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IMPORTANT ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN MAKING REGULATORY TELECOMMUNICATION POLICIES DURING AND FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The 36 Meeting of the Permanent Consultative Committee II: Radiocommunications,

CONSIDERING:

a)   that the advent of COVID-19 has increased current economic and social inequalities;

b)   that telecommunications/ICT are a key activity for the economic, social, and cultural development of countries;

c)   that global telecommunication/ICT infrastructure is a key and indispensable input for regional and national economies and for the well-being of all societies;

d)   that telecommunication/ICT services play a valuable role in offsetting COVID-19's adverse impacts on equity;

e)   that exchange forums where participants can share their experiences in order to examine procedures and practices that promote a comprehensive vision that would enable them to better address the challenges stemming from the pandemic have proven to be of great value;

f)   that it is essential for information and communication systems to continue to be functional and even to be expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency and recovery phases;

g)   that, during crisis conditions, there was an excellent collaboration between the different sectors (for example, health, education, security, etc.) and the telecommunication/ICT sector, as well as between the public and private sectors;

h)   that it is likely that the COVID-19 phenomenon shall speed up the achievement of many sector reforms and innovations that were already under way, for example, allocating and sharing spectrum for specific applications, updating and implementing digital infrastructure, sharing infrastructure, and rolling out new generations of communication technologies;

i)   that, for social reasons, it is best to move forward with the rollout of improved digital infrastructure, a harmonized allocation of spectrum, and new generations of technological standards,

RECOGNIZING:

a)   that the exchange of experiences taking place in the series of round tables and forums coordinated by the CITEL Secretariat contributed positively to the responses of OAS member states to better address the COVID-19 pandemic;

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b)   that Telecommunication/ICT infrastructure, tools, and knowledge have made it possible for the response to COVID-19 to be more effective and decisive than it would have been otherwise possible;

c)   that a greater rollout of telecommunication infrastructure can promote access to essential services, such as health, education, and employment;

d)   that better access to telecommunication/ICT services can lead to economic and social inclusion and gender equality;

e)   that public-private cooperation is a key element for the rollout of telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and access to affordable services, which are vitally necessary for economic and social recovery;

f)   that increasing the affordability, availability, and accessibility to public services supports digital connectivity and might ensure access to information and promote social cohesiveness during lockdown.

g)   that the temporary assigment of spectrum has been a crucial element for greater connectivity for the connected and the unconnected; and

h)   that the innovations that have been seen in the regulatory sector, such as the digitization and streamlining of administrative paperwork, guidelines for telecommuting, technological convergence, among others, made positive contributions to mitigating the pandemic's impacts.

RECOMMENDS:

That CITEL members consider implementing the following actions:

1.   Promoting actions to make spectrum resources available where the existing radio networks are congested or require tackling greater traffic demand, in order to restore access to service where it has been suspended, giving priority to the connections to critical government functions, vital services, and strategic connectivity points.

2.   Boosting actions that make it possible to increase affordability, availability and accessibility of services and devices to guarantee the continuity of services, supporting digital connectivity to guarantee access to information and promote social cohesiveness during lockdown.

3.   Granting and keeping, to the extent possible, the essential service status to telecommunications/ICT services to that field activities can continue, such as infrastructure installation and maintenance.

4.   Promoting actions that allow telecommunications operators to deploy and maintain a network infrastructure that is resilient, stable and safe to support the entire population, including emergency services.

5.   Fostering the drafting and implementation of national emergency telecommunication plans that include response actions to tackle an emergency in a timely, appropriate, and effective way, safeguarding reliable information and communications in the four phases of disaster risk management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

6.   Supporting the use of online services, especially by children and vulnerable populations, respecting the right to privacy and promoting trust and security in the use of data, while observing the regulatory framework applicable in each country.

7.   Empowering the safe exchange of digital contents to support electronic education, telehealth, digital agriculture, electronic financial services and mobile payments, as well as electronic government platforms.

8.   Promoting in increase in connectivity, facilitating spectrum access for the provision of ICT services, the rapid rollout of infrastructure, access to communication equipment, and the transit of Telecommunication/ICT staff, taking into account elements such as administrative simplification to grant state and/or municipal permits, maintaining the verification of terms and conditions, and other ways to exert a positive impact on service delivery.

9.   Motivating coordination between businesses and the government in order to undertake joint actions in response to the pandemic and tackle the rise in the demand for connectivity, ensuring that strategic and essential services are provided with quality and continuity.

10.   Enabling universal service funds or assistance funds for connectivity projects in rural, remote, or underserved areas, as well as access to essential services promoting incentives that facilitate access to spectrum use.

11.   Implementing information campaigns aimed at the general population regarding phone and text scams, as well as the importance of telecommunication infrastructure, emphasizing that there is no connection whatsoever between telecommunication transmission antennas and the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

12.   Enabling virtual assistance channels and telephone lines with short numbers to answer inquiries or information requests from the population in case of an emergency.