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 the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years

Submission by

Council of Europe

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the CSTD secretariat that will inform the substantive discussion at the CSTD on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years during its 28th annual session in April 2025, in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution E/RES/2023/3, to the CSTD to conduct such substantive discussions and to report thereon, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly.

Twenty years in the implementation of outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) - Council of Europe contribution

WSIS+20 Reporting Template

Name of organization: Council of Europe

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Role of respondent: Digital Governance Advisor

Date of response: 15 November 2024

I. What is your organisation's formal role and responsibilities concerning WSIS implementation?

a. Mandates of your organization relevant to the WSIS implementation

The Council of Europe member States are committed to securing the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) for everyone within their jurisdictions, both online and offline.

An Internet governance, and more broadly a governance of the digital environment, that respects, protects and promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law principles, and promotes information integrity, is a priority for the Council of Europe. In addition to ensuring that the Internet remains open, global, free, interoperable and accessible, the aim is to guarantee and create conditions for the effective, free and safe exercise of human rights online and for fostering citizens' participation in the democratic processes. The rights concerned include, inter alia, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, children's rights, the rights to education, respect for private and family life and effective protection against discrimination and hate speech.

In accordance with the conclusions of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005 and the lessons learnt from practice, the Council of Europe believes that the form of governance that is best suited to achieving these aims is a multistakeholder model that is inclusive and transparent. Such governance includes, in addition to States – governments, parliaments and other relevant State bodies – the private sector, civil society, international organisations, academia and the technical community, in order to account for the diversity of knowledge and perspectives.

b. Brief History of your organization's contribution to the World Summit on the information Society (WSIS)

The Council of Europe recognises the key role played by the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in the evolving global digital governance and supports the annual IGF which has successfully provided, for twenty years, a global platform for stakeholders from communities around the world to discuss and exchange views and best practices relating to the Internet and digital public policy issues, including on the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms online. The Council of Europe is actively sharing its work and instruments with the IGF community in fields such as AI, cybercrime, data protection, environmental sustainability, online content moderation, regulation of media and

platforms, empowerment of users through media and information literacy, safeguarding non-discrimination and equality online.

The Council of Europe also welcomes the emergence, since the WSIS, of regional, national and youth multistakeholder Internet governance forums (NRIs), as well as of the wide range of partnerships, co operation initiatives and coalitions involving different stakeholder groups. The Council of Europe has supported and actively participated in the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG) since its inception in 2008. In 2016, the Council of Europe launched a digital partnership with technology companies and their associations which currently includes 27 members, to engage in policy dialogue to respect and protect human rights online. Most lately, the Council of Europe actively contributed to the WSIS +20 Forum High-Level Event 2024, in May 2024, and issued a Declaration on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 review and the extension of the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in September 2024.

c. Implementation processes and initiatives within your organization and/or in partnership with other organisations

In the context of its Internet Governance Strategies 2012-2019, the Council of Europe has provided member States and partners, as well as other stakeholders, with broad references for the implementation of its standards in the digital environment. The Council of Europe Digital Agenda 2022-2025 further aims at consolidating the existing digital regulation in Europe and beyond, responding to challenges raised by the new technologies, and accompanying member States in the digital transition.

The Council of Europe member States, together with likeminded States from other regions of the world, have established legally binding standards for artificial intelligence systems throughout their lifecycles, ensuring a human-centric approach and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law through the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

The Committee of Ministers has also adopted and widely promoted several recommendations to member States, declarations and guidelines aimed at improving the Internet and the broader digital governance:

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)6 on a Guide to human rights for Internet users
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)6 on the free, transboundary flow of information on the Internet
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)1 on protecting and promoting the right to freedom of expression and the right to private life with regard to network neutrality
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)5 on Internet freedom
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)2 on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)1 on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)11 on principles for media and communication governance
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)13 on the impacts of digital technologies on freedom of expression
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech

The Council of Europe also provided, in recent years, practical guidance on online content moderation, countering online mis- and disinformation in a human rights and rule of law compliant manner, as well as on combatting online hate speech and prioritisation of public interest content online. In addition, it has initiated wide range of co-operation initiatives to support its member States and other key

stakeholders to implement these standards and guidelines. Lately, it has engaged in a reflection on the Metaverse, virtual realities in general and their human rights and rule of law implications and, more widely, their potential impact on the principles and values underlying our democratic societies.

II. What have been your organization's main contributions to the direct implementation of the WSIS outcomes and related areas of digital development since the Summit, particularly since 2015?

a. WSIS Action Lines (as lead, co-facilitator or supporting participant)

The Council of Europe, has continued the resolute implementation of its [Digital Agenda 2022-2025](#) focused on consolidating the existing digital regulation, responding to new challenges while taking advantage of the opportunities provided by emerging digital technologies; and accompanying governments for a digital transition with European values.

A large body of public policies and laws as well as numerous capacity building programmes in the area of information society and digital governance, particularly on freedom of expression and media freedom, AI and privacy, cybersafety and cybersecurity, digital literacy and non-discrimination, diversity and justice, have been promoted among 46 member states of the organisation and towards the global community.

These efforts were supported by multi-stakeholder collaboration among governments, tech platforms, and civil society, fostering advancements in digital governance and e-democracy.

The extension of the global reach of the [Budapest Convention on Cybercrime](#) (76 countries) and the [Data Protection Convention 108+](#) (55 countries) has bolstered international cooperation on cyber issues and privacy. The opening for signature on 5 September 2024 of the Council of Europe [Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law](#) has opened a global and inclusive regulatory pathway for this new revolutionary technology.

The 2024 [Declaration of Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 review and the extension of the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)](#) has underscored continuous support for a transparent multi-stakeholder governance of a free and safe internet for all.

For more details see Council of Europe contribution to the WSIS Questionnaire on 2024 Summit Follow-up below.

WSIS Questionnaire
2024 Summit follow

b. WSIS-related projects

c. Indicators used to measure the impact of ICT in the achievement of the SDGs in your organization's area of work

The Council of Europe regularly reports the progress on implementing United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals on its [SDG 2030 dedicated web page](#).

d. What assessment has your organization made of its engagement in WSIS-related work and digital development in its areas of responsibility?

In September 2024 the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers issued a Declaration on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 review and the extension of the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) that assessed the organisation's contribution to the WSIS process and underscored continuous support for a transparent multi-stakeholder governance of a free and safe internet for all.

In October 2024 the Council of Europe contributed to the WSIS Questionnaire on 2024 Summit Follow-up detailing its contribution to WSIS action lines.

WSIS Questionnaire
2024 Summit follow

III. What does your organization see as the main achievements, problems and emerging issues arising from WSIS and from digital development in its areas of responsibility since the Summit, particularly since 2015?

a. What have been the main achievements of WSIS and digital development?

The WSIS+20 review process will feed into the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Agenda. As new and emerging technologies deepen their imprint on societies, extending the IGF mandate beyond 2025 should harness the opportunity for continuity and progress toward the aim of a human-centred and multistakeholder approach to global digital transformation.

b. What problems, obstacles and constraints have been encountered?

To ensure a fair and inclusive digital future, it is crucial to shape digital transformation and standard setting with the public interest at the forefront, and to bridge the digital divides globally. Currently, digital infrastructure and major platforms are predominantly owned by private entities, and there are increasing concerns about unequal access and benefits for different groups of people. Disparities in digital literacy increase these divides, hindering equitable participation in the digital economy.

c. What new opportunities and challenges have emerged over the years since WSIS which need to be addressed?

The open and inclusive collaboration and co-operation among all stakeholders involved in matters related to the Internet and digital issues are fundamental in ensuring that WSIS remains a dynamic and effective process, based on an agile and responsive approach to the expanding frontiers of emerging technologies and taking into account the interdependencies between sustainable development and human rights. By building on a strong commitment to the multi-stakeholder approach and discussing the opportunities, risks and evolving trends within the digital sphere, the WSIS action lines can be further developed and look beyond the 20-year milestone.

States should collaborate with all stakeholders to develop strong public policies, enforce corporate responsibility, encourage social investments, and drive technological innovations that prioritise accessibility, transparency, and fairness for all. This collaborative effort is essential to foster a digital environment that serves the common good and reduces existing inequalities. Discussions within both

the WSIS Forum and the IGF are critical for achieving this goal and key to deepening multi-stakeholder Internet and digital governance and they should lead to actionable plans for strengthening this model.

IV. Lessons learned in the implementation of the Summit outcomes in your organisation's specific areas of responsibility

Strengthening Multistakeholder Internet Governance: The importance of inclusive governance emerged as a key lesson, with broad stakeholder engagement proving essential for ensuring policies address diverse perspectives. Investing in technical infrastructure was also crucial for maintaining the Internet's availability and resilience, particularly in the face of growing cybersecurity challenges.

Aligning Digital Governance with Human Rights and Rule of Law: Balancing innovation with regulation required continuous dialogue among stakeholders to avoid stifling technological progress while safeguarding democratic principles. Establishing accountability mechanisms helped ensure decisions adhered to the principles of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, fostering trust across the digital ecosystem.

Leveraging Digital and AI Technologies for Sustainable Development: AI technologies demonstrated immense potential in advancing sustainable development goals, but ethical governance remained critical to mitigate risks such as bias and rights violations. Localizing digital solutions enhanced their relevance and impact, addressing community-specific needs while minimizing unintended consequences.

Navigating Risks to Democracy and Human Rights: Proactive risk management and stakeholder capacity-building emerged as vital strategies for addressing challenges like misinformation and privacy breaches. Equipping stakeholders with the knowledge to handle complex digital governance issues ensured adaptive, resilient approaches in an ever-evolving digital environment. These lessons will guide future initiatives, enabling ethical and sustainable digital progress.

V. Observations or recommendations concerning the future of WSIS and digital development, taking into account the outcomes of the Summit of the Future in September 2024

States should strengthen action to ensure the effective protection of human rights in the online environment and that **business enterprises operating online have a responsibility to respect human rights**, as outlined in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; in this framework, recognises the need for States and the private sector to ensure online safety and information integrity while maintaining a fair and open platform environment and ensuring freedom of expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, in line with applicable standards.

United Nations General Assembly's twenty-year review of implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (the WSIS+20 review) should **reaffirm the importance of a multistakeholder approach in the field**, as well as that it is crucial for States and regional and international organisations to actively follow its evolution and participate in related reflection and regulatory processes.

States should encourage participation of all stakeholders in all processes related to Internet and digital governance at the national, regional and global levels, including the WSIS+20 review process and the high-level political forum 2025, and strengthening the linkages between the WSIS action lines and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). This also includes encouraging the setting-up of

dedicated national Internet and digital governance forums and considering ways to include the multistakeholder community in consultations relating to Internet and digital policy decision-making processes;

The United Nations General Assembly is welcome and well justified to extent the mandate of the IGF for ten years until 2035;

The internet and digital governance multistakeholder community should actively engage in the support, intersessional work, and preparation of the IGF and to provide financial contributions to ensure its long-term financial stability.

VI. Please identify publications, reports and other documents by your organisation which you consider can contribute to the work of the review.

25.09.2024 - [Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 review and the extension of the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)](#)

04.05.2022 - [Council of Europe Digital Agenda 2022-2025](#)

17.12.2019 - [Final report of the Secretary General on the Internet Governance (2016-2019)](#)

30.03.2016 - [Council of Europe Internet Governance Strategy for 2016-2019](#)

28.01.2016 - [Final report of the Secretary General on the Internet Governance (2012-2015)](#)

03.06.2014 - [Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +10 review and the extension of the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)](#)

[Council of Europe Contributions to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals web page](#)

Useful reference links:

Geneva and Tunis outcome documents from WSIS -
https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/outcome/booklet/index.html

The General Assembly's ten-year review report -
https://publicadministration.un.org/wsis10/Portals/5/N1543842.pdf

The CSTD ten-year review - https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2015d3_en.pdf

Contributions should be submitted by **15 November 2024** to the CSTD Secretariat at cstd-wsis20@unctad.org. They will be made available on the CSTD website for consideration by the Commission unless contributors specifically request that their submissions should not be published.

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