

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

**Twenty-eighth session  
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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**

**International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions**

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 28<sup>th</sup> 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.

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***Twenty years in the implementation of outcomes of the World Summit on the  
Information Society (WSIS)***

**WSIS+20 Reporting Template**

Name of organization: **IFLA**

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Role of respondent: **Policy & Advocacy Officer**

Date of response: **15/11/2024**

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

**a. Mandates of your organization relevant to the WSIS implementation.**

IFLA continued to advocate for an inclusive, rights-based information society throughout the present year. We worked alongside library members, volunteers and information professionals to uphold intellectual freedom, access to culture, education, digital inclusion and freedom of speech.

We support the idea of meaningful access to information for all and library-powered sustainable development by strengthening the ability of the library and information sector to advocate for equitable access to information and resilience sustainable library communities. We believe that access to information, underpinned by universal literacy is an essential pillar of sustainable development in our times.

We continue to play a role in supporting libraries worldwide in the task of archiving and preserving cultural and historical documents, books and other materials. Libraries' adaptation to new technological developments has allowed them to seek new ways to ethically preserve traditional and indigenous knowledge also in the digital context. In a similar way, IFLA accompanies libraries and information professionals in their adaptation to the digital transformation and helps them navigate challenges and opportunities in the digital era.

**b. Brief history of your organization's contribution to the World Summit on the  
Information Society (WSIS).**

IFLA has been contributing to the WSIS process since 2003. During the Geneva and Tunis phases, IFLA and its members shared their common vision of an inclusive information society in which everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge and which is based on the fundamental right of human beings both to access and to express information without restriction.

This vision mentions and includes the central role of libraries in the information society as actors of change that respond to the particular needs of their communities. They support the general transmission of knowledge and build capacity by providing training and access to resources. Due to the centrality of knowledge to economic progress, libraries remain critical allies to achieve the development goals.

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

IFLA continues to support the capacity building of members, volunteers, sections and information professionals across the library and intersecting worldwide networks. Through this, IFLA ensures that the library and information workforce benefits from a wide range of opportunities to work together to advance community development. By enabling interconnectedness, our institutions, collections and services can better innovate to realize further the goal of meaningful and inclusive access to information. Together we have a unique potential to drive systemic change in the areas in which we work. Standards and guidelines developed have tuned out to be particularly useful in this regard.

IFLA keeps collaborating with Electronic Information For Libraries (EIFL) in the Internet Governance Forum Dynamic Coalition for Public Access in Libraries (DC-PAL) and has recently partnered with UNESCO's Dynamic Coalition on Measuring Digital Inclusion (DC-DI).

During the past months IFLA and UNESCO have also worked together to expand the use of the jointly published IFLA and UNESCO-IFAP's Public Library Manifesto. This manifesto reflects the changing technological and societal landscape while retaining public libraries' original purpose, making it a valuable resource for library professionals and institutions worldwide.

Similarly, in August 2024, IFLA published its revised Internet Manifesto which represents a unification of library voices in regard to the Internet and sets out a compelling narrative about the place of libraries in the digital spaces.

In terms of access, IFLA has also maintained alignment between its own practices and some connectivity-oriented initiatives such as ITU's GIGA. In December 2024, IFLA took part at the Partner2Connect Annual Meeting and presented two pledges the focused on bringing together and sharing geolocation of libraries and the development of a handbook, building on good examples of digital inclusion initiatives by libraries. Following up to these pledges, IFLA kickstarted the 'Libraries Boosting Connectivity' project in September 2024, which will be piloting geolocation and other data collection activities in six different countries.

IFLA has also maintained its observer status at WIPO and continued to work with other stakeholders on how to share information and collaborate across borders.

In the same manner, IFLA has collaborated with other organizations with similar information goals such as the Tactical Technology Collective, Save the Children, the European SchoolNet and Politecnico Di Milano.

**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)**

C2. Information and communication infrastructure – The library network understands that access to information is critical to sustainable development. As the Internet has become the major source of information today, IFLA has helped libraries in their journey to increase connectivity efforts and to facilitate public Internet access. Existing infrastructure has also been improved by expanding and equipping libraries with better resources, materials and training. Libraries are also key actors in promoting community networks across countries which is one of the reasons why we consider that public access should be considered as part of the broader infrastructure for last mile connectivity, both on its own and as a complement to private connectivity.

C3. Access to information and knowledge – During the past years, IFLA has continued to support its trusted network of local institutions to effectively reach new and marginalized populations. This support includes closing gaps in access to information and helping governments, civil society and businesses to better understand local information needs. In a similar way IFLA promoted the advancement of digital inclusion through access to ICT and dedicated staff to help people develop new digital skills. In certain regions, libraries remain as a single point of access to the Internet for many individuals and therefore the importance of their role has increased as more people in underserved areas strive to access the information, services and resources that are only offered via Internet access. It is also important to highlight the key role of libraries as part of the scientific infrastructure as they offer open access repositories and other services which are the backbone of many research systems and processes.

C4. Capacity building – Libraries have been leading digital skills development efforts for several decades. First by improving the capacities of their own staff to deliver better services to their communities and secondly by having their staff deliver workshops and community oriented training to library attendees. IFLA has partnered with several libraries and implemented initiatives with its members and volunteers which aim to build capacities in different regions. With the rise of AI and other emerging technologies, big efforts have been aimed at increasing the understanding of individuals facing these technological changes, regardless of their age and socio economic background.

C7. ICT applications – e-govt, e-learning, e-health, e-employment – Libraries worldwide represent also a network of delivery sites for government programmes and services. During the last decade, IFLA has offered support to the library network which has resulted in the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities and the increase of access to government services many individuals worldwide. That became even more evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when many people lost temporary access to library facilities. Throughout the last decade, IFLA has conducted research with libraries to better understand their support for economic development, employment and healthcare access. In Botswana (2015), 87% of library visitors reported that their health improved as a result of the health information they found using public library services, likewise, many people in several countries have reported using library computers and training to support employment related activities. As a result, many libraries have increased their guidance programs targeting current and prospective business owners from underserved communities.

C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content – One of IFLA's strongest mandates is to preserve and provide access to cultural heritage via libraries. To enable libraries to be able to fulfill that mission and adapt to the needs of their local communities. IFLA continues to work both within the organization and with partners to deliver on the human right of cultural participation. Through collections, spaces, staff and programming, libraries make a huge contribution to the cultural life of their communities.

#### b. WSIS-related projects

Throughout 2024, IFLA worked with the UNESCO- Information For All Programme (IFAP) to host a session via the WSIS+20 event. The session highlighted examples of best practices for the empowerment of communities through inclusive access. The central role and changing paradigm of libraries was also discussed and raised the importance of promoting human-centric design of systems and services, particularly in the face of AI and emerging technologies.

In the same way IFLA and UNESCO-IFAP co-authored two policy briefs on Ethical AI practices from the library perspective and on digital inclusion and how to facilitate collaboration between libraries and member states for more inclusive frameworks. The briefs will be launched at the 2024 Internet Governance Forum via a joint session.

The 'Libraries Boosting Connectivity' (LBC) project was recently launched (October 2024) and, as above mentioned, seeks to collect data on libraries' geolocation, connectivity and digital related matters during the coming months. The project aims to build a more comprehensive picture of the current digital and connectivity status of libraries across the world and to find gaps and opportunities for further expansion. This is explicitly aligned to the GIGA initiative, and aims to bring us closer to a situation

where the potential of libraries is mobilized in contribution to efforts to achieve wider development goals.

The implementation of two digital literacy projects also took place throughout this year and will continue to run through 2025. The EU funded Media Literacy Case for Educators (MLCE) project, aiming to empower educators and librarians for the next digital decade, trained approximately 80 direct facilitators via the Training of Trainers and more than 300 who participated in a developed MOOC. This project was implemented by IFLA in collaboration with the Tactical Technology Collective, Save the Children and the European School Network. The ‘Everywhere all the Time’ materials and workshops used practical examples, simple and familiar language and engaging visuals making it accessible and interactive for people of all ages.

The EMIF funded, Media Literacy for Societal Resilience (MILSR) project was co-developed by the Tactical Technology Collective and Politecnico Di Milano’s Density Design Lab and is being implemented by IFLA across 50 European libraries. The ‘Supercharged by AI’ intervention is an interactive exhibition on the effects of AI on our online lives. The large scale display aims to make complex issues related to AI more tangible for visitors and provides a kit to them with practical tips to reach when confronted with these issues in our daily online lives.

The LEO libraries project continues to run as part of the initiatives of the Gigabit Libraries Network. The project enables field test services for performance and reliability to evaluate impact on facility operations and on surrounding communities.

Another project implemented in collaboration between IFLA and the Gigabit Libraries Network is the ‘Libraries in Response’ webinar series that continued to run through 2024 having held over 30 sessions during the year, addressing libraries’ response to a wide range of crises intersecting with health, social, economic, political and climate issues. The YouTube channel has over 300 subscribers and around 14,000 views and has helped connect, exchange and build the capacity of people in the information field.

Earlier this year, IFLA published the final version of its revised Internet Manifesto. This version was the product of several physical and online consultations that took place over the course of several months, and it sets out the key principles that the library sector believes should underpin decisions taken about the Internet. The document represents a unification of library voices, sets out a compelling narrative about the place of libraries in the digital landscape and provides a series of recommendations for different actors on how to engage with libraries in the pursuit of a more inclusive and people-centered information society. The manifesto is currently being translated to several languages and will be complemented by a series of webinars and tools next year to facilitate its implementation.

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

The data obtained and to be obtained by the above mentioned, Libraries Boosting Connectivity project provides metrics on the amount of libraries that offer connectivity. As the project is being piloted in six different countries, the results will shed some light of ICT access and how this influences development in the region. This is particularly as libraries are a single point of connectivity in many underserved places so these metrics will help us understand not only which libraries are connected and which ones are not, but also the extent to which the connecting libraries are operating and what are the most common challenges and opportunities they have identified within their local communities.

In the same way, the IFLA Library Map of the World is currently being revised to launch a new version in 2025, the new version will provide more information on library loans both physical and electronics, registered users, staff and success stories related to the SDGs in every region in the world.

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

The publishing process of IFLA's Internet Manifesto was also an assessment as part of a bigger consultative process. A lot of actors were involved in this process including IFLA's members and volunteers, as well as external stakeholders and organizations. This process fit well with WSIS as it was a reflective exercise for the library and information sector on how to better contribute to the creation of a more people-centered information society. The outcome of this process was not only the final manifesto but also several themes and priorities that were raised and that provided an agenda for the library field to be addressed in 2025. It is not a surprise that many of these priorities turned out to be in alignment with the Global Digital Compact themes and possible ways of implementation.

### **III. What does your organization see as 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?

To a great extent, many objectives have been achieved or are on the way of being accomplished. The investment done in the information and communication infrastructure and the exponential growth of Internet users have been some of the most notable achievements over the past decades. The overall process has also become much more holistic than it used to be as today it allows for wider participation from a more diverse group of actors.

Overall, there has been a robust framework for the implementation of specific WSIS outcomes and many successes come from that effort. However, the transition from a focus on connectivity alone towards an era of meaningful internet access presents different challenges.

Affordability remains an obstacle for the achievement of universal connectivity in low-income economies and therefore contributes to widening the digital divide between communities, countries and regions. More efforts must be focused on providing affordable and accessible internet access to underserved areas and populations and these efforts must be accompanied by an immediate development of digital skills so people can benefit from the technology that they have available. Only through the development of these skills will individuals be able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by ICT infrastructure.

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

The information ecosystem is changing rapidly and people around the world are having a hard time keeping up not only with new devices, systems and processes, but also with new ways of communicating and turning to reliable information. Because of this libraries have been steadily contributing to the fight against misinformation.

During the past years we have observed how the spread of misinformation and disinformation poses a critical threat to the foundational elements in our societies. The proliferation of fake news and information undermines people's trust in institutions and also fuels divisions in society. It is now more important than ever to focus global efforts on strengthening the integrity of the information space and funding programs and initiatives that promote the development of digital skills and critical thinking for people of all ages.

As a result of the above the digital divide keeps also widening between certain world regions and is affecting both rural and urban areas. Many regions and nations still fall short of the digital infrastructure that is needed to support an inclusive and thriving digital economy. Bridging the divide requires not only funding of broadband infrastructure but also coordinated efforts between countries and stakeholders to systematically target digital needs according to the regional context.

Many tech companies continue to expand their activities and as AI becomes more integrated into our lives, we face a risk of drifting away from that people-centered vision of the Internet that may lead to a digital world focused on corporate interests at the expense of individual rights and public good. We consider it important to ensure that technology serves as a tool for personal and collective empowerment rather than a source of control and profit.



As the discussions on platform regulation continue, it is important to promote a human rights-based approach above all. Concerns have been raised around the issue of hate speech, disinformation and online harassment but government and decision makers should tread carefully and avoid restricting freedoms in an effort to regulate the digital space. It is important to keep making use of multi stakeholder spaces as a platform to raise the risks that may arise from platform regulation itself, whether these effects are well-intentioned or deliberate.

Finally, we hold that our approach to information regulation, and in particular the application of copyright, needs to be updated to reflect the nature of the internet. The nature of copyright, with national-level licensing, inconsistent approaches to enabling research, education and access to culture (through copyright exceptions) effectively contributes to a fragmentation of the internet that needs urgently to be addressed. Part of the response to this is also the promotion of open access, open science and open culture.

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

The emergence of the meaningful connectivity concept is a big highlight as it has shifted the narrative from simply getting people online to empowering them to thrive online. As many stakeholders and governments continue to pilot measuring approaches, the obtained metrics might reflect a more accurate version of the user experience and a better understanding of what is needed to help people thrive online in specific regions. We need to be clear that meaningful connectivity depends on a combination of access to physical connectivity, competences and content.

Global mobilization towards the expansion of Internet access has also moved forward at a rapid pace during the last years enabling millions, including marginalized groups, to access education and other services that used to be out of their reach.

While there have been many rising opportunities, there are also significant challenges. AI represents both at the moment as there are many known and yet to be known positive applications for AI, however, this has also come at a great cost as we observe privacy and data protection issues, algorithmic bias and increasing use of resources to sustain energy consumption. A well-balanced approach will require us to understand to what extent we can maximize the benefits of AI while we can still mitigate its risks. We believe that AI can be a strong positive for our societies, with appropriate regulation that supports positive public interest benefits.

Regarding the library field, we still observe a lot of uncertainty about the place of libraries in a digitally driven society. While librarians and people in the information field have a clear mission and longstanding commitment to improve access to information and preserve knowledge; many policymakers and stakeholders in Internet Governance

spaces are yet to understand and recognize this role. Addressing this gap in understanding and partnering with libraries as key players in this ecosystem is vital to ensuring that these can continue to serve as indispensable hubs of connectivity, digital literacy and accessible information all over the world.

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

IFLA considers important to future-proof libraries so they can continue to serve their communities needs. Partnerships with local governments, NGOs and private sector entities might help secure sustainable long-term funding and alignment with national agendas.

It is also important to build capacity among librarians and information professionals on emerging tools and trends so they can play a better role in promoting open access to research and information, particularly in science, education and technology fields. This will help foster international cooperation and democratize access to knowledge. They should also be enabled – both through skills and the right regulation – to be active players in relevant discussions.

Youth and future generations are also reflected as one of the main priorities of the summit outcomes. To that end, IFLA has been increasingly preparing its members and volunteer network to serve younger generations. They have found success in tailoring digital literacy for children, teenagers and young people, career readiness and community engagement programs. They also offer programs that equip youth with skills for a changing job market and overall make special efforts to include marginalized youth, including those from low-income backgrounds, disabilities and many other intersecting minorities.

#### **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.**

As we move towards the promise of universal connectivity, it is important to keep in mind that the digital gap is still widening. Public access to information should remain a central focus of the WSIS process, as it is still relevant despite the existence of private Internet access. Support of libraries and other community anchor institutions is central to this objective, particularly in lower-income economies and underserved communities, but this is relevant everywhere. Advocacy efforts should be focused on advocating for policies and funding that enhances digital infrastructure in public spaces, prioritizes digital skills programs and that recognize the role of the libraries for sustainable digital development.

The support of inclusive economic development also lies at the heart of WSIS and the Summit of the Future processes. Libraries play a significant role in developing local economies by offering digital training, resources for small businesses, and spaces for entrepreneurial activities. They should therefore be positioned as essential contributors to digital economy initiatives that could help individuals access training and online market platforms and resources, helping them bring the gap between marginalized communities and digital economic opportunities.

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

- [IFLA Internet Manifesto 2024](#)
- [IFLA Public Library Manifesto 2022](#)
- [IFLA Trend Report 2024](#)