

# UNGIS Response to the WSIS+20 Review Elements Paper

The United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the WSIS+20 Review Elements Paper.<sup>1</sup> UNGIS reaffirms its commitment to the WSIS vision of a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society, and supports efforts to ensure its continued relevance and impact in the context of rapid digital transformation.

UNGIS, comprising 31 member organizations and 17 observers from the United Nations system, serves as the inter-agency mechanism for coordinating substantive and policy issues related to WSIS implementation. It plays a unique role in promoting coherence, fostering partnerships, leveraging resources and aligning digital cooperation efforts across the UN system. UNGIS's collaborative platform supports joint initiatives and coordinated support to Member States in advancing inclusive digital development.

From the perspective of UN system-wide coordination, UNGIS recommends that the following points are strengthened:

1. *Recognition of UNGIS as a System-wide Coordination Mechanism*

The Elements Paper highlights the importance of coordination and partnerships but omits reference to UNGIS—the United Nations system's dedicated inter-agency mechanism for WSIS follow-up. Established by the Chief Executives Board in 2006, UNGIS aligns digital cooperation efforts across more than 30 UN system entities and fosters joint initiatives in support of WSIS outcomes and broader development goals.

UNGIS has enabled inter-agency collaboration in areas such as child online protection, digital literacy and skills development, gender equality, and infrastructure. It also brings together operational capacities across sectors—development, education, employment, environment, health, agriculture and humanitarian responses—to help bridge digital divides and support Member States in advancing inclusive and sustainable digital strategies.

In addition, all co-leads of the subgroups under the Working Group on Digital Technologies—tasked with supporting implementation of the Global Digital Compact (GDC)—are either members or observers of UNGIS. This further underscores its central role in UN system-wide digital cooperation.

With two decades of institutional experience, UNGIS offers a proven model for follow-up to WSIS+20. Its explicit recognition in the outcome document of the WSIS+20 review process would help ensure coherent implementation and sustained UN

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<sup>1</sup> This submission is provided on behalf of UNGIS and does not replace individual submissions by its member organizations.

system-wide support. This role was also reaffirmed by Member States in ECOSOC Resolution E/RES/2024/13, which recognizes the contribution of UNGIS to the WSIS follow-up and encourages continued system-wide coordination in this regard. In this context, the continued role of the UN Regional Commissions—mandated by ECOSOC and General Assembly resolutions to support WSIS review and implementation—remains essential for ensuring regional alignment and continuity. UNGIS supports calls to renew this mandate in the WSIS+20 review outcome.

2. *Complementarity and synergies between the Global Digital Compact and the WSIS*

UNGIS acknowledges the complementarity between the WSIS process and the GDC, and the potential synergies that can be harnessed through closer alignment and integration, as appropriate. It stands ready to facilitate this process through existing inter-agency structures. Building on WSIS Action Lines and drawing on tools, such as the WSIS–SDG–GDC Matrix, the GDC Implementation Map and other means, UNGIS can help ensure that implementation of the GDC commitments benefits from two decades of institutional experience while avoiding unnecessary fragmentation and duplication, with a view to ensuring a cohesive and consistent approach to digital cooperation..

The United Nations provides a critical platform for such cooperation, and existing processes should be leveraged to this end. In this regard, UNGIS notes the recommendation made by Member States in the draft resolution submitted for adoption by ECOSOC that is included in the report of the twenty-eighth session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (E/CN.16/2025/4) that the WSIS+20 review include as an outcome, a tasking to UNGIS to explore modalities for a Joint Implementation Roadmap for WSIS and GDC commitments, so as to ensure a unified approach to digital cooperation that avoids duplication and maximizes resource efficiency. UNGIS also recognizes the General Assembly’s commitment, as reflected in paragraph 68 of the GDC, to build on existing WSIS processes and forums—including the WSIS Forum and the Internet Governance Forum—to advance the implementation of the Compact.

3. *Reaffirming the Role of the WSIS Forum and multistakeholder participation*

The WSIS Forum—co-organized annually by UNGIS members such as ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD—has evolved into the UN system’s main platform for multistakeholder dialogue, partnership-building and review of digital development progress. It could be explicitly referenced in the Elements Paper as a continuing mechanism for inclusive implementation and follow-up of WSIS and GDC commitments. As a proven model for multistakeholder engagement across all action lines, the WSIS Forum can support alignment between the WSIS and GDC agendas while reinforcing complementarities and avoiding duplication.

As a long-standing multistakeholder platform, WSIS has played a vital role in ensuring that diverse perspectives—including those from civil society, technical communities, and regional actors—shape global digital cooperation and bring human rights

upfront. Participation in these processes is not only a means to inclusion but a right in itself and remains essential to contextualizing debates and addressing digital inequalities. The diversity of UNGIS membership—including globally focused entities and the Regional Commissions—enhances its ability to translate global commitments into national and regional realities, while fostering coherence and legitimacy across all levels of implementation. UNGIS strongly encourages that inclusive multistakeholder participation feature as a core element of the outcome document’s approach to digital governance.

4. *Integrating and Strengthening Human Rights*

The WSIS vision of a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society inherently reflects universal human rights principles. Realizing this vision requires stronger integration of these principles into digital governance and the broader WSIS framework. International human rights law—anchored in the dignity of every individual—should guide how Member States engage in digital cooperation. UNGIS encourages that the WSIS+20 outcome build on past commitments by more explicitly embedding international human rights standards, drawing on agreed language from the GDC and recent Human Rights Council and General Assembly resolutions.

5. *Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment*

The Elements Paper rightly affirms that empowering women and girls is essential to closing the gender digital divide and achieving the WSIS vision. UNGIS encourages the outcome document to move from principle to practice by embedding gender-responsive targets and sex-disaggregated indicators across all Action Lines. Digital governance should be reshaped to mainstream gender equality, promote the rights of women and girls, and ensure inclusive and transformative digital ecosystems.

6. *Strengthening Monitoring and Measurement*

UNGIS welcomes the Elements Paper’s focus on monitoring and measurement and would like to highlight the role of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development—co-led by several UNGIS members—in advancing global ICT statistics, supporting capacity-building, and informing evidence-based policymaking. UNGIS encourages recognition of these collaborative efforts in the outcome document, as well as continued support for strengthening national capacities to monitor WSIS and GDC implementation.

7. *Addressing Financing Needs and Learning from Past Mechanisms*

The original WSIS outcome documents recognized the need for additional financial resources to support digital inclusion, including through a Digital Solidarity Fund. While that fund was eventually discontinued, the need for investments in capacity building, technical assistance, and digital infrastructure remains critical—particularly in developing countries. UNGIS encourages the outcome document to acknowledge this ongoing financing gap, call for greater support to ongoing work by the UN system to address the needs of developing countries and deliver in-country,

and to reflect on lessons learned from earlier mechanisms. Exploring diverse, sustainable funding options—and ensuring effective development cooperation frameworks—will be essential to support the equitable implementation of WSIS.

8. *Investing in Digital Public Goods and Infrastructure*

Consistent with global trends on digital foundations for scale across sectors, the Elements Paper should call for increased investment in digital public goods and in interoperable, inclusive, safe and context-appropriate digital public infrastructure (DPI), including for relevant thematic sectors that enhances all people's ability to enjoy the benefits of digital development while preventing harm. Investments should comply with national and UN standards to ensure scalability, sustainability, and respect for human rights. Implementation tools should help ensure evidence-informed planning and reduce fragmentation.

Over the past two decades, the WSIS process has supported measurable progress in expanding connectivity, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering digital economic growth—particularly through multistakeholder collaboration and UN system support. These achievements should be acknowledged in the WSIS+20 review outcome as a foundation for renewed commitment. Building on these foundations, UNGIS reaffirms its readiness to contribute actively to WSIS+20 Review and implementation of the next phase of the WSIS. The Group stands ready to assist in ensuring that digital commitments are translated into coherent, coordinated actions that accelerate progress across the Sustainable Development Goals. UNGIS looks forward to continued engagement in the process leading up to the WSIS+20 outcome document.