

# I. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) for Sustainable Economic and Financial Development

## **Recent Developments**

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA) Second Committee regularly reports assessments and recommendations on the topic to the General Assembly Plenary. In 2021 the UN General Assembly's Second Committee, by adopting resolution 76/189 (2021) on "Information and Communication Technologies for Sustainable Development", notes with great concern an exacerbation of the digital divide in recent years.<sup>1</sup> The digital divide especially manifests in developing countries, as well as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), in which four out of five people cannot profit from the social and economic benefits of the internet.<sup>2</sup> The economic downturn during the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the access to resources needed for rapid digitalization.<sup>3</sup> It hence is a risk not only to individuals but also to the effectiveness of the Financing for Development (FfD) process as a whole.<sup>4</sup> The General Assembly recognizes several countering measures: to practice capacity-building from the entire UN system, use the expertise of forums for knowledge exchange, and keep up investments in digital infrastructure with the help of governmental and civil stakeholders.<sup>5</sup>

During the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2021, the UN Secretary-General urged to make the internet a safer, more trusted space, and in the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), connect everyone to the internet within this decade.<sup>6</sup> The 2021 IGF report concludes that digital transformation processes must be diverse, inclusive, democratic, and sustainable.<sup>7</sup> The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2021 was themed "ICTs for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Societies and Economies (WSIS Action Lines for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals)".<sup>8</sup> It translated policy recommendations in the field of ICTs for sustainable development into lines of action and featured the *WSIS Forum 2021 and SDG Matrix*, mapping the interactions between digitalization and the SDGs.<sup>9</sup> The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recognized the outcomes of the WSIS Forum 2021, which Member States can harness to bridge the digital divide.<sup>10</sup> It reaffirmed that the next 10-year review of WSIS will hold the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting (WSIS +10) in 2025.<sup>11</sup>

In line with the multi-stakeholder approach of WSIS, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) assist Member States in providing best practices and strengthening the enabling role of ICTs.<sup>12</sup> One example is the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) of the World Wide Web Foundation, which recently

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, *Information and Communication Technologies for Sustainable Development (A/RES/76/189)*, 2021, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, *Information and Communication Technologies for Sustainable Development (A/RES/76/189)*, 2021, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Financial System and Development (A/RES/76/192)*, 2021, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Financial System and Development (A/RES/76/192)*, 2021, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> UN General Assembly, *Information and Communication Technologies for Sustainable Development (A/RES/76/189)*, 2021, pp. 8-12.

<sup>6</sup> UN DGC, *Secretary-General's Video Message for the Opening Session of the 16th Internet Governance Forum: "Internet United"*, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> IGF, *Katowice IGF Messages: Sixteenth Meeting of Internet Governance Forum 6-10 December 2021 Katowice, Poland*, 2021, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> ITU, *WSIS Forum 2021: Highlights and Outcomes*, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> ITU, *WSIS/SDGs Matrix. WSIS Forum 2021: Outcomes: Linking WSIS Action Lines with the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> UN ECOSOC, *Assessment of the Progress Made in the Implementation of and Follow-up to the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (E/RES/2021/28)*, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> UN ECOSOC, *Assessment of the Progress Made in the Implementation of and Follow-up to the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (E/RES/2021/28)*, 2021, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> UN ECOSOC, *Assessment of the Progress Made in the Implementation of and Follow-up to the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (E/RES/2021/28)*, 2021, pp. 4-6.

issued the *Affordability Report 2021*. This report in particular lays out ways to align the digital transformation more closely with funding mechanisms to drive down the future price of internet access.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> World Wide Web Foundation, *Affordability Report 2021: A new Strategy for Universal Access*, 2021.

## II. Disaster Risk Reduction

### **Recent Developments**

Considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, increasingly intense and frequent natural disasters connected to climate change, as well as their growing interaction, the key goal of the international community with regards to disaster risk reduction (DRR) continues to be the full implementation of the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* (Sendai Framework) to achieve the disaster-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

By April 2021, a “mixed picture” in the achievement of the seven targets of the Sendai Framework was observed; 120 countries met the deadline to achieve target (e) by reporting on national and/or local DRR strategies by the end of 2020.<sup>1</sup> General Assembly (GA) resolution 76/204 (2021) on “Disaster risk reduction” recognizes this progress.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it urges Member States to intensify their efforts to fully implement the Sendai Framework.<sup>3</sup> A new mid-term review for the implementation of the Sendai Framework in 2023 was agreed on in GA resolution 75/216 (2020) on “Disaster risk reduction”. This review shall be held at the “highest possible level” according to GA resolution 76/204 (2021), thereby expressing its top priority.<sup>4</sup>

As the Secretary-General pointed out in his report to the GA 76/240 (2021) on the “Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030”, the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a severe setback in the progress made in human development.<sup>5</sup> The need to further integrate health aspects into DRR strategies by implementing the *Bangkok Principles for the implementation of the health aspects of the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-203* was reemphasized.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic is widely seen as an opportunity to “build back better” by addressing the underlying roots of disaster risk and a “moral obligation to re-think our approaches to managing risk”.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, many United Nations entities such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or the World Health Organization (WHO) have recently included DRR aspects in their COVID-19 recovery initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, climate change leads to increasingly frequent and intense disasters.<sup>9</sup> Besides fostering resilience to climate change-related disasters and extreme weather events, there has been a special call for land and water management strategies in GA resolution 76/204 (2021) on “Disaster risk reduction” to counter the threat of drought and flood and ensure the achievement of water-related SDGs.<sup>10</sup> Raising awareness of the disaster risk posed by drought is also one of the goals of the *Special Report on Drought 2021*.<sup>11</sup> Further, the *Words into Action Guideline*, which was launched in 2021, offers governments

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Report of the Secretary-General (A/RES/76/240)*, 2021, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, *Disaster Risk Reduction (A/RES/76/204)*, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly, *Disaster risk reduction (A/RES/76/204)*, 2021, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly, *Disaster risk reduction (A/RES/75/216)*, 2020, p. 6; UN General Assembly, *Disaster risk reduction (A/RES/76/204)*, 2021, p. 6

<sup>5</sup> UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Report of the Secretary-General (A/RES/76/240)*, 2021, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Report of the Secretary-General (A/RES/76/240)*, 2021, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> UN General Assembly, *Disaster risk reduction (A/RES/76/204)*, 2021, p. 3; UNDRR, *Final Concept Note: Seventh Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP2022)*, 2021, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Report of the Secretary-General (A/RES/76/240)*, 2021, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> UN General Assembly, *Disaster risk reduction (A/RES/75/216)*, 2020, pp. 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> UN General Assembly, *Disaster risk reduction (A/RES/76/204)*, 2021, pp. 4-7.

<sup>11</sup> UNDRR, *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Special Report on Drought 2021*, 2021, p. x.

practical guidelines for nature-based solutions aiming at the reduction of disaster risk and the adaption to climate change through the provision of experts' and practitioners' knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that disaster risks are becoming increasingly complex, systemic, and mutually reinforcing. As shown in the *Interconnected Disaster Risks Report 2020/21*, the impacts of global interconnectedness are not only evident through the COVID-19 pandemic but become manifest in severe weather phenomena and large-scale disasters such as the Arctic Heatwave, the Amazon Wildfires, or the Beirut Explosion.<sup>13</sup> In light of this, a need for preventive multi-sectoral strategies, especially including marginalized societal groups, is necessary to mitigate existing and avert new disaster risks.<sup>14</sup> This was also emphasized by the Committee on DRR of the Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in its seventh session held in August 2021.<sup>15</sup>

Building on the successful completion of the Making Cities Resilient (MCR) campaign in 2020, the MCR2030 campaign was initiated by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). Bearing in mind that sustainable urban planning is crucial for creating disaster-resilient communities, MCR2030 strives to sustainably mainstream DRR in participating cities by 2030. This three-stage multi-sectoral approach works towards the achievement of SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities).<sup>16</sup>

In June 2022, the Seventh Session of the Global Platform for DRR (GP2022) will take place in Bali, Indonesia. The theme "From Risk to Resilience: Towards Sustainable Development for All in a COVID-19 Transformed World" reflects the opportunities brought along with the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed and still poses to the international community; the planned topics include addressing systemic risks, COVID-19 recovery, and financing for DRR.<sup>17</sup> GP2022 will also be the last official meeting of all stakeholders before the midterm review of the Sendai Framework in 2023.<sup>18</sup>

As reflected in the most recent GA resolutions on DRR, the most pressing issues in the area of DRR are the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of climate change. However, these and other potential risk areas are becoming more and more interdependent. Initiatives to recover sustainably from the pandemic and increase DRR in a multi-sectoral way were launched. In addition, the GP2022 is an important opportunity for consulting with all stakeholders before the newly set midterm review of the Sendai Framework.

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<sup>12</sup> UNDRR, *Words into Action*, 2021, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> UNU-EHS, *Disaster Risks in an Interconnected World*, 2021, pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Report of the Secretary-General (A/RES/76/240)*, 2021, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> ESCAP, Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, *Seventh session: Annotated provisional agenda*, 2021, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> UNDRR, *Making Cities Resilient 2030 (MCR2030)*, 2021, pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> UNDRR, *Final Concept Note: Seventh Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP2022)*, 2021, pp. 3-8.

<sup>18</sup> UNDRR, *Final Concept Note: Seventh Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP2022)*, 2021, pp. 3-8.

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