

**Statement of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
Briefing for Member States and Stakeholders on the preparations of the
11th Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology, and Innovation
for the Sustainable Development Goals (STI Forum)
4 March 2026 10:00 ET**

Mr. President, STI Forum Co-Chairs, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to deliver this statement. ITU is a proud member of the Inter-Agency Task Team on STI. We congratulate the Co-Chairs, Zambia and Austria, on their appointment. ITU looks forward to supporting your leadership and contributing actively to a successful 2026 STI Forum.

On the review of **SDG 9**, specifically, we wish to highlight the central importance of digital infrastructure, digital capacity development, and particularly Target 9.c—to significantly increase access to ICTs and strive for universal and affordable Internet access, especially in least developed countries.

Expanding connectivity is a crucial enabler of progress across the 2030 Agenda. Yet ITU's latest **Facts and Figures** show that 2.2 billion people—more than one in four globally most in low and middle income countries remain offline, largely excluded from the digital and AI revolutions.

To help address such persistent digital divides, we and our partners are advancing initiatives such as:

- **Partner2Connect**, which has mobilized **over USD\$82 billion in pledges** to support meaningful connectivity and digital transformation in developing countries.
- **Giga**, the ITU–UNICEF initiative, which has mapped connectivity in **over 2.2 million schools in over 40 countries** and helped connect **tens of thousands of schools** — supporting digital inclusion of children and youth.
- The **AI for Good** platform and the **2026 AI for Good Global Summit**, which will take place **in Geneva in July** immediately following and in the same venue as the inaugural **UN Global**

Dialogue on AI Governance co-chaired by El Salvador and Estonia.

- There is also the **AI Skills Coalition**, bringing together partners across the UN, private sector, and academia to support inclusive digital and AI skills development for developing countries.

AI capacity development is in high demand. At the **ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference 2025**, ITU Member States adopted resolutions on AI capacity development. There are also the **WSIS+20** outcomes, the **Global Digital Compact** and the **AI modalities** resolution reinforcing the importance of AI capacity development. Such outcomes are guiding our work with partners in helping countries safely and effectively leverage AI technologies and close digital divides.

For **STI Forum 2026**, as we have done for the last two years, ITU and partners are again planning to propose an **AI for Good Lab** as a side event. This year, the Lab would focus on the UN system's work on AI capacity building, highlighting practical approaches to strengthening national readiness, skills, and institutional capabilities for AI adoption.

Thank you.