



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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144th IPU Assembly

Nusa Dua, Indonesia
20-24 March 2022



Leveraging Information and Communication Technology as an enabler for the education sector, including in times of pandemic

*Resolution adopted unanimously by the 144th IPU Assembly
(Nusa Dua, 24 March 2022)*

The 144th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Welcoming Sustainable Development Goal 4, the Incheon Declaration and the United Nations Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation that all recognize the importance of equitable access to information and communication technology (ICT) in education,

Encouraging the use of ICT to support, enhance and optimize the delivery of information to create new teaching methods and improve learning results while paying attention to challenges in terms of human rights, equity and inclusion, security and privacy, infrastructure, connectivity and the financing of expensive digital capacities,

Recognizing the fact that the world had been facing a global learning crisis long before the COVID-19 pandemic started,

Aware that, according to the Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in 2016, over 600 million children and adolescents were estimated to be not reaching minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, and that an estimated 53 per cent of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read proficiently by age 10, a phenomenon the World Bank defined as "Learning Poverty",

Welcoming the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) call to address the learning crisis and urgently increase finance for education for children, with special attention to the disadvantaged and marginalized – children living with disabilities, migrant and refugee children, and children in remote areas,

Highlighting Sustainable Development Goal 10 and the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated gaps between rural and urban areas, with a critical impact on the education of children, especially the disadvantaged ones, and that Africa and Asia account for nearly two-thirds of the 463 million school children unable to access remote learning,

Noting that learning is the right of every child,

Bearing in mind that remote learning can open up vast opportunities in bridging disparities between urban and remote areas, by bringing new applications to classrooms, as well as by reaching out to families in times of pandemic, but that it can also expose children to a myriad of risks including cyberbullying, and online abuse and exploitation,

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Welcoming technological development that creates more opportunities with smaller and more effective devices, more inventive applications, and more interactive solutions,

Acknowledging that digitalization is pivotal in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but aware that unequal access to broadband internet can deepen inequalities between and within countries, between the poorest and richest households, women and men, girls and boys, and among different communities, including indigenous communities, in rural, remote and urban areas,

Welcoming the efforts of the United Nations Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries to help low-income countries build their science, technology and innovation capacity,

Noting that in-person social interactions are important to children and adolescents,

Acknowledging that countries come from very different starting points in terms of their capacity to acquire technological devices and in terms of teaching staff, and emphasizing the importance of stakeholders, including the international community, to provide adequate capacity-building and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms to developing countries, particularly the least developed countries,

Reminding parliaments and governments that, according to the estimates of UNICEF, every dollar invested in increasing enrolment in pre-primary education returns US\$ 4 to 9 in benefits to society,

Recognizing that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples and their right to their own language, culture and religion, and that the realization of these rights must be supported by education systems and institutions that reflect their cultural methods of teaching and learning,

Noting that remote learning requires more self-discipline from pupils and their families, the lack of which is a major contributing factor to the digital divide between pupils,

Stressing that digital and remote learning can never fully replace in-person learning as vocational teaching in many fields requires in-person learning on site,

Recognizing the critical role of the private sector in ICT infrastructure, content and services, and also the importance of public-private partnerships and other approaches to that end,

Recognizing also that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to advancement of all the SDGs, and emphasizing the need to promote and target iSTEAM-subjects (Innovation, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) to narrow the gender digital divide,

1. *Stresses* that device access (computers, laptops, mobile phones and others), digital literacy and skills, and affordable and well-functioning internet connections are the basis of an infrastructure necessary to leverage ICT as an enabler for the education sector;
2. *Underlines* that the pedagogical skills and ICT literacy of teachers and assisting staff are of key importance in all learning, including in the use of ICT devices and applications, and in teaching methods that support the introduction of ICT skills, and therefore that learners, teachers and assisting staff's ICT skills require constant updating and training;
3. *Calls for* teachers' ICT skills to be constantly improved and developed to adapt to new information technology to effectively apply and unlock its full benefits, including to maximize the quality of behavioural learning during the digital education process;
4. *Calls upon* parliaments and governments to pass necessary legislation on adequate support and needed infrastructure to enable effective ICT training of teachers and digital solutions to be part of curricula in their countries based on their national digital situations, while bearing in mind that funding for learning conditions and more basic teaching equipment should not be compromised;

5. *Welcomes* holistic thinking to create ecosystems which integrate ICT, digital content and digital skills with the capacities of teachers and policy makers to build resilient education systems;
6. *Emphasizes* that hybrid teaching arrangements, including both in-person and remote learning, significantly increase the workload of teachers, which must be taken into consideration when compensating the salary and benefits of the teaching staff, and that sufficient measures must be taken to avoid overburdening teachers;
7. *Calls for* parliaments to encourage their respective governments to develop effective tools for tackling all forms of online security risk, harassment and bullying, and legal frameworks for zero-tolerance policies against such offences to create a safe and non-discriminatory learning environment;
8. *Stresses* the importance of evaluating and monitoring of education results as one of the cornerstones of measuring the success of education policies and teaching methods;
9. *Encourages* governments to keep the number of pupils in classes small if necessary to curb the spread of pandemics, and to ensure efficient teaching and learning processes;
10. *Emphasizes* the key role of families in supporting children, especially in the early stages of education, in learning, both in the learning process itself and in understanding the importance of education;
11. *Stresses* that digital and remote learning can never fully replace in-person learning as vocational teaching in many fields requires in-person learning on site, but also that there are demonstrable benefits to remote learning for students for whom in-person learning on site is problematic and that it is therefore important to recognize the benefits of remote learning to engage these students;
12. *Urges* parliaments to pay special attention to equity, language, local content and accessibility, particularly for persons living with disability, when legislating in the education sector, including in the use of ICT;
13. *Also urges* governments and the private sector to work together to remove technological barriers by investing in digital infrastructure and lowering connectivity and device costs, and to support open educational resources and open digital access;
14. *Invites* parliaments and governments to support the United Nations Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries in its efforts to bridge the digital divide;
15. *Underlines* that women are a large, untapped learning resource as women and girls are often prevented from using ICT and particularly the internet, and, at the same time, that educated women have a great impact on societal development by contributing to more stable, resilient societies that give all individuals – including boys and men and marginalized citizens – the opportunity to fulfil their potential;
16. *Calls upon* parliaments and governments to ensure policies and resources allocated to encourage the use of ICT in education and ICT-related training and employment serve to empower women and girls, including by setting targets, quotas and other positive measures;
17. *Encourages* governments to include in their development cooperation programmes assistance in technology transfer in the education sector and support in teacher training to empower students to learn from practical experiences and motivate creative and innovative mindsets;
18. *Also encourages* governments to invest more in ICT learning, research, development and innovation, which are an essential cornerstone in modern human resource development;
19. *Further encourages* governments to provide vitally important support functions, such as free meals in schools, because well-nourished pupils can concentrate better and get better learning results, and also because free meals in schools can be an added incentive especially to poorer families for sending their children to school;

20. *Invites* governments to engage the youth in the development of plans and strategies in the short and medium term, to chart the obstacles that may arise, and to look for new opportunities in introducing ICT in education;
21. *Invites* parliaments and governments to look into possible partnerships with United Nations organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF, as well as industries and businesses, to accelerate the use of ICT in the post-pandemic education system;
22. *Encourages*, in federated and decentralized states where education may be a responsibility shared by more than one level of government, the various legislative and executive bodies to find ways to collaborate on the measures and initiatives highlighted in the present resolution;
23. *Emphasizes* the importance of sustainable digital skills and digital literacies in narrowing the digital divide and enhancing inclusion to empower students and build a modern, interactive and flexible learning environment for a better tomorrow;
24. *Calls upon* parliaments to enact legislation and standards that regulate the process of remote education and e-learning, including the recognition and adoption of certificates at all levels;
25. *Calls upon* parliaments and governments not to compromise or reduce budgets for education, including e-learning, and to share good strategies and practices to support the key role of the educational system for the state and all members of society.