

Tech Envoy Office's Inputs to Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014 – 2024

II. An overview of recent socio-economic development in LLDCs including impact of COVID-19 pandemic

(The section will analyse recent developments in the social and economic situation of the LLDCs including progress made by LLDCs on the SDGs and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on these countries. The analysis will integrate gender and human rights.)

As the world now focuses on recovering from COVID-19 and faces new global challenges, we must recognize the essential significance of digital technologies. However, although internet use had increased during the COVID pandemic, 2.9 billion people still remain without access to internet. LLDCs are even more seriously affected by this digital divide, because of challenges associated with geography and other structural constraints. For instance, in 2021 the internet usage rate in LLDCs was 34.7%, far below the world average of 63%.

This lack of basic connectivity and internet access means that LLDCs are unable to fully enjoy and engage with the transformative potential of digital technologies. An important reason for limited access to broadband is that broadband services remain unaffordable for most of LLDCs, broadband costs are comparatively higher than in coastal countries, due to their remoteness from submarine communication cables, and hence, need to access fiber optic submarine cables through cross-border connectivity, which largely depends on transit infrastructure, political relations with neighbors, and administrative processes in transit.

The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology is now working closely with partners, including the Office of the High Representative, to implement the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, with key action points in areas such as global connectivity and digital capacity-building. These are critical in supporting the Vienna Plan of Action, which calls for LLDCs to make broadband policy universal, promote open and affordable internet access for all and actively engage to address the digital divide.

III. Status of implementation of the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action

(The section will assess the progress made in the implementation of the VPoA highlighting the major progress and challenges experienced including due to COVID-19. The specific sub sections will be namely: Fundamental Transit Policy issues; Infrastructure Development and Maintenance; International Trade and Trade Facilitation; Regional Integration and cooperation; Structural economic transformation; Means of implementation.)

N/A

IV. Follow-up and review and progress on Roadmap for accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in the remaining five years

(The section will highlight progress in other activities of the United Nations system and other international organizations relating to implementation of the priorities of the VPoA including the Roadmap for accelerated implementation of the VPoA.)

The Tech Envoy Office is working with UN partners and stakeholder partners to promote a human-centered approach to achieving universal connectivity and broader concrete actions and partnership efforts to push universal connectivity forward, including GIGA, a UNICEF-ITU initiative to connect all schools around the world to the Internet to accelerate connectivity, with activities in LLDCs, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Niger, Rwanda, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe.

The Tech Envoy Office has also established a Roadmap Response Team (RRT) with DCO, as an interagency initiative to support Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams in implementing the Roadmap at the national level and accompany national digitalization efforts. Currently the RRT is exploring how to strengthen interagency collaboration in a more coordinated manner to better support RCs and UNCTs, and has worked closely with interested RCOs and UNCTs.

In line with the Digital Cooperation Roadmap's recommendation for scaling up coordinated global digital capacity-building efforts, the Tech Envoy Office, together with ITU and UNDP, has launched an online website for digital capacity-building, a ITU-UNDP Joint Facility mechanism and a multistakeholder capacity-building network

In November 2021, UN-DESA together with the Tech Envoy Office launched a mapping exercise of Digital-Related Initiatives in the UN System, to analyze the landscape of UN digital-related activity and facilitate further collaboration on harnessing digital technologies to achieve SDGs.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

(This section will provide key recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action based on the analysis provided in the report.)

1. Renew efforts to achieve 2030 target to universal and affordable internet for LLDCs

The Doha Programme of Action for the LDC5 Conference contains specific targets for LDCs to achieve universal meaningful connectivity by 2030. The ITU, Office of the Tech Envoy working with multistakeholder partners will issue (at end-April) a set of aspirational targets to achieve this, including recommendations for affordability and penetration – a baseline for universal meaningful connectivity.

2. Enhanced Global Efforts to strengthen digital capacity-building for LLDCs

The following are needed:

More scaled up and coherent and coordinated global efforts, engaging all stakeholders — Governments, civil society and the private sector — to help LLDCs to better understand digital issues and develop national capacity to steer cooperation related to social and economic impacts of digital technologies.

Greater Support to LLDC governments in developing a robust and effective regulatory framework, with policies to encourage digital infrastructure and services, digital capacity-building, digital transformation, while being equipped to address and mitigate risks and challenges of digitalization, including ensuring promoting and protection of human rights.

Promote partnerships with the private sector especially tech companies, to leverage fully on their capacity for innovation to facilitate LLDCs overcoming their geographical vulnerability in achieving full internet coverage and boost digital capacity-building on all levels; to encourage investment in LLDCs, including through pilot programmes to implement green technologies and innovations, as well as motivate private

sector investment in sustainable network infrastructure and practical digital capacity-building initiatives. Lessons learnt and good practices from successful private sector efforts and pilots in areas such as digital connectivity, capacity-building and digital transformation should be shared and countries with similar challenges.

3. Fully recognize the needs and priorities of the LLDCs in global digital discussions

Promoting Internet connectivity and digital capacity-building is not a standalone goal from other objectives; LLDCs should harness digital technologies for their environment and social-economic developments. Given variances within and among countries and regions, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Greater understanding and country/local level studies are thus needed of which connectivity and capacity-building approaches are most effective, considering political, economic and social contexts.