

**United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)  
Twenty-fourth Annual Session**

**High-level Roundtable on  
“Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit  
on the Information Society at the regional and international level”**

**20 May 2021, 2 p.m.  
Hybrid Meeting  
Concept Note**

## **1. Background**

During the twenty-fourth annual session of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), a High-level Roundtable will be held in the afternoon of 20 May 2021, under the theme of ‘Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international level.’ The Roundtable will focus on opportunities and challenges posed by information and communications technologies (ICTs) for achieving the WSIS vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in the context of the acceleration of digitalization driven by COVID-19 and of the enduring inequalities and ethical dilemmas that the pandemic has also highlighted.

The year 2020 was a testing ground for progress towards the implementation of the WSIS outcomes. Digital technologies have played a crucial role in addressing the pandemic and enabling resilience in many ways, such as the use of big data and artificial intelligence for public health interventions, the use of digital services to expedite infection monitoring and testing, the use of the internet and videoconference platforms for work and education and the expanded use of electronic commerce (e-commerce) and online entertainment platforms. On the other hand, those who lack affordable connectivity have been severely disadvantaged, and the pandemic has emphasized the crucial value of meaningful access to digital resources for participation in society. Other challenges have also emerged including widespread misinformation and disinformation, privacy and data protection and cybersecurity.

## **2. Objectives**

The developments seen through the COVID-19 pandemic seem likely to continue once it is over, accelerating changes caused by digitalization that were already apparent in society and the economy. There is a need to draw the pertinent lessons so that stakeholders can optimize opportunities, mitigate risks and enable societies to rebuild better as the crisis recedes. In this context, the Roundtable will provide an opportunity for high-level policymakers to exchange experiences, lessons learned and good practices, and to discuss challenges faced at national, regional and international levels as well as those that affecting specific groups. The outcome of the session will feed into the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Council.

## **3. Questions for discussion**

The following questions will guide the discussion:

- What are best practices and policies that can help countries to combat the ongoing pandemic and eventually build back better using ICT and digital technologies?
- What are the emerging and future issues that may have an impact on progress towards the WSIS vision?

- What can the international community do to ensure progress towards the implementation of the WSIS outcomes in the context of the COVID-19 and its unequal implications for countries and social groups?
- What are best practices/lessons learned to reduce the digital divide both among and within countries?
- What can CSTD do to enhance digital cooperation and digital governance?

#### **4. Format of the High-Level Roundtable:**

Following a brief introduction of the session by the chair, the Keynote speaker will address the Commission. After this, high-level participants will make their initial interventions (5-7 minutes). Then, the chair will initiate an interactive discussion among the participants, including those from the floor.

#### **5. Supporting document**

A/76/64–E/2021/11 “Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels”

Document available on the website of the CSTD:

<https://unctad.org/meeting/commission-science-and-technology-development-twenty-fourth-session>