

# **COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)**

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## **Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2025 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

### **Submission by**

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General 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 levels" (to the 29<sup>th</sup> session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

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## IFLA Submission to the 2025 WSIS Action Lines Review

IFLA, as a contributor to the facilitation of Action line C3, is proud once again to be sharing its contribution to the WSIS Reporting process.

### Key Activities

Libraries around the world have continued to provide internet connectivity through public access as a primary, complementary, and back-up means of getting online. They have also continued to explore how to design and deliver public access in ways that support the goal of a people-centred internet, as well as broaden our understanding of what public access is.

IFLA promoted its [Internet Manifesto](#), which sets out a vision both of what libraries contribute to, and need from, wider internet governance. A key goal of the update is to stimulate libraries to engage more actively in preparing and delivering national and local digital inclusion strategies.

EIFL advanced its [Public Library Innovation Programme](#) with a new cohort of grantees, as well as new resources to help libraries maximise the impact of the internet access they can offer. There has been a particular emphasis on drawing on public access to provide access to materials and tools that build skills, as well as collaboration with other institutions such as schools.

Recognising strong like-mindedness between the work of libraries and the Connect.Post initiative, IFLA signed an MoU with the Universal Postal Union. This promises to realise synergies and ensure stronger positive impact on communities – see more in our [conference session](#).

We have advanced towards the production of a proof-of-concept of a library layer or the GIGA project, in order to ensure that stakeholders looking to support stronger connectivity and related projects have a better evidence base with which to work.

### Trends and Barriers

Public access to the internet, through libraries and other community centres, continues to represent a significant part of the wider infrastructure for ensuring inclusive and effective connectivity.

A strong concern has been the **attacks on eRate (universal service fund) support for library connectivity** in the United States. This funding makes it possible for libraries to provide connections for communities – notably through the lending of hotspots. This is a lifeline for many, in particular in rural areas, who otherwise have little realistic possibility to get online. Libraries are arguing strongly for the preservation of such funding in order to enable such connectivity to continue.

Partly connected to the **rise of populism** is the tension between efforts to advance work to build inclusive forms of access, as well as collections and broader surveys, but also to resist efforts to cancel out such programming for political reasons. This highlights the importance of ensuring that libraries can retain their public status (free of commercial influence), but also be governed by professional principles and ethics rather than political priorities. Getting this right is important if we are to ensure that libraries are as accessible as possible to all who need to get online.

An area of ongoing development is around the potential of libraries, as public access venues, to contribute to reflection on and more widespread (responsible) **take up of artificial intelligence**. As a technology that brings with it both real possibilities for people, but also some

risks, there is a need for spaces where people can get online and engage with experts of training materials. In parallel with ongoing work to explore how libraries themselves can make optimal use of AI and support training, they have also rolled out AI literacy training to their communities. This work is, of course, just the latest iteration of libraries' long-standing role as a place where people can get to grips with new technology in a safe, supported space.

Libraries' **ability to provide content** – which is essential if internet access is to be meaningful – is also increasingly under threat. Broader attacks on scientific infrastructures in different parts of the world are a concern, as is the imposition of network usage fees that will ultimately harm libraries and other non-profit content sharing organisations far more than major tech companies. A particular concern is around the tougher contract terms being offered by publishers and other vendors that prevent the development of collections or the provision of access to library users. The failure to update copyright law for the digital age poses a major threat to libraries' ability to offer content that makes public access meaningful.

Finally, an IFLA survey of how libraries are providing public access, as well as what services and other support they are building on top of this, has underlined that **many libraries still cannot provide public access**. Most frequently, this is down to a lack of infrastructure or cost, and it is seen as having a significant negative impact on ability to offer resources and learning.

Those who do provide access offer a range of services, with educational content most regularly shared, followed by online journals and eBooks. There does nonetheless remain concern around the degree to which relevant materials are available in formats and language that work for users. There is sometimes training for librarians, but often this is basic, and more could be done to ensure that librarians can better support their communities to be effective and safe internet users. Nonetheless, over half of libraries across our sample already offer skills.

## **Priorities and Plans**

Looking ahead, we continue to look to push the boundaries of what public access is and does in order to achieve WSIS goals.

We welcome the emphasis in the zero draft of the WSIS+20 Outcome Document on the continued role of Action Line Facilitators in planning for and driving forwards work in their areas. We are happy to continue to support the Facilitators, and look forward to working with other Action Line Facilitators and stakeholders more broadly to achieve this.

We believe that **more needs to be done to include libraries should also be replicated at the national and local levels**, ensuring that public access centres such as libraries should also be integrated into wider digital inclusion strategies. This is not just a matter of ensuring adequate resourcing, but also ensuring that plans are drawn up based on a comprehensive idea of the tools and infrastructures available to support the achievement of goals.

In terms of emerging ideas, we are currently exploring the **potential of libraries to support citizen data observatories**, both as drivers of scientific progress, and in order to build civic engagement. Core to libraries' ability to contribute here is their ability to combine connectivity with other aspects, such as space and staff support.

Finally, we need to ensure that **decision-making about internet governance in general serves to support public access**, and the content and skills support that makes this meaningful. In parallel, we need to be careful to avoid steps that make this more difficult, or try to apply the same rules to libraries as to major technology platforms.