



## WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS) FORUM

Contribution for the Global Digital Compact (GDC)

### Introduction

The UN General Assembly [Resolution 56/183](#) (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)** in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005. The goal of WSIS is to achieve a common vision, desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information.

Through the Summit's first phase in 2003, a framework for an inclusive information society was created as set out in the Geneva Plan of Action<sup>1</sup>. Since 2015, the WSIS Process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are being aligned by stakeholders to integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) into their approaches in implementing the activities/initiatives to support the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

In line with UN [Resolution A/70/1](#) and [Resolution A/70/125](#), ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD, in collaboration with more than 30 UN agencies, are continuously working towards strengthening the alignment of the WSIS Process implementation activities with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, thereby highlighting the direct linkages between WSIS Action Lines and SDGs.

### WSIS Forum: World's Largest Annual Gathering of the 'ICT for Development' Community

The WSIS Forum is an example of **successful digital cooperation within UN Agencies** including the Governments, Private Sector, Civil Society, Academia and the Technical Community. The Forum is co-organized by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD, in close collaboration with other UN Agencies (FAO, ILO, ITC, UNDESA, UNEP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNITAR, UNODC, UPU, UN Women, UN Tech Bank for LDCs, UNU, WFP, WHO, WIPO, WMO and UN Regional Commissions) and all WSIS Action Line Facilitators/co-facilitators.

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<sup>1</sup> The Plan of Action sets forth a clear commitment to translate these principles into practice and to meet concrete and tangible targets with the aim of promoting sustainable development. <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/promotional/brochure-dop-poa.pdf>

The WSIS Forum has proven to be an **efficient medium for coordination of multistakeholder implementation activities**, information exchange, creation of knowledge, sharing of best practices and foster partnerships to advance development goals.

The [WSIS Forum 2023](#) took place from 13 to 17 March 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland, and continued with virtual sessions in April-May. The overall theme of the WSIS Forum 2023 is *WSIS Action Lines for building back better and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs* ([www.wsis.org/forum](http://www.wsis.org/forum)).

The WSIS Forum continues to serve as an open and inclusive platform to ensure the common WSIS goals are met.

### **WSIS Action Lines: An Information Society for All – Key Principles**

[The WSIS Action Lines](#) serve as key principles for building an inclusive information and knowledge societies. All stakeholders should work together to: improve access to information and communication infrastructure and technologies as well as to information and knowledge; build capacity; increase confidence and security in the use of ICTs; create an enabling environment at all levels; develop and widen ICT applications; foster and respect cultural diversity; recognize the role of the media; address the ethical dimensions of the Information Society; and encourage international and regional cooperation.

The vital role of ICTs as a catalyst for development is specifically recognized in the new development framework Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which acknowledges that “the spread of information and communication technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress and to develop knowledge societies, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy.

Four targets of the SDGs explicitly recognize the role of ICTs. This applies to the targets on Education and scholarships (4.b) on Gender empowerment (5.b) on Infrastructure for Universal and Affordable access to ICTs and the Internet in the Least Developed Countries (9.c) and more broadly, Goal 17 on Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development, which calls to enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular ICTs. There are also several references to technology in general throughout the SDGs in which ICTs play an important direct or indirect role. At the same time, it should be noted that the WSIS outcome documents were drafted at a time when many aspects of today’s high level of digitalization were not known or foreseen.

The WSIS-SDG Matrix developed by WSIS Action Line Facilitators serves as the mechanism to map, analyze and coordinate the implementation of WSIS Action Lines, and more specifically, ICTs as enablers and accelerators of the SDGs. The Matrix draws direct linkages of the WSIS Action Lines with the SDGs to continue strengthening the impact of ICTs for sustainable development (<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/>).

## **The WSIS Stocktaking: A Global Repository of ICT-Driven Sustainable Development Projects and Best Practices**

The [WSIS Stocktaking process](#) was initiated in October 2004 during the Tunis phase of WSIS, and in the years since has come to comprise the database of:

- exchanges of information on projects
- sharing of best practices of certain regions
- initiatives related to the implementation of the 11 WSIS Action Lines
- linkage between the 11 action lines and the SDGs – a linkage that becomes more and more important over the years.

The WSIS Stocktaking Process serves as a tool to monitor the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines and demonstrate the capacity of ICTs to foster development. As a unique global platform, the WSIS Stocktaking portal hosts an international register of ICT projects and activities conducted by a diverse range of stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, the business sector, civil society, and other entities. This portal represents a repository of projects that stakeholders can access to stay informed about the latest progress in the implementation of WSIS outcomes.

The principal role of the WSIS Stocktaking exercise is to collect information, share knowledge and experiences and leverage the activities of stakeholders working on the implementation of WSIS outcomes. The WSIS stocktaking database contains over 14,000 entries of ICTs projects to date. By facilitating the exchange of information, the WSIS Stocktaking can empower stakeholders to collaborate, learn from each other, and identify opportunities to enhance the impact of ICTs in promoting sustainable development.

## **The WSIS Prizes: A Global Contest Recognizing the Power of ICTs in Enabling Sustainable Development**

The [WSIS Prizes](#) contest is an integral part of the WSIS Stocktaking process set up in 2004 to assist WSIS implementation and follow-up. The contest was held for the first time in 2012 and has rapidly gained popularity and attention within the global community.

This annual contest recognizes outstanding initiatives and projects that leverage the power of ICTs to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. By showcasing innovative and effective approaches, the WSIS Prizes contest provides a unique opportunity to raise awareness, share good practices, and inspire stakeholders to collaborate on the deployment of ICTs as a driver of sustainable development.

The prizes are awarded across 18 categories, each directly linked to the 11 WSIS Action Lines defined in the Geneva Plan of Action. The 18 winner projects are selected as the most successful stories worldwide, under each category, to serve as best practice models to be replicated by other stakeholders interested in ICTs for development.

## **Towards a Sustainable and Inclusive Digital Future: The WSIS and Global Digital Compact**

The [WSIS Forum 2023](#) hybrid week, held from 13 to 17 March 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland, brought together a diverse range of stakeholders to discuss the latest developments in the world of ICTs, and associated opportunities and challenges. One of the key topics of discussion was the Global Digital Compact, which aims to build a digital future that is open, free, secure, and inclusive.

The Ministerial Roundtable at the WSIS Forum 2023 recognized the complementary nature of the Global Digital Compact and the WSIS Framework, emphasizing the need for continuous dialogue among stakeholders to leverage the learnings of WSIS implementation in discussions of the UN SG's report 'Our Common Agenda'. The Ministers emphasized that harnessing the power of digital will be vital to rescuing the SDGs.

In accordance with its mandate, the WSIS+20 review will assess progress and achievements made in the first 20 years of the WSIS. The WSIS Forum 2024 will be branded as *WSIS+20 Forum High-level Event* in Geneva and serve as a platform for the WSIS+20 review to provide multistakeholder discussions and to take stock of the achievements and key trends, challenges, and opportunities since the Geneva Plan of Action. This will complement the work of UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development in its system-wide assessment of WSIS+20.

To avoid duplication of existing multistakeholder processes, it is important to foster synergies between the WSIS+20 process, the Global Digital Compact and the Summit of the Future.

The WSIS Action Lines have served a valuable role in identifying and addressing emerging trends, opportunities and challenges in the digital world. All stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations, have a role to play in implementing the WSIS Action Lines and ensuring that the benefits of ICTs are accessible to all.

The WSIS community has seen significant growth in recent years and continues to contribute to the WSIS Forum, bringing in valuable insights, ideas, and initiatives that advance the WSIS Action Lines and the Sustainable Development Goals. The annual WSIS Forum has resulted in several valuable outcomes, which include policy recommendations, achievements, publications, and other measures that reflect the strong commitment towards the WSIS process and its goals.

### **WSIS Forum 2023: Key Outcomes (an input to the GDC), 13-17 March 2023, Geneva, Switzerland**

The annual WSIS Forum is a global multistakeholder platform facilitating the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for advancing sustainable development, organized by the ITU, UNESCO, UNDP, and UNCTAD, in close collaboration with all WSIS Action Line co-facilitators and more than 30 UN agencies. The Forum provides an opportunity for information exchange,

knowledge creation and sharing of best practices, while identifying emerging trends and fostering partnerships, taking into account the evolving information and knowledge societies.

The WSIS Forum 2023 hybrid week was held from **13 to 17 March** in Geneva, Switzerland, and brought together experts, policymakers, and diverse stakeholders from around the world to discuss ICTs for sustainable development. This year's Forum theme is *WSIS Action Lines for building back better and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs*. The Forum hybrid week welcomed over **2,700 participants** attending both on-site and remotely, from 150 countries worldwide. The Forum gathered more than **150 high-level representatives** of the wider WSIS stakeholder community, including Ministers and Deputies, Ambassadors; and leaders from the private sector, academia and civil society.

This year's Forum hybrid week had several innovative session formats and featured around **250 sessions**, including open space talks, thematic workshops, country workshops, WSIS Action Lines Facilitation Meetings, knowledge cafes, WSIS Prizes, high-level track sessions, and many more. The stakeholders appreciated the new innovative formats, which fostered more participatory and collaborative exchanges with engaging dialogues. **The WSIS Forum 2023 continues with virtual workshops from April to May 2023**. Please refer to the WSIS Forum 2023 agenda available here: <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2023/Agenda>.

The WSIS Forum 2023 saw a significant milestone, as the first female Chairperson, **H.E. Dr. Emilija Stojmenova Duh, Minister of Digital Transformation, Republic of Slovenia**, chairing the WSIS Forum 2023. Summarizing the high-level track, the Chairperson highlighted that "international cooperation and multistakeholder engagement are the key, therefore, processes as WSIS are an immense contribution. They bring us together to meet and build meaningful partnership. And they are of immense help on our way towards achieving sustainable development goals".

The concrete outcomes of WSIS Forum 2023 will enable stakeholders to strengthen implementation of WSIS Action Lines and the alignment of the WSIS and SDG processes. Some of the highlights and key outcomes of the WSIS Forum 2023 are the following:

#### **Highlights:**

- The WSIS Forum 2023 featured [high-level keynote speeches from global leaders](#), including the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, who emphasized the importance of the Forum to build a free and fair information society for all people, everywhere; his video message is available [here](#).
- **30+ exhibitions spaces** showcased ICTs for sustainable development. The exhibitors displayed a wide range of technologies and innovative solutions addressing global development issues. The WSIS Forum 2023 partners also exhibited their projects and initiatives. The exhibition spaces also featured virtual reality tools that provided participants with different immersive experiences, such as to explore the reality of the

indigenous people of the Amazon, to explore the enigmatic world of M.K.Čiurlionis paintings from Lithuania, and to explore the XR Olympics. The exhibitors came from governments, civil society, private sectors, technical community, academia, youth, and the international organisations. The WSIS Forum 2023 photo contests winners and finalists photos enriched the exhibition space and the venue.

- The [United Nations Group on the Information Society \(UNGIS\)](#) reiterated its commitment to the WSIS process and WSIS Action Lines implementation as well as to strengthen the alignment of the WSIS and SDG processes. UNGIS members discussed the preparation of an action plan to leverage the profile of UNGIS and to contribute to other global processes on digital for development issues. Contributions in a video format by the UN Heads of UN Agencies are available on [WSIS Process YouTube channel](#).
- The announcement of the [WSIS Prizes 2023](#), as an integral part of the **WSIS Stocktaking**, took place during the Forum with **18 winners and 72 champions** celebrated globally for their efforts in implementing WSIS Action Lines and advancing the SDGs. In addition, the winning entries of the [WSIS Forum Photo Contest 2023](#) were unveiled, depicting how ICTs are playing a vital, enabling role on the road to achieve the SDGs.
- **Announcement and awards of the WSIS Special Prizes and Activities have also contributed to the overall celebration of ICTs and its economic, social, cultural, and environmental impact around the world:**
  - 4 WSIS Forum 2023 [Hackathon winners](#): Digital GovHack: Advancing the Digital Economy by Leveraging Emerging Technologies. The WSIS Forum 2023 was jointly organised by ITU, WSIS, and Digital Government Authority of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
  - 1 winner of the [WSIS Healthy Ageing Innovation Prize](#)
  - 1 winner, 5 finalists of the [WSIS Digital Service Design Prize 2023](#)
  - Launch of the [WSIS x Generation Connect Youth Prize](#)
- Networking tool: **600 participants** used networking tool **imeetyou@wsis** for networking with onsite participants - [LinkedIn](#).
- The **Ministerial Roundtable** at the WSIS Forum 2023 (13-17 March), benefited from the presence and contributions of 40 Ministers/Deputies. In an innovative format with 3 breakout rooms chaired by Ministers (Gambia, Philippines, UAE), 3 topics were discussed:
  - ICTs rescuing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development WSIS Action Lines for building back better and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs
  - World Summit Information Society Ministerial Contribution to the Global Digital Compact Consultations

- Exploring the Potential of Space for all as a Driver of Sustainable Development

The Ministerial roundtable of WSIS Forum 2023 concluded with the following:

- They emphasized that harnessing the power of digital will be vital to rescuing the SDGs. ICTs are a powerful tool that should be fully leveraged towards this goal. The WSIS process provides an existing and well-functioning framework for accelerating the achievement of the SDGs.
  - They invited all stakeholders to harness the power of digital and leverage the alignment between the WSIS process and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, as well as the SDG Digital Day to accelerate the achievement the SDGs.
  - They recognized that discussions on Our Common Agenda and especially its Global Digital Compact are complementary to the WSIS Framework. Therefore, they invited all stakeholders to leverage the learnings of the implementation of the WSIS Framework and related process in their deliberations of Our Common Agenda.
  - They recognized the enormous potential that Space holds in global efforts to connect the unconnected and beyond. Thus, they invited all stakeholders to work together to ensure that Space is leveraged in a safe and sustainable manner.
- The WSIS Forum 2023 **Ambassadors roundtable** discussion took place on 13 March 2023, featuring approximately 50 Ambassadors to UN in Geneva, where they deliberated on the following topics:
    - Leveraging the power of ICTs and the need to bring about an inclusive, prosperous, sustainable, safe and trusted digital future for all;
    - Meaningful communication and Geneva community's role in effective implementation of UN Processes;
    - WSIS+20 review process and the future of WSIS beyond 2025 – identifying emerging trends, challenges and opportunities for implementing the WSIS Action Lines;
    - WSIS+20 review and the GDC
      - GDC discussions could consider ongoing multistakeholder discussions on WSIS+20. The WSIS Action Lines are particularly important as they capture emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges in the digital world beyond 2025. WSIS Forum will continue to play an important role in digitalization;
      - Global Digital Compact process must reflect the needs of developing countries to create more equitable prosperity and reduce structural inequalities. Questions on the GDC process, including its linkages with the Summit of the Future, were raised. Mexico informed that during the GDC discussions in Mexico, the imperative of closing the digital divides was discussed to produce

tangible elements to be included in the future Global Digital Compact to be adopted at the Summit of the Future in 2024;

- To avoid duplication, the WSIS+20, Global Digital Compact, and Summit of the Future should be synergized. Some highlighted strengthening the role and contribution of the Geneva community towards can contribute to Global Digital Compact discussions with Sweden, Rwanda, and the UN Tech Envoy. WSIS+20 is important to achieve the common goal of connecting humanity.
- The WSIS Forum 2023 provided a platform for **multistakeholder consultations** on the **WSIS+20 review**. The discussions reflected on the achievements of the WSIS process in the past 20 years, its future direction, and its interconnection with other global processes, including the Global Digital Compact. Despite the progress made in the past 20 years of the WSIS process, there are still many complex challenges to overcome. It is paramount to maintain the momentum towards a digital future that is inclusive and sustainable, with technology serving the needs of everyone, leaving no one behind. All stakeholders are invited to contribute to the WSIS+20 Forum High-level Event in Geneva, from 27 to 31 May 2024, and its upcoming open consultation process, which aims to ensure wide participation in and broad ownership of the Forum. The Forum continues to collect inputs from stakeholders on emerging trends, challenges and opportunities on WSIS Action Lines for 20 years of their implementation and beyond.
- The WSIS Forum 2023 also provided a platform for **multistakeholder discussions** on the **Global Digital Compact**. The co-facilitators of the GDC, H.E. Mr. Claver Gatete, Ambassador of Rwanda, and H.E. Ms. Anna Karin Eneström, Ambassador of Sweden, were present at the WSIS Forum and had the opportunity to interact and listen to the views of multistakeholders on the future on GDC and the importance of the WSIS process beyond 2025. Mr. Amandeep Singh Gill, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, was also present at the Forum.
- For its second edition, the [Mayors track](#) at the WSIS Forum 2023, co-organized by ITU and Geneva Cities Hub, provided an opportunity to discuss how smart cities are the drivers of innovative sustainable development and enablers to respond to challenges related to climate change and achievement of the SDGs. Mayors presented concrete projects and local achievements on scalable and replicable good practices of digital solutions for climate change adaptation and energy transition. They also interacted during a multistakeholder [High-Level Dialogue](#) engaging with High-Level representatives from the private sector, UN organizations and the civil society on ways to accelerate digital transformation and building more resilient cities.
- Along with the Forum and High-Level Track sessions, the WSIS Forum 2023 also featured a variety of [social events](#) that provide on-site participants with opportunities to network and engage in an informal setting.



- Permanent Mission of India organised **Yoga: wellbeing and mindfulness sessions** with professional instructors during the WSIS Forum 2023, which provided on-site participants with breathing exercises to relax and unwind from the busy Forum schedule as well as to improve the mindfulness.
- The daily video highlights and interviews are available [here](#). For the WSIS Forum 2023 pictures and photos, please see [here](#).

### **Outcomes:**

- The full list of official WSIS Forum 2023 outcomes and the below publications will be made available on the WSIS Forum 2023 website:
  - WSIS Forum 2023: Outcome Document
  - WSIS Forum 2023: High-Level Track Outcomes and Executive Brief
  - WSIS Stocktaking Report 2023
  - WSIS Stocktaking Success Stories 2023
  - WSIS Forum 2023 and SDG Matrix
  - WSIS Forum 2023 Report WSIS Action Lines: Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.
- The Forum also provided opportunities for stakeholders to fostering new partnerships and collaborations among different stakeholders, promoting knowledge-sharing and collective action towards digital cooperation.
- [#WSIS](#) was the 6<sup>th</sup> trending hashtag on Twitter in Switzerland during the High-Level segment.
- The WSIS Forum 2023 highlighted innovative ICT solutions and best practices from around the world, showcasing the potential of digital technologies to drive sustainable development and social progress.

### **Impact:**

- The WSIS Forum 2023 contributed to advancing the global digital agenda and promoting the use of ICTs for sustainable development, through the multistakeholder approach, fostering dialogue and meaningful discussions around key ICT-related issues and trends.
- The WSIS Forum 2023 provided an open, crowdsourced, and inclusive platform for building networks and partnerships, facilitating the exchange of ideas, best practices and experiences, and promoting collective action towards achieving global goals.
- The Forum demonstrated a strong commitment and active participation from stakeholders across all sectors, including governments, private sector, technical

communities, civil society, and academia to the shared vision of the WSIS. The engagement and contributions of these stakeholders were critical in shaping the discussions and outcomes of the Forum and in driving progress towards achieving the WSIS and SDG goals.

- The Forum proved the WSIS process and the WSIS Action Lines to be a good example of a well-functioning framework for accelerating the achievement of the SDGs and this global platform continues to evolve reflecting the scope, pace, complexity, and impact of today's digital transformation.
- UN WSIS Action Line Facilitators, ILO, ITC, ITU, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNDESA, UNESCO, UNEP, UPU, WHO, WMO, and UPU assessed the contribution of the Action Lines since 2003 and discussed the challenges and opportunities.

All stakeholders are invited to participate and contribute actively to the **WSIS Forum 2024**, which will be branded as WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event, scheduled to take place from **27 to 31 May 2024** in Geneva, Switzerland.