

Informal Virtual Consultations with Member States and Other Stakeholders
WSIS+20 Zero Draft
13-14 October 2025

The WSIS+20 Co-facilitators, H.E. Ms. Suela Janina (Albania) and H.E. Mr. Ekitela Lokaale (Kenya) convened [informal virtual consultations](#) with stakeholders on the [Zero Draft](#) of the WSIS+20 outcome document. The consultations were held in two sessions on 13 and 14 October to accommodate different time zones. Participants included representatives from Member States, intergovernmental and international organizations, the private sector, technical community, academia, civil society, and youth.

The Co-facilitators opened the sessions by recalling that over ninety written inputs had been received on the Zero Draft and published online. They thanked all contributors for their engagement and noted that the consultations aimed to gather feedback to inform preparation of a revised draft in November 2025.

Bridging Digital Divides and Capacity Development

Stakeholders emphasized that while progress has been made in expanding connectivity, the digital divide persists, particularly between high- and low-income countries, rural and urban areas, and among women and marginalized groups. Several interventions noted that closing the divide requires going beyond infrastructure to address underlying structural, social, and ethical dimensions.

Participants highlighted the importance of affordability, local content creation, and linguistic diversity to ensure meaningful connectivity. Calls were made for measurable targets and accountability mechanisms to accompany commitments, as well as financing strategies that link global priorities to national realities.

Speakers urged investment not only in technical capacity but also in critical thinking, problem-solving, and lifelong learning. Many underlined the need to integrate digital literacy and skills development across all levels of education, with particular attention to youth, women, and persons with disabilities. Proposals included adding new language to the Zero Draft to strengthen references to accessibility – such as recognizing persons who are deaf, including explicit references to the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, and ensuring representation of persons with lived disabilities in Internet governance bodies like the IGF MAG.

Youth participants called for recognition of young people as co-creators of the digital future, proposing the establishment of a Youth Advisory Council and inclusion of youth as a distinct stakeholder group in the WSIS process.

Enabling Environment and Digital Economy

Many interventions stressed that an enabling environment must combine supportive policy frameworks, regulatory clarity, and investment incentives. The private sector emphasized that predictable, transparent, and forward-looking regulation is key to attracting investment and ensuring innovation.

Proposals included streamlining licensing processes, ensuring competition in markets, and transparent pricing for consumers. Governments were encouraged to target public investment to areas where markets fail, and to make more effective use of universal service funds.

Several speakers underlined that private sector investment has been the principal driver of digital progress to date, and that balanced, proportionate regulation – avoiding protectionism or over-reach – is essential to maintain innovation. It was proposed by some that paragraph 35 of the Zero Draft be refined or deleted to avoid prescribing specific market regulation policies, while focusing instead on outcomes such as inclusion, capacity building, and connectivity.

Others stressed the importance of linking global dialogue with national action, including through greater parliamentary engagement in the WSIS and IGF processes, consistent with the Pact for the Future's recognition of the role of parliaments in digital cooperation.

Speakers from developing regions drew attention to the challenges of fragile infrastructure, unreliable power supply, and disaster vulnerability, urging that resilient digital infrastructure be designed to serve remote, mountainous, and disaster-prone areas. Climate and environmental resilience were identified as essential dimensions of digital development.

Human Rights

Stakeholders strongly reaffirmed that human rights must remain at the center of the WSIS vision and of all digital policy processes. The Zero Draft's anchoring of the WSIS framework in international human rights law was widely welcomed, with calls to further strengthen related language.

Speakers proposed integrating human rights safeguards throughout the life cycle of digital technologies – from conceptualization and design to deployment and trade – and to reaffirm that any limitation of rights must comply with the principles of necessity, proportionality, and legality.

It was proposed that the outcome document call for mandatory human rights impact assessments and the creation of accountability and remedy mechanisms to ensure private-sector responsibility in the digital sphere. Several participants highlighted that data governance and privacy should be explicitly recognized as fundamental human rights issues.

Speakers supported reinforcing collaboration between the WSIS architecture and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, including proposals for an annual human rights report to the IGF and Human Rights Council, prepared in cooperation with the NRIs.

Gender equality was also a recurring theme, with strong support for systematic gender mainstreaming across all action lines, measurable gender indicators, and robust accountability mechanisms. Participants emphasized that gender equality is not a side issue but a central requirement for achieving the WSIS vision.

Artificial Intelligence

Stakeholders recognized artificial intelligence as both a transformative and potentially divisive technology, with growing implications for human rights, employment, and sustainability.

Speakers called for AI frameworks consistent with international human rights law, and for risk-based, inclusive governance approaches that minimize duplication with existing UN mechanisms. Many referenced the need for coherence between the WSIS framework and other global AI initiatives, including the Global Digital Compact and the Hiroshima AI Process.

Proposals included adding explicit language on environmental impacts of AI, the need for ethical standards and transparency, and ensuring participation of women, civil society, and

Global South researchers in AI governance and research programmes. Several underscored that no AI system incompatible with international human rights standards should be permitted.

Internet Governance

A large number of interventions reaffirmed the central role of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as the primary multistakeholder platform for addressing Internet and digital governance issues. Many stakeholders called for the IGF to be granted a permanent mandate, with predictable and sustainable funding, and recognition of its intersessional work, including national, regional, and youth IGFs (NRIs) and Dynamic Coalitions.

Speakers stressed that the IGF must remain open, inclusive, and evidence-based, with improved linkages between its outputs and relevant intergovernmental processes. Several noted that the Sao Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines (NETmundial +10) should be reflected in the revised text, alongside reaffirmation of the Tunis Agenda principles.

Many interventions underlined the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity, open standards, and interoperability as foundations of an open and secure Internet. Some proposed establishing a dedicated financial task force within the WSIS architecture to support IGF operations and capacity-building, particularly for developing countries.

Others called for recognition of youth IGFs and for enhanced participation of underrepresented groups, while reiterating that Internet governance should be understood broadly in line with the Tunis Agenda, encompassing public policy issues including human rights, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies.

Other Topics

Speakers discussed the need to strengthen coherence across UN digital cooperation mechanisms, particularly between WSIS+20, the Global Digital Compact, and the 2030 Agenda. Many supported reinforcing the role of UNGIS as an inter-agency mechanism, including proposals to enhance its coordination and functionality with a stable secretariat.

Environmental sustainability, gender equality, and inclusion of persons with disabilities were highlighted as cross-cutting priorities to be mainstreamed throughout the outcome document and WSIS action lines. Participants also called for integration of sustainability monitoring and reporting structures, and for the WSIS review to reflect commitments to open data, digital commons, and accountability frameworks.

Conclusion

The consultations reflected broad and substantive engagement across all stakeholder groups, reaffirming the WSIS community's commitment to a human-rights-based, inclusive, and multistakeholder approach to digital cooperation. Participants expressed much appreciation for the Co-facilitators' openness and transparency in the process and looked forward to the next iteration of the draft outcome document in November 2025.