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Subject: Mainstreaming digital solutions and technologies in EU development policy
- Council conclusions (28 November 2016)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council Conclusions on mainstreaming digital solutions and technologies in EU development policy, as adopted by the Council at its 3505th meeting held on 28 November 2016.

**Council Conclusions on mainstreaming
digital solutions and technologies in EU development policy**

1. The exponential spread and scale-up of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), including the Internet, have profound global implications, creating opportunities in terms of sustainable development and inclusive growth, as well as people empowerment and enhanced democratic governance. It however entails also new challenges and threats. Digitalisation needs to be properly mainstreamed across all policy areas, including in the EU's development and foreign policies, while addressing cyber challenges and assuring the promotion and protection of human rights, including privacy, data protection and freedom of expression, with particular attention to freedoms online, in the digital age;
2. The Council welcomes the reference to ICT throughout the UN 2030 Agenda both as specific targets and as means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹. The Council also recalls the WSIS+10 review in December 2015² calling all relevant stakeholders to integrate ICT when implementing the SDGs. The Council further recalls its relevant Council Conclusions³;
3. The Council underlines the significant contribution of digital technologies in all socio-economic and environmental dimensions as well as their role in promoting democracy, good governance, inclusion and participation in decision-making processes, non-discrimination, equality and equity, as well as transparency and accountability, including through eGovernment processes. Digital technologies hold great potential for enhancing the effectiveness of the public administration services and making them more citizen and business oriented, particularly, open data is critical for an evidenced-based policy-making that boosts development and growth;

¹ A/RES/70/1.

² A/RES/70/125.

³ Council conclusions on Cyber Diplomacy of 11 February 2015 (Doc. 6122/15) and Council conclusions on A New Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015 of 26 May 2015 (Doc. 9241/15).

4. The Council recalls the importance of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline adopted on 12 May 2014, and stresses the importance of upholding the Rule of Law on Internet;
5. In order to tackle cyber threats at global level, international cooperation and assistance in cyber capacity building play an essential role in enabling States to secure information and communication technology and their peaceful use. The Council highlights the need to support national and regional exchange and cyber capacity building and adopt strategies and legislation for cyber security and against cybercrime, as part of a comprehensive set of policy, legislative and operational measures, including actions to protect critical infrastructures, to counter violent extremist and terrorist use of the Internet, human trafficking, as well as child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation online, in accordance with international human rights law. The Council also highlights the need to support the establishment of national computer emergency response teams and/or computer security incident response teams in partner countries. Equally, the Council backs the efforts of the European Commission to promote the fight against online hate speech on the basis of ethnicity, ideology, sexual orientation, and gender identity;
6. As digital technologies enhance information management and communications, they can help improve civil registries and thereby contribute to the realisation of the human right to birth registration and nationality, and subsequently facilitate the enjoyment of other rights and services. This can increase the positive effects of mobility. In the context of forced displacement, electronic registration can facilitate delivery of humanitarian and development assistance. The Council encourages the use of digital technologies in responding to disasters and the implementation of humanitarian projects, as well as in the context of migration with a view to supporting refugees and host communities. Digital technologies can also significantly contribute to reducing remittances transfer costs;

7. In spite of good progress achieved in recent years, the Council is concerned by the persistent digital divides and the unequal distribution of ICT benefits. The Council stresses the need to bridge these divides with a particular focus on facilitating access, affordability, and the further development of content and services in a variety of languages and formats that are accessible to all people who also need the capabilities and capacities, including media, information and digital literacy skills, to make use of and further develop information and communication technologies. In line with the overarching principle of the 2030 Agenda to “Leave No One Behind”, particular focus should be placed on access for underserved and marginalised communities, notably in least developed countries, as well as on promoting gender equality, youth empowerment and the inclusion of persons with disabilities, in order to prevent the enlargement of existing inequalities and the rise of new ones;
8. The Council recognises that there are a number of barriers, including socio-cultural constraints, lack of skills and the underrepresentation in the IT sector, that prevent women from reaping the benefits of the digital transformation and that need to be overcome to close the gender digital divide. The Council emphasises that digital technologies can be a powerful catalyst for economic, political and social empowerment of women as well as a tool to promote gender equality, in line with the commitments in the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020;
9. The Council emphasises that digital technologies play a strategic role in the development and growth of the cultural and creative industries sector and, as such, should be used to protect and promote cultural diversity;

10. Sound institutional governance and access to energy are key conditions for improving access to digital technologies. Access to affordable and non-discriminatory digital infrastructure and broadband connectivity remain major obstacles to development in many developing countries, notably in rural and remote areas. Its deployment requires a business friendly environment based on legal certainty and the reduction of administrative obstacles in order to boost investment. Publicly financed open access infrastructures can also be used to extend services where private investment is lacking. Developing independent and neutral Internet peering capacities represents a crucial prerequisite to improve the quality of Internet connection and reduce prices;
11. The Council stresses the importance of promoting a free, open, inclusive and safe Internet. Recalling paragraph 29 of the Tunis Agenda⁴, the Council recognises that the management of the Internet as a global facility includes multilateral, transparent, democratic and multi-stakeholder processes, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society, international organisations, technical and academic communities, and all other relevant stakeholders with their respective roles and responsibilities. The Council welcomes the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority function stewardship transition to the global multi-stakeholder community. Autonomous and effective management of national internet domains (ccTLDs) represents a key part of ICT development in each country;
12. Enhancing digital literacy and skills is essential to ensure that development interventions, enhanced by the use of digital technologies, generate positive outcomes for the target groups and leave no one behind;

⁴ Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6 (Rev. 1)-E.

13. Supporting digital entrepreneurship, including for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, start-ups and scale-ups, are essential to develop locally relevant content, promote innovation, and to foster job creation and growth. The Council underlines the need to address the challenges and opportunities that digitalisation brings to the micro, small and medium enterprises with regard to access to finance and access to global value chains, including through innovative financing solutions and by reducing the risk and cost of servicing SMEs;
14. Ownership of regional policy strategies is also crucial to ensure sufficient take-up of digital technologies, including locally developed software in the local language, mobile applications and content as such. The Council recalls the need to support the development of multilingual Internet, particularly through investing in translation and language technologies, in order to promote the broadest use of ICT and spread of the digital economy worldwide. The Council calls to prioritise open digital solutions, including open licence models, for any EU development supported solutions to maximise public benefit and to foster cost-effective scalability and sustainability;
15. The Council underlines the importance of creating favorable conditions for the necessary investments for the deployment of Machine to Machine and Internet of Things solutions, including initiatives on smart industries and cities, noting that, due to their global nature, interoperability of services and movements of data across borders may represent an important element in exploiting their potential benefits to all citizens and businesses;
16. The Council emphasises the importance of facilitating access to finance for ICT infrastructure, as well as supporting safe and secure digital and mobile economy, including broadening mobile devices penetration, in partner countries. More efforts are needed to promote public-private partnerships and attract private sector investment, including through EIB supported projects and the use of innovative financial mechanisms, through the European External Investment Plan;

17. The Council stresses the need to promote policy coherence for sustainable development, notably through research and innovation, and recalls the conclusions on the EU Digital Single Market Strategy⁵ and in particular the eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020⁶ bringing important aspects of digitalisation which may be translated into development cooperation policy;
18. The Council insists on the importance of using ICT as an enabler for sustainable development, inclusive growth and inclusive societies. To this end, the Council encourages the Commission to develop its capacities in this regard and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to raise awareness at headquarters level and in country delegations. Digital by default should be a guiding principle for implementing development projects in the 21st century, with sensitivity to existing digital divides;
19. The Council calls for the rapid launch of pilot initiatives in selected priority areas, including support for formulating appropriate policies and strategies for digital development, improving affordable connectivity, equal access, digital literacy and skills, eGovernment, cyber capacity building, digital entrepreneurship, as well as the use of digital technologies and services in other sectors. The Council underlines that small projects in target areas should represent a coherent complement to large infrastructure projects, and be implemented in line with the principles for digital development⁷, in order to address the digital divide more efficiently;

⁵ Doc. 8735/16.

⁶ Doc. 12359/16.

⁷ www.digitalprinciples.org

20. The Council stresses the need to enhance knowledge sharing and coordination between the EU institutions and the Member States on future programming, pooling of aid resources and implementation of projects related to ICT with the aim to distribute deliverables of EU development cooperation within partner countries in a balanced manner. Fostering partnerships with all relevant stakeholders that are active in the ICT sector is essential to enhance the positive impact of ICT on sustainable development, including by providing swift responses in the event of natural disasters. Stronger coordination and engagement in multilateral fora as well as multi-stakeholder policy dialogue with developing and emerging economies can also create common ground for global governance mechanisms preventing trends of Internet fragmentation;
21. Finally, the Council welcomes the Commission proposal to revise the European Consensus on Development stressing the role of digital solutions and technologies in EU's future development cooperation. The Council insists on the need for a more strategic EU approach on the impact and opportunities of digitalisation to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and as an enabler for aid efficiency, and therefore invites the Commission to prepare a Staff Working Document on mainstreaming digital solutions and technologies across EU Development Policy.
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