

COVID-19 crisis
Broadband Commission
Agenda for Action
For faster and better recovery

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For faster and better recovery

Resilient connectivity, affordable access, and safe use of online services for informed and educated societies.

Never before have broadband networks and services been so vital to our health and safety and to keeping our economy and societies working. Digital is truly the hidden hero of this unprecedented global crisis.

With the new coronavirus continuing to ravage many nations around the globe and now beginning to make in-roads in countries less well-equipped to handle a major health emergency, immediate action is needed to ensure no one is left behind in humanity's collective response to the crisis.

The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, the UN's high-level public-private partnership, is committed to putting digital cooperation into action, to keep economies and societies working, and to support the world's vulnerable populations (the elderly, refugees and internally displaced populations, persons with disabilities, children, rural dwellers, indigenous communities, and those residing in the most vulnerable countries).

A global pandemic demands a global response. The stakes have never been higher. We believe

that building, reinforcing and scaling digital cooperation around three key broadband pillars will help accelerate our collective response to COVID-19 and lay the groundwork for a better and faster recovery built on a broadband internet enabled world.

Commissioners and their organizations are urgently collaborating to compile and disseminate a repository of tangible actions based on the three pillars of resilient connectivity, affordable access, and safe use of online services for informed and educated societies, to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and ease the immediate adverse impacts for economies and societies.

Commissioners commit to champion and implement this Agenda for Action and invite all parties – intergovernmental, regional, national, industry, civil society and technical and academic communities – to join with us to leverage the power of broadband for more effective emergency response and to promote faster and better recovery.

The 3 pillars of the Agenda for Action



1. Resilient connectivity

Sustain and extend resilient, stable and secure infrastructure to support all populations, including emergency responders. Increase bandwidth, restore service access where this has been restricted, strengthen network resilience, manage network congestion, prioritize connections to critical government functions, vital services and strategic connectivity points (such as hospitals, pharmacies, emergency centres, transportation hubs...), and ensure continuity of public services, which may require temporary relaxation of regulations and other policy measures necessary to fast-track response.



2. Affordable Access

Increase affordability, availability and accessibility of services and devices to ensure business and service continuity, support digital connectivity to ensure access to information and to promote social cohesion during confinement, and to help with financial hardship and economic challenges, through measures like price reductions and discounts on capacity, airtime and devices. Support alternative funding models for complimentary access solutions.



3. Safe use of online services for informed and educated societies

Support safe use of online services by all, especially children and vulnerable population; respect the right to privacy; promote trust and security in the use of data; enable safe digital content sharing to support e-education, e-health, digital agriculture, e-financial services and mobile payments, and e-government platforms; empower youth, ensure and promote child safety online; promote the use of broadband to provide distance-learning programmes for all ages; empower people with quality journalism and evidence-based and scientific information about COVID-19; promote media and information literacy to detect disinformation and to advance understanding on the dangers of sharing false facts about COVID-19.

These proposed immediate actions to address the acute phase of the current pandemic and to save lives will need to be followed by mid- and longer-term strategies to ensure faster global recovery by minimizing the social and economic impact of COVID-19 and to prepare for future global challenges. Better recovery will depend on a commitment to our common responsibility to collaborate, partner and develop more inclusive and sustainable models for preventive and post-crisis development and preparedness for future crises.

Short-term agenda

Proposed immediate actions for impact:
Commissioners' Commitments



Industry, private sector



Resilient and secure connectivity

Ensure connectivity and network continuity, increase bandwidth capacity and network resilience and security, including for vulnerable populations in LDCs and in refugee camps

Manage capacity to ensure rational use of the network

Provide vital/emergency services to support general population as well as emergency responders



Lease spare satellite transponder capacity at very nominal costs during emergency crisis

Provide temporary royalty-free software licenses for capacity augmentation, and Intellectual Property rights for related vital service delivery



Affordable access

Provide in-kind support through donation of ICT services, cloud services, software, equipment and end user devices, and support working from home

Identify solutions for liquidity and financial shortage to ensure service continuity

Offer special tariffs for related health, education, humanitarian and emergency workers/services

Offer free SMS and zero rating for access to health, educational content and government information services

Safe use of online services for informed and educated societies

Make available broadcasting capacity for education and health

Make available safe and secured digital platforms and open source software for health, education, food security, financial and governmental services, including sharing open-source Digital Public Goods

Promote quality education and information content and services; enhance policies against disinformation, increase transparency

Provide online training and safe digital tools to parents and teachers to keep children safer online

Share data on a voluntary basis and use AI to perform analytics for prevention and monitoring purposes, ensuring data anonymization

Use AI to support medical institutions

Short-term agenda

Proposed immediate actions for impact:
Commissioners' Commitments



Government, policy makers, regulators



Resilient and secure connectivity

Implement policy and regulatory actions to: - temporarily relieve network capacity constraints and keep networks running and operational (including decreasing taxes and fees, offering wholesale services, temporarily freeing up additional spectrum which can be immediately deployed, infrastructure sharing, using existing USF funds, promoting cross border roaming etc)

- maintain internet access
- support urgent requirements to expand bandwidth and connectivity, inclusive of marginalized groups and vulnerable populations, including refugees
- streamline customs processes and classify network equipment as essential infrastructure to ensure supply chain continuity



Affordable access

Facilitate delivery of (and remove barriers to) industry commitments, and general provision of ICT services

Use USF funding to support affordable access to health, education, humanitarian and emergency services and people and communities with special needs

Safe use of online services for informed and educated societies

Provide guidance to consumers and the general population in areas including child online safety, data protection and cybersecurity measures

Increase proactive publishing to promote access to information, support learning institutions to conduct distance classes, take actions to foster media and information literacy

Short-term agenda

Proposed immediate actions for impact:
Commissioners' Commitments



UN, IGO, international financial institutions



Resilient and secure connectivity

Mobilize expertise, foster better coordination and international technical support

Affordable access

Finance national digital connectivity initiatives, and electricity generation, transmission and distribution vital for digital service provision

Create pricing strategies and financing/investment documents to help finance national connectivity in schools, to be extended to health centres, emergency hubs, etc.

Safe use of online services for informed and educated societies

Promote and nurture innovative partnerships among organizations and with the private sector

Support norms and provide resources to educational and media institutions

Short-term agenda

Proposed immediate actions for impact:
Commissioners' Commitments



Academia, NGOs, non profits, civil society

Resilient and secure connectivity

Provide support with expertise, research, innovation and thought leadership

Affordable access

Provide online educational content in local languages, training in health care and emergency services, and training for (non-IT) teleworkers

Safe use of online services for informed and educated societies

Provide digital skills training programmes,
programmes to promote online safety

Monitor and promote open educational Resources, enhance online capacity building around issues relating to information and disinformation

COOPERATION

Industry,
private sector



Government,
policy makers, regulators



UN, IGO, international
financial institutions



Academia, NGOs,
non profits, civil society



**These proposed actions will be selected
by each interested party according to the
development of corresponding information
infrastructure in each country.**

Medium term agenda



Acceleration and implementation of digital cooperation and digital strategies and policies, including emergency health response, safer use policies, and strategies to promote greater digital inclusion, and identifying gaps for effective response and better preparedness.



Elevation to the G20 level of resilient broadband networks as a basic right.



Implementation of agile and flexible regulatory measures to support inclusive and competitive digital environment.



Adoption of strategies aimed at promoting universal, affordable broadband connectivity by mobilizing public and private funding and investment, especially in Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.



Implementation of streamlined actions and partnerships to promote the expansion of, broadband connectivity, digital services and digital inclusiveness to unconnected communities and populations still lacking access.



Emphasizing and promoting the ongoing importance of connectivity for education, access to information and online user empowerment through media and information literacy.



Highlighting of areas where connectivity is playing a key role in the COVID-19 pandemic response and sharing of these stories to help build better and more resilient societies.



Identifying major partners for public financing of connectivity of vital services including schools, and actions to attract institutional finance investors looking for a compelling market opportunity.

The current health emergency highlights the urgency of the Broadband Commission's core mandate and ongoing agenda, and the work of its various Working Groups. Current Working Groups are focused on a broad range of areas including identifying new 21st century financing models for broadband access and connectivity; expanding broadband connectivity in Africa; mapping, connecting and financing connectivity for all the world's schools; the use of AI to facilitate and accelerate better health care responses; and the deployment of broadband to facilitate public private partnerships to enhance epidemic preparedness.

About

The **Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development** was launched by ITU and UNESCO in 2010 to advocate for the power of broadband to drive sustainable development and accelerate progress towards the Global Goals. The Commission comprises a high-powered community, including CEOs and industry leaders, senior policy-makers and government representatives, heads of international agencies, academia, and organizations concerned with regional and global development.

The Commission advances its vision and mission through its annual State of Broadband report, along with deep-dives into key issues led by specialized Working Groups. These Working Groups produce “state of the art” reports on the progress and development of broadband and related digital technologies and their beneficial impact on sustainable development. Landmark reports include:

Connecting Africa Through Broadband: A Strategy for Doubling Connectivity by 2021 and Reaching Universal Access by 2030

Epidemic Preparedness: Preventing the Spread of Epidemics Using ICTs

Digital Health: A Call for Government Leadership and Cooperation between ICT and Health

The Promise of Digital Health: Addressing Non-communicable Diseases to Accelerate Universal Health Coverage in LMICs

Child Online Safety: Minimising the Risk of Violence, Abuse and Exploitation Online

Digital Gender Divide: Bridging the Gender Gap in Internet and Broadband Access and Use

Education: Digital Skills for Life and Work

Digital Entrepreneurship

Broadband for the Most Vulnerable Countries

Digitalization Scorecard: Which Policies and Regulations can Help Advance Digitalization

Linking ICT with Climate Action for a Low Carbon Economy

Creating a Favourable Environment for Attracting Finance and Investment in Broadband Infrastructure

The Commission has also been instrumental in launching the following global initiatives:

“EQUALS”, the ITU/ITC/GSMA/ UN Women Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age

“GIGA” the ITU/UNICEF Global Initiative to Connect Every School to Internet by 2030

Child Online Safety Universal Declaration