



Sixth annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

[Special event: Digital Cooperation in the Decade of Action](#)

Background

In the words of the UN Secretary General *“Digital technology is shaping history. But there is also the sense that it is running away with us. Where will it take us? Will our dignity and rights be enhanced or diminished? Will our societies become more equal or less equal? Will we become more, or less, secure and safe? The answers to these questions depend on our ability to work together across disciplines and actors, across nations and political divides. We have a collective responsibility to give direction to these technologies so that we maximize benefits and curtail unintended consequences and malicious use.”*

Indeed, digital technology has enormous potential for positive change but can also reinforce and magnify existing fault lines and worsen economic and other inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified existing digital divides between countries and groups of people, as the world has moved social and economic interactions online. At the same, digital technologies have also been greatly beneficial in keeping people connected. Supercomputers and grass-roots Internet-connected computation collaborations have successfully supported the search for medicines and vaccines against COVID-19. Digital platforms have helped securing supplies for billions and enabled education and economic activity. However, as ever more people are being brought online, new vulnerabilities such as data breaches and misinformation have become increasingly significant. Similarly, digital technologies also have had increasing direct and indirect impacts on the environment – both positive and negative.

Based on recommendations from the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel for Digital Cooperation (2018-2019) and additional consultations with key stakeholders from governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, academic institutions, the technical community, and other relevant stakeholders, the eight areas of actions were envisaged in the Secretary General’s Roadmap on digital cooperation, including achieving universal connectivity by 2030; promoting digital public goods to create a more equitable world; ensuring digital inclusion for all, including the most vulnerable; strengthening digital capacity building; ensuring the protection of human rights in the digital era; supporting global cooperation on artificial intelligence; promoting trust and security in the digital environment; and building a more effective architecture for digital cooperation.

Objectives

This special event will build on session 5 which broadly explored the latest developments in science and technology and their current and potential future impacts on sustainable development. It specifically

focuses on digital cooperation in the Decade of Action can accelerate progress to the SDGs. It will include discussions on artificial intelligence, connect to the PGA's high-level thematic debate on digital cooperation and connectivity, and seek TFM synergies with multiple stakeholders active in the follow-up to the SG's roadmap on digital cooperation. The event will explore broader STI actions that are essential to close digital divides, including gender digital divides.

Format

The session will be structured as a moderated panel discussion (5 minutes per panelist). Panelists will make their interventions and the moderator will take comments and questions from the audience during an interactive discussion. The session will close with a brief presentation of main outcomes of the discussion by the moderator.

Questions for discussion

The discussion will be guided by the following questions:

- How can the world close the digital divide and achieve universal, affordable and reliable access to the Internet for all?
- What are opportunities and risks of digitalization in developing and developed countries?
- What are your three most important recommendations for policy and concrete digital cooperation action that promise to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals?
- What should be the role of the UN Technology Facilitation Mechanism in digital cooperation? How could it support the Secretary General's roadmap for digital cooperation?

Supporting documents/publications

- [UN Secretary General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation \(UN, June 2020\)](#)
- [IATT report for the STI Forum: "Emerging science, frontier technologies, and the SDGs – Perspectives from the UN system and science and technology communities" \(IATT, May 2021\)](#)
- [UN Technology and Innovation Report \(UNCTAD, 2021\)](#)