



Council of the
European Union

**Brussels, 20 November 2017
(OR. en)**

14542/17

**DEVGEN 266
ACP 131
RELEX 999
TELECOM 307**

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

On: 20 November 2017

To: Delegations

No. prev. doc.: 14170/17

Subject: Digital for Development (D4D)
- Council conclusions (20 November 2017)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on Digital for Development (D4D), as adopted by the Council at its 3578th meeting held on 20 November 2017.

Council conclusions on Digital for Development

1. The Council recalls its conclusions on 'Mainstreaming digital solutions and technologies in EU development policy'¹ and reaffirms the EU and Member States' commitment to support Digital Technologies and Services in developing countries as powerful enablers of inclusive growth and sustainable development, as stated in the new European Consensus on Development. Digitalisation is an essential driver for achieving the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It can contribute to achieving progress in areas such as gender equality, good governance and the rule of law, migration, health, education, agriculture, energy and climate change, and sustainable job creation. Digital for Development will follow a rights-based approach encompassing all human rights and freedoms, promote democratic governance and the rule of law.
2. The Council welcomes the publication of the Commission Staff Working Document on Digital4Development (D4D)², which provides a framework for mainstreaming digitalisation into EU development policy and identifies four priority areas with an immediate focus mainly in Africa. The Council underlines the need to promote D4D as a comprehensive framework in all developing countries focusing on those where digital needs and opportunities are the greatest.
3. The Council invites the Commission to swiftly implement the D4D approach through a series of concrete and demand-driven actions to be launched during the 2017-2020 period. It further calls on the Commission to bring successful pilot projects to scale. The Council looks forward to progress in developing digital infrastructure, promoting e-governance and digital skills, strengthening the digital economy and fostering start-up ecosystems including funding opportunities for micro, small and medium sized enterprises. Digital start-ups in creative and cultural industries should also be promoted in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

¹ 14682/16

² Digital4Development: mainstreaming digital technologies and services into EU Development Policy, SWD(2017)157

4. The private sector plays a critical role in promoting digital for development, in particular in terms of investments, innovation, market knowledge and expertise. The Council underlines the importance of leveraging additional sources of funding, and welcomes in that regard the launch of the External Investment Plan and the creation of a dedicated investment window on digitalisation within the European Fund for Sustainable Development as a major innovative tool to mobilise public and private investment and to support the digital economy in partner countries. The Council stresses the importance of mainstreaming digitalisation in all other investment windows in order to create synergies.
5. The Council remains concerned that more than half of the world's population is still lacking access to the Internet and stresses the need to redouble efforts to bridge the digital divides within and between countries, paying particular attention to least developed countries. In doing so, priority should be given to improving access to affordable Internet connectivity, notably in rural and remote areas where the private sector is absent. The Council stresses the importance of not duplicating with the services of existing local providers. In addition, the Council stresses the importance of multilingualism online to promote universal access to and use of an open and neutral Internet.
6. The Council reiterates the need to bridge the growing gender digital divide and emphasises the importance of strengthening the participation of women and girls in the digital economy in view of their political, economic and social empowerment, while promoting women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights. This includes steps to overcome existing barriers to access and use of digital technologies by women and girls as well as targeted measures to develop their digital skills.

7. The Council stresses the need to accelerate the deployment of e-governance services and digital services infrastructure as a means to improve the business environment, enhance transparency, and reduce corruption, attract private sector investments, increase domestic resource mobilisation, improve statistics, and enhance the access to and availability of public services for citizens. The Council encourages the promotion of existing expertise and best practices in e-governance services across the EU. The Council reiterates that robust and inclusive identification systems, including e-ID and mobile ID, can contribute to the realisation of the fundamental right to birth registration and nationality and the subsequent realisation of other rights. Digitalisation of public registries facilitates access to entitlements and services and contributes to improved governance, transparent electoral processes and accountability as well as democratic participation. The Council emphasises the importance of local and national ownership and the key role of public authorities to create and implement an enabling regulatory framework, protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to privacy, while ensuring data protection.
8. The Council stresses the need to enhance citizens' online participation and emphasises the need to provide an enabling environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) to operate freely. The Council recognises the important role of CSOs in building digital skills and in helping people and communities adapt to the digital economy, benefit from digital opportunities, and engage in e-democracy.
9. The Council expresses concern by the rising number and frequency of cyber threats at global level, including large-scale cross-border cybersecurity incidents and coercive cyber operations. It stresses the need to strengthen cyber security and the fight against cyber-crime, both in the EU and in partner countries, through international cooperation and assistance in the field of cyber capacity building. In that regard, the Council stresses the importance that all actions undertaken are in line with international law and uphold the Rule of Law on the Internet. Enhancing trust and security in cyber space is fundamental to unlock the potential of digitalisation and to prevent new threats and attacks.

10. The Council encourages the further use of innovative digital solutions in the context of humanitarian crises and disaster risk reduction interventions, including when responding to protracted forced displacement, to enhance the quality and efficiency of assistance provided, while at the same time ensuring the protection of privacy and the principle of do-no-harm. Digital solutions and the use of big data can also help to produce actionable insights for development and humanitarian actors, and can therefore strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus notably by making better use of early warning systems and early action mechanisms.
11. The Council underlines the importance of promoting and using digital technologies, including big data and open data, as a catalyst for the achievement of the SDGs. The Council encourages the production and use of relevant high quality and accessible disaggregated data to monitor the implementation of the SDGs and mobilise public support towards their achievement.
12. The Council recognises that innovations, including data sciences, artificial intelligence or the internet of things, might bring new solutions for development and encourages their promotion and the building of local capacities in this respect.
13. The Council stresses the need to effectively mainstream D4D in EU development policy to ensure greater transformative potential. The Council reiterates the importance of promoting policy coherence for sustainable development and of implementing the principles of EU's Digital Single Market (DSM) in its external policies, especially through providing support to national regulatory frameworks in partner countries, as appropriate, as well as promoting cross-border digital trade.

14. The Council calls for concrete deliverables on D4D with African partners, in particular in the context of the upcoming AU-EU Summit and its follow-up. The Council looks forward to the launch of flagship projects on digitalisation as described in the Summit documents by the EU and the Member States in the framework of a renewed partnership with Africa. The Council welcomes the work by the Commission to map possibilities for advancing e-governance solutions in African countries.
15. The Council also welcomes further initiatives on digitalisation in the EU's Neighbourhood, including as a follow-up to the Declaration of the Second Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting on the Digital Economy³ and the upcoming Eastern Partnership summit.
16. The Council underlines the need for regular exchanges between the EU, the Member States and relevant actors, including civil society, academia and the private sector, with a view to enhancing complementarity and synergies, sharing experiences and lessons learnt on D4D approaches and ensuring coordinated commitment of all stakeholders. The Council urges the Commission to set up a multi-stakeholder group for sharing best practices and lessons learnt from digital transformation and for strengthening cooperation with all relevant actors in the context of D4D, as well as to make use of other existing coordination mechanisms. Cooperation and regular dialogue with partner countries and other international partners is also important, including for international and global standard setting.

³ <https://www.eu2017.ee/sites/default/files/2017-10/MinisterialDeclaration.pdf>

17. Members States are invited to explore possibilities for integrating digitalisation into their national strategies for development cooperation. The Council calls upon the Commission and the Member States to continue developing the capacities and know-how on D4D among their staff in the headquarters and in partner countries in order to accelerate the operationalisation of the D4D approach and enhance coordination and synergies in the field. The Commission and the Member States are invited to enhance awareness of digitalisation benefits among partner countries, while promoting all human rights, in particular the freedom of expression online and offline⁴.
18. The Council invites the Commission to lay out further concrete steps and develop measurable targets for implementing the D4D approach, and to update on the progress made on an annual basis orally and within the existing reporting framework. It further invites the Commission to integrate D4D into reflections on the future financing of EU external action.
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⁴ Foreign Affairs Council, 12 May 2014, EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline, Council of the European Union, 9647/14; Council conclusions on the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015 – 2019, Foreign Affairs Council, 20 July 2015, Council of the European Union, 10897/15