

## **EU Non-Paper on Strengthening the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) for a Forward-Looking, Inclusive and Multi-Stakeholder Internet Governance**

### **Rationale**

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) remains the embodiment of the multistakeholder model, providing a unique venue for diverse stakeholders to address digital governance issues transparently and collaboratively. Its inclusive, bottom-up nature is instrumental in ensuring that even underrepresented voices can shape international digital policies. The EU and its Member States reaffirm the IGF's mandate as established in the Tunis Agenda and recognize its pivotal role in addressing the broad spectrum of evolving digital challenges.

However, the IGF must continuously evolve to remain effective amidst growing geopolitical fragmentation, technological change, and emerging digital divides. The WSIS+20 review provides a critical opportunity to strengthen the IGF's structure, in terms of financial sustainability, and the impact of its actions.

### **Institutional set-up**

Established in 2005, the IGF initially received a mandate for a period of 5 years which has since been periodically renewed. Currently its third mandate was renewed in 2015 for a period of 10 years<sup>1</sup> expiring in 2025. To ensure its long-term stability and effectiveness, the EU proposes:

- **Permanently institutionalize the IGF** maintaining its institutional home within UN DESA, along with the IGF's Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) and Leadership Panel.
- **To endow it with appropriate funding through the UN regular budget via reallocation of existing funds, complemented by voluntary contributions**, ensuring financial independence and inclusive participation.
- **To appoint an IGF Secretariat Director** to follow-up on IGF outputs, interconnect them with other digital governance initiatives at UN level and represent the IGF to the broader stakeholder community.

### **Enhanced Cooperation and Representation**

Balanced representation and active participation from the multistakeholder community are fundamental to the IGF's effectiveness. The EU thus advocates:

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly Resolution 70/125

- **Enhanced involvement of developing countries and marginalized groups** in the activities of the IGF, including through dedicated financial support such as travel grants and support to remote participation hubs.
- **Strengthening National, Regional, and Youth IGF Initiatives (NRIs)**, providing stronger financial backing and recognition within the broader IGF ecosystem.

### **Ensuring Policy Impact and Alignment with WSIS**

The IGF's discussions should systematically inform broader WSIS processes. Therefore, the EU proposes:

- **Reinforcement of multi-year thematic tracks and actionable post-IGF sessions**, combined with simplified and focused IGF outputs, ensuring broader accessibility and policy continuity.
- **Linking IGF conclusions to the WSIS Action Lines** by mandating that the conclusions of the IGF annual meetings be presented to the relevant WSIS Action Lines' Facilitators. Thereafter Facilitators would report back during the annual WSIS Forum on progress of implementation, thereby enhancing coherence and impact between IGF discussions and WSIS objectives.

### **Forward-Looking Governance: Multistakeholder Governance Labs**

To proactively address emerging technological challenges and prevent Internet fragmentation, the EU proposes establishing **Multistakeholder Governance Labs within the IGF framework**. These Labs would:

- Provide **collaborative and adaptive spaces** or Labs (other concept can be used) within the IGF where diverse stakeholders—including governments, civil society, technical communities, businesses, and academia— jointly explore, anticipate, test and come to a common understanding of the impacts caused by the deployment of emerging technologies on internet governance and identify appropriate, innovative solutions to address them.
- Integrate within the work of the Labs the **relevant work being done with existing structures**, in particular IGF Policy Networks, Best Practice Forums, Dynamic Coalitions, and build on previous work delivered by those.
- Allow to examine impacts on diverse geographical regions and populations and consequently increase ownership of the problem identification and proposed solutions. The aim is to pursue **Internet interoperability** in the context of powerful new technologies impacting the network and preventing fragmentation, considering advancements in other relevant IGF tracks.
- **Attract new and diverse participants**, particularly youth and specialists in emerging technologies, apt at assessing their impact on internet governance, particularly from

developing regions, thereby enriching the IGF's discussions and enhancing global inclusivity.

These Labs, inspired by the Global Multistakeholder High Level Conference on the governance of Web 4.0 and Virtual Worlds<sup>2</sup>, would reflect the IGF's inclusive, multistakeholder philosophy and bolster the global community's capacity to tackle complex, future-oriented governance challenges in a multistakeholder fashion.

### **Draft Language Proposal for WSIS+20 Outcome Document**

To reflect these proposals within the WSIS+20 outcome document, the EU suggests the following complementary language:

We reaffirm the importance of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as the primary multistakeholder platform for inclusive and forward-looking Internet governance. We decide to establish the IGF as a body of the United Nations with a permanent mandate within UN DESA, endowed with appropriate funding through the regular UN budget complemented by voluntary contributions. We make sure there is an IGF Secretariat Director and sufficiently strong secretariat for the IGF, to guarantee its long-term stability, inclusivity, and financial independence.

We further decide to institutionalize the IGF's Multistakeholder Advisory Group, Leadership Panel, and strengthen National, Regional, and Youth IGF Initiatives (NRIs), recognizing their critical role in the global Internet governance ecosystem.

To proactively address emerging technological and governance challenges to the global interoperability and openness of the Internet, the IGF will establish Multistakeholder Governance Labs integrating work being done in relevant IGF Policy Networks, Best Practices Forums and Dynamic Coalitions and building on their expertise and output. These Labs will provide inclusive, collaborative spaces for testing innovative governance solutions in relation to emerging technologies impacting the Internet that may be proposed for implementation in other fora already dealing with the technologies in question. By raising a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities arising from emerging technologies, they can contribute to mitigating the risks of fragmentation and preserve the openness of the global Internet.

We also commit to ensuring systematic reflection of IGF conclusions within WSIS Action Lines, requesting facilitators to annually report at the WSIS Forum on progress towards implementing IGF outcomes. This will enhance coherence between IGF discussions and the broader WSIS process.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/event-web-4-governance>