:
  - Close the digital data divide to make education more relevant and resilient for all learners everywhere.
  - Close the data skills divide to make education data use safer, smarter, and more secure.
  - Strengthen international normative instruments for data-sharing across borders and between public and private institutions.

In addition, the Commission's Working Group on AI Capacity Building for Civil Servants developed a Competency Framework for Civil Servants for Digital Transformation, including AI, that aims to:

- Promote trustworthy, inclusive and human rights-centric implementation of AI technology
- Enhance the capabilities of civil servants to engage in national digital transformations
- Build a knowledge platform for future capacity-strengthening efforts by the Broadband Commission, including localized initiatives

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**Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by your intergovernmental body or forum to support implementation of the 2023 SDG Summit Political Declaration and the outcomes of the 2024 Summit of the Future, to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The example of selected Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development's follow-up actions and measures to support the implementation of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit, including:

- **Advocacy:** The Commission continues its advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the fundamental importance of broadband connectivity in achieving the SDGs, especially as it reached the deadline to achieve its seven advocacy targets. It will leverage the influence of its membership to bring connectivity to the top of global policy discussions and use its channels to illustrate the importance of connectivity for inclusive and sustainable development.

  Examples of the Commission's advocacy work include:
  - Flagship reports measuring the progress of 7 Advocacy Targets
  - Continued contributions to UN Processes & Events
  - Bi-monthly newsletters
  - Dissemination of other reports and policy recommendations
  - Multistakeholder events

- **Policy Recommendations and Thought leadership:** The Commission continues to develop and promote policy recommendations for all stakeholders to increase access, affordability and use of broadband. The Commission highlights the cross-sectoral actions of its memberships to track progress on its goals, as well as provide real-life case-studies of effective programs. The Commission will continue to develop recommendations through its Working Groups , including the current one on Data Governance and Annual State of Broadband Report.

- **Fostering Global Digital Collaboration:** The Commission fosters partnerships between governments, private sector, civil society and academia to ensure a holistic perspective when preparing policy recommendations. By building these diverse partnerships, the Commission can facilitate the collaborative efforts needed to expand broadband access and use, thereby contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission contributes to multistakeholder initiatives and provides inputs to processes of the United Nations, such as:
    - Global Digital Compact,
    - High-Level Political Forum
    - WSIS

References:

- https://broadbandcommission.org/recommendations/
- https://broadbandcommission.org/advocacy-campaigns/
- Contributions to UN Processes - Broadband Commission

**Recommendations and key messages to be considered for inclusion in the Ministerial Declaration of the 2025 HLP**

The Broadband Commission annually releases the State of Broadband report. This report draws on the collective knowledge of over 50 high-level Commissioners and offers a global overview of the broadband landscape. It also includes a series of actionable policy recommendations and considerations jointly developed by the members.
For consideration into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2025 HLPF, the Broadband Commission's 2023 State of Broadband Report: Digital Connectivity: A Transformative Opportunity offers a set of recommendations for the road ahead to achieve the Commission's Advocacy Targes, and thereby advance progress on the UN 2030 Agenda.
The State of Broadband 2024 titled "Leveraging AI for Universal Connectivity," aims to inform policymakers on AI advancements and the Commission's goals. It emphasizes the urgent need for policymakers to leverage AI's benefits while mitigating potential risks, ensuring equitable access to digital opportunities for all.

Key messages:

1) **Define (and re-define) measurable goals for "universal meaningful connectivity", to meet today's needs**
    a. While governments should be supporting infrastructure incentives in high-cost areas, demand support initiatives, and digital ecosystem initiatives, countries should avoid falling into a digital chasm of seeking to meet minimum standards only; countries should also be aiming for high-performing, high-capacity connectivity, setting the connectivity ambition bar as high as possible
2) **Close the usage gap by addressing key barriers to people adopting and using the internet where coverage is available**

a. Policies and initiatives addressing digital literacy, affordable devices, relevant content and maintenance support are powerful tools to increase adoption and close the Usage Gap. The residual coverage gap, particularly in low density rural areas will be met by a mix of fiber, terrestrial wireless and satellite technologies should be available for funds as is most appropriate.

3) **Broaden the base of contributors and implement creative funding approaches, including incentivizing infrastructure funding and reforming Universal Service and Access Funds (USAF) approaches**
    a. For digital transformation to fully benefit everyone and close the digital divide, industry and governments must work together to put high-performing, high-capacity connectivity in place at speed and scale. Governments can broaden the base of contributors by including companies participating in and benefiting from the digital economy. Governments could be ear-marking ICT sector contributions to governments and spending it on initiatives supporting connectivity and adoption goals, and reforming USAFs to be more effective financing mechanisms that support and expand connectivity to ICT services.
4) **Align and incentivize funding contributors to mobilize all sectors' pools of capital by removing challenges and barriers to network infrastructure investment**
    a. This requires governments to go with the grain of development finance institutions (DFIs) and ensure that challenges and barriers to private sector investment are removed and reduced, e.g.
        i. Ensuring market structures are sustainable and incentivize investment,
        ii. Ensuring technology and vendor neutrality; where governments avoid picking winners, distorting markets and impinging on private sector investment.
        iii. Enabling a fair competition / level playing field, spurs investment, innovation and cooperation. It also means that the best technologies rise and scale on their merits, securing broad use, interoperability and affordability
        iv. Trading off spectrum fees and extending license lengths for commitments to build out meaningful connectivity infrastructure to areas where it is lacking rebalance, fostering transparency and efficient permit granting procedures, providing harmonized mobile spectrum in a timely and affordable manner, focusing on harnessing long-term societal value.
        v. Direct government interventions should be limited to market failures alone and in helping meet the needs of underserved households and businesses, again without distorting competition dynamics and in a way that amplifies private sector investments, respecting technology neutrality.
5) **Build network infrastructure policies to last with sustainable and agile plans**
    a. Governments should consider building sustainable policies that are both robust and resilient, giving policymakers the agility to scale up and/or adjust plans where necessary. A number of approaches should be considered:
        i. Using global, open standards within the network infrastructure. Without global standards, it would not have been possible for communication network technologies to compete, succeed and scale globally. Because the industry adopted and used international standards widely, it resulted in the expansion of

communication technology coverage to regions not previously covered, and scaling up improves affordability and enable cost reduction for the entire supply chain: manufacturers, operators, and users. Countries should seek to prevent fragmentation of standard setting for telecommunications and digital technologies and pursue the continuation of and adherence to global open standards as is the case with mobile technologies in 5G, extending to 6G.

ii. Creating a database of funding best practices and their impact on broadband adoption and economic development,

iii. Creating an international ICT investment fund with the objective of supporting sustainable development of broadband connectivity and hosting the fund in a multilateral development bank (MDB) or an existing international organization.

6) **Policy-making in relation to AI is rapidly evolving - policy responses are in the early stages of development and policy-makers and legislators are trying to find the proper balance that promotes the benefits of AI while managing possible risks**

Countries and regions begin to establish guidelines or regulations to balance AI's benefits against its risks, although comprehensive policy responses by a large number of countries and normative recommendations are still under development. -

At the current crossroads, as broadband and computing infrastructure provides the basis for changes brought about by AI, policy responses are in the early stages of development. The State of Broadband report 2024 aims to inform policy-makers about developments in AI and their effects on the goals of the Broadband Commission, as policy-makers engage with the development of digital technologies and their impact on the policy landscape.

**References:**


- https://broadbandcommission.org/publication/state-of-broadband-2023/
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