

WSIS+20 General Assembly Overall Review – Preparatory Process
1st Preparatory Meeting | 30 May 2025, 3:00–6:00 p.m. | Conference Room 1, United Nations HQ, New York
Briefing Note

In December 2003, the global community gathered in Geneva at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), declaring a shared commitment to “build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.” This milestone launched a sustained effort to harness information and communication technologies (ICTs) for sustainable development, initially contributing to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The resulting Geneva Plan of Action established 11 Action Lines¹ to guide progress in key areas. The United Nations General Assembly recognized the outcomes of the Geneva phase in its resolution 59/220².

The second phase of WSIS, held in Tunis in 2005, built upon the Geneva outcomes and adopted the Tunis Agenda, which addressed additional dimensions such as financing mechanisms and Internet governance. Paragraph 111 of the Tunis Agenda, endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 60/252³, called for the General Assembly to conduct an overall review of WSIS outcomes in 2015. That review culminated in a high-level meeting in December 2015, following an inclusive preparatory process, and resulted in an intergovernmental agreed outcome document, reflected in resolution 70/125⁴.

In resolution 79/277⁵, adopted in March 2025, the General Assembly decided to conclude the overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes – known as WSIS+20 – with a two-day high-level meeting to be held on 16–17 December 2025. This will be preceded by an intergovernmental preparatory process that includes inputs from all relevant WSIS stakeholders.

To lead this process, the President of the General Assembly appointed H.E. Ms. Suela Janina, Permanent Representative of Albania and H.E. Mr. Ekitela Lokaale, Permanent Representative of Kenya, as co-facilitators to lead the intergovernmental process, which will include preparatory meetings, resulting in an intergovernmental agreed outcome document, for adoption at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS, also referred to as the WSIS+20 Review.

The review will take stock of progress since Tunis, identify gaps, and examine new and emerging challenges and opportunities in the digital landscape, ensuring that policies reflect both technological evolution and development needs. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), as it did during the 10-year review in 2015, will serve as the Secretariat for the WSIS+20 review.

The Tunis Agenda also tasked the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with responsibility for overseeing the system-wide follow-up to WSIS. ECOSOC, in turn, mandated the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) to

¹ <https://publicadministration.un.org/ws10/WSIS-Action-Lines-and-Facilitators>

² https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/538071/files/A_RES_59_220-EN.pdf

³ https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/571576/files/A_RES_60_252-EN.pdf

⁴ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/70/125>

⁵ https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4080263/files/A_RES_79_277-EN.pdf

assist in this follow-up. For the WSIS+20 review, the CSTD commissioned in 2024 its 20-year progress report⁶, prepared as a contribution to the review to be conducted by the Assembly in 2025.

The General Assembly's WSIS+10 resolution called for close alignment between the WSIS process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, highlighting the crosscutting contribution of information and communications technology to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and poverty eradication. The General Assembly requested in that resolution that the WSIS+20 review should be an input to the 2030 review of the Agenda and the SDGs.

In 2024, the General Assembly adopted the Pact for the Future, including the Global Digital Compact. The Compact complements and reaffirms the outcomes of WSIS, draws attention to major developments in the Information Society since the Summit and identifies frameworks for further development of the Information Society consistent with the vision and principles set out in the WSIS outcome documents.

Progress in the Implementation of WSIS outcomes

Since the adoption of the Geneva Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda, significant advances have been made in access, connectivity, and the integration of digital tools into public policy and governance. Today, over two-thirds of the global population uses the Internet, and broadband infrastructure reaches a growing share of rural and underserved regions.

Governments have increasingly leveraged digital platforms to enhance the accessibility, efficiency, and resilience of public services – from digital identity and mobile banking to e-health and remote learning. These innovations, many aligned with the WSIS Action Lines, have supported measurable progress toward national development strategies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the same time, new technologies have emerged with profound policy implications:

- Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are reshaping service delivery, governance, and public-sector innovation.
- Cloud computing, data analytics, and digital public infrastructure are facilitating real-time decision-making and improving government responsiveness.
- Social media platforms and mobile technologies have transformed civic engagement, service feedback loops, and emergency response.

These developments demonstrate the continued relevance of WSIS outcomes and action lines in guiding national and international digital public policy.

Challenges and Areas for Continued Focus

Despite notable progress, significant challenges remain in translating digital potential into inclusive, secure, and sustainable development. The digital divide has become more complex, encompassing not just infrastructure gaps but also affordability, connectivity quality, device access, and digital skills. Inequalities persist across gender, age, geography, and income,

⁶ unctad.org/system/files/official-document/wsis20_cstd-report_en.pdf

while new divides are emerging in relation to advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Many governance frameworks struggle to keep pace with technological change, particularly in contexts with limited institutional capacity. Misuse of ICTs – including cybersecurity threats, disinformation, and online abuse – undermines trust, weakens democratic institutions, and threatens social cohesion. Environmental concerns, including e-waste and energy consumption, also call for more sustainable digital strategies. In addressing these complex and interconnected challenges, all WSIS Action Lines remain equally relevant, offering a comprehensive foundation for inclusive, secure, and resilient digital development.

Governments have a critical role to play in ensuring that digital transformation advances equity and rights. This includes embedding ICTs in national development strategies, strengthening regulatory frameworks, and supporting inclusive dialogue through platforms such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). Priority actions include expanding digital literacy, particularly for women, youth, and marginalised communities; fostering international cooperation and responsible technology transfer; promoting local and multilingual content; and aligning digital policy with public interest values such as privacy, and data protection.

Guiding questions

1. *To what extent and how has the vision of a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society" evolved over the past 20 years since WSIS?*
2. *What are the priorities and challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes today?*
3. *How can cooperation through the WSIS mechanisms, including multistakeholder dialogue and recently adopted the Global Digital Compact, enhance coherence in digital governance?*

Draft Programme

Friday, 30 May 2025		
3:00-3:15	Opening	Co-facilitators
3:15-3:30	Introductory Discussion on Progress in the Implementation of WSIS outcomes, Challenges and Areas for Continued Focus	Presentation delivered by the UN Secretariat
3:30-5:45	Statements by Member States and Observer States and Observers	Member States and Observer States and Observers
5:45-6:00	Closing and Next Steps	Co-facilitators