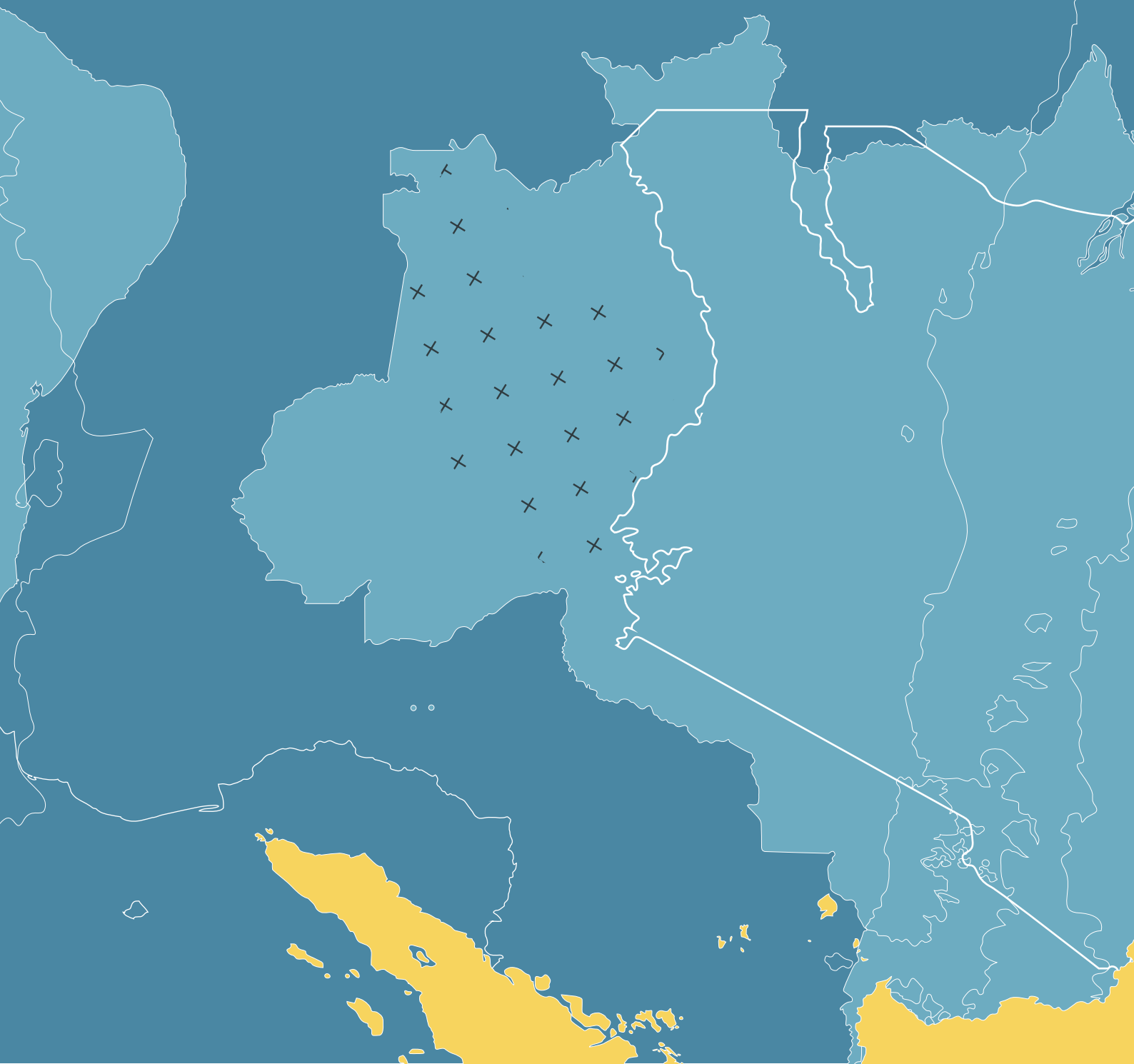


The Road to WSIS+20:

Key Country Perspectives in the
Twenty-Year Review of the World
Summit on the Information Society



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Introduction

The World Summit on the Information Society

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was convened in two phases in 2003 and 2005 to address the growing impact of information and communications technologies (ICTs) on society. At a time when there was no agreed framework for digital cooperation or internet governance, WSIS was a groundbreaking initiative. For the first time, a global forum brought together heads of state, stakeholders from across sectors, and UN agencies to develop a shared vision for an inclusive, development-oriented information society.

The outcomes of the original WSIS summits have had lasting influence. The Geneva Plan of Action set out Action Lines to guide progress towards a people-centred information society, while the Tunis Agenda introduced a distributed, multistakeholder model of internet governance and established the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). These documents remain foundational to digital policy discussions today. In 2015, the ten-year review (WSIS+10) reaffirmed these frameworks and extended the IGF's mandate, though broader systemic change was limited.

Now, twenty years on, the WSIS+20 process provides an opportunity to assess whether the WSIS outcomes, and the institutions built around them, remain fit for purpose. The landscape has shifted dramatically. Emerging technologies, evolving security threats, and deepening digital divides raise urgent questions about equity, governance, and rights. At the same time, the international environment has grown more fragmented, with new structures such as the Office on Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET) and the Global Digital Compact shaping parallel discussions. These developments challenge both the coherence of digital governance across the UN system and the ability of less-resourced stakeholders to meaningfully engage.

Project Background and Scope

This report aims to support engagement in the WSIS+20 process by providing insight into the positions and priorities of selected governments. The chapters in this report were produced as part of the *Shaping the WSIS+20 Review for a Unified Internet Multistakeholderism* project coordinated by the Global Network Initiative and Global Partners Digital with support from the inaugural [ICANN Grant Program](#).

This project aims to ensure the voices from the Global Majority and technical community are represented in the WSIS+20 review process. It spans Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ghana, India, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia. Partners include the Centre for Communications Governance at the National Law University, New Delhi, Data Privacy Brazil, Derechos Digitales, Digitally Right, Fundación Karisma, Media Foundations for West Africa, Paradigm Initiative, and Research ICT Africa.

In addition, this report also includes research chapters on China, the European Union (EU), Indonesia, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), Russia, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland. These chapters focus on countries which are expected to be influential during the negotiations are included to support advocacy efforts, particularly by Global Majority civil society, by increasing understanding of a range of countries' national positions.

Methodology

Each chapter in this report was based on the same research framework and offers country-specific analysis of the actors driving each position, their motivations, and the implications for human rights, development, and internet governance.

In Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ghana, India, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia the drafting of these chapters began with national workshops involving policymakers, local civil society, the private sector, and the technical community. These served as a key source of information for the research, together with analysis of government official positions, communiques, interventions, and policies. In some cases, these sources of information were combined with expert interviews.

For the additional chapters on China, the European Union, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Russia, the chapters drew on desk research combined with expert interviews.

As some information shared in the chapters was communicated during interviews or drawn from non-public documents, citation has not always been possible. The report reflects the state of play at a particular moment in a fluid process, before the Elements Paper is released and at the beginning of the consultation process. Countries positions may change throughout the WSIS+20 review process.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh's engagement with the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) has consistently reflected Global South priorities, including access, affordability, and technology transfer. However, while it initially embraced a multistakeholder model, its approach has gradually shifted toward a more centralised and state-driven form of digital governance.

Bangladesh participated actively in the 2003 Geneva Summit, sending one of the largest Global South delegations. But under successive administrations, civil society participation declined significantly due to digital repression, internet shutdowns, and restrictive legal frameworks. Government involvement continued through the Aspire to Innovate (a2i) programme, BTRC, and relevant ministries, with a strong emphasis on development-focused digital platforms.

Since the 2024 political transition, there has been renewed momentum for reform. While no formal WSIS+20 position has been announced, discussions on digital governance and multistakeholder engagement are re-emerging. Civil society, academia, and the private sector are beginning to re-engage with the WSIS process in an effort to reshape Bangladesh's future role in global digital governance.

Brazil

Brazil has been active in WSIS since the beginning of the process and, more broadly, in Internet Governance, establishing itself as a leading proponent of multilateral action rooted in the multistakeholder model. In recent years, especially under the current administration, Brazil has prioritized the digital agenda, focusing on issues related to connectivity, information integrity, digital public infrastructures, and artificial intelligence. These themes have been explored at the domestic and international level, linked to priorities such as reducing inequality and digital sovereignty and are likely to inform Brazil's positions during WSIS+20. Brazil's historic involvement with Internet Governance and regional influence could help to position the country as a key player in the WSIS+20 process.

The Brazilian government is prioritizing strengthening both the multistakeholder and multilateral models. More specific positions are still under discussion at the time of writing, with government representatives highlighting the review's rushed timeline, operational and capacity challenges arising from the government's structure, and the lack of clarity on coordination between the WSIS and the Global Digital Compact (GDC).

Chile

Chile's overall foreign policy agenda is focused on the defense of human rights, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and gender equity.

In regional discussions on digital policy, Chile has established itself as a leading and vocal advocate for the responsible governance of artificial intelligence (AI). In the context of the Global Digital Compact negotiations, Chile's position —aligned with the G77 + China— centered on defending the continuity and relevance of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) agenda. Chile also emphasized the importance of the multistakeholder mechanisms established through that process. Given its consistent commitment to multilateralism and the protection of human rights in international forums and processes, Chile is expected to prioritize these topics during the WSIS+20 review.

China

China views the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) as a strategic platform to advance its interests in global Internet governance, technological development, and digital sovereignty. China advocates for a multilateral model of Internet governance, where states play the central role, as opposed to the multistakeholder model favoured by Western democracies that includes civil society, the private sector, academia and the technical community. This vision aligns with China's preference for state control over information flows. China also uses WSIS to reinforce the idea of "cyberspace sovereignty", the right of each country to regulate the Internet within its own borders and without external interference. This principle is a core part of China's broader cyber strategy. To this end, China leverages WSIS as an opportunity to promote its Digital Silk Road initiative, part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes building digital infrastructure and exporting Chinese technology standards to developing countries. China participates actively in WSIS and related UN processes but is careful to shape the agenda in ways that do not compromise its domestic control over Internet content and infrastructure.

Colombia

Colombia is an active participant in the implementation and review of the WSIS. However, the country's priorities for the WSIS review remain unclear.

Global internet governance processes —historically the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Latin American and Caribbean Internet Governance Forum (LACIGF) and ICANN, and recently the Global Digital Compact (GDC)— have served as spaces for successive Colombian governments to present their digital agendas. Areas of interest have mainly included Internet connectivity, inclusion, e-government and, more recently, data infrastructure and artificial intelligence. In general, Colombia's approach aligns with principles of human rights, multistakeholder participation, sustainability, and digital equity.

An official statement is expected during the WSIS+20 review process — likely similar to those issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the GDC negotiations and during WSIS+10 — outlining national programs and activities in line with the plan of action. It is anticipated that the Colombian Internet Governance Board (Mesa Colombiana de Gobernanza de Internet) will follow up on any eventual position shared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The European Union

The European Union (EU) has played an active role in the WSIS process since it first began twenty years ago, seeing it as a vehicle to expand access to digital technologies, advance digital cooperation, and to enable socio-economic development. Since then, digital technologies have become a core element of the EU's international strategy. The EU seeks to play a leadership role in WSIS+20 focusing on reinforcing a multistakeholder, rights-based, and open approach to digital governance, while promoting alignment with other global processes including the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The EU favours incremental changes to the original WSIS framework and opposes updates or additions to the Action Lines while considering how to best address technological developments and societal and geopolitical challenges. Key priorities include protecting and enhancing the multistakeholder approach to digital governance, defending the open and decentralised model of the internet, aligning the initiatives of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) into the WSIS process, and advancing human rights and democratic values in the digital age.

Ghana

Ghana has been a long-standing and active participant in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), regularly aligning its national digital policies with WSIS Action Lines. The country's engagement is grounded in multistakeholder principles, with the Ministry of Communications and Digital Technology and Innovation (MoCTI) leading initiatives that prioritise digital inclusion, e-governance, and rights-based ICT development. Civil society and private sector partners, such as the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, have played a significant role in shaping the national digital agenda.

Recent policy initiatives reflect Ghana's alignment with WSIS objectives, including broadband expansion for rural communities, digital education through smart classrooms, and gender empowerment via the Girls-in-ICT programme. Ghana's continued participation in the WSIS Forum and efforts to strengthen cybersecurity capacity demonstrate its commitment to inclusive, sustainable digital development and active global engagement.

India

India has consistently supported the multistakeholder model of digital governance since the WSIS process began. It hosted the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in 2008 and has continued to participate in subsequent reviews, advocating for affordable access, development-oriented policies, and more inclusive management of critical internet resources.

While reaffirming support for multistakeholderism, India also highlighted the lack of progress on enhanced cooperation. Based on its historical position, India continues

to support the multistakeholder model of internet governance, support for IGF, and development-oriented digital governance.

In recent years, India has been undergoing a rapid process of digitisation that is geared towards transformation of governance, capacity building, and promotion of technological innovation. India has also been positioning itself as a global technology leader, particularly through its emphasis on building Digital Public Infrastructure ('DPI') and by articulating Global Majority concerns at various international fora.

As the WSIS+20 progresses, India is seeking to leverage the potential of AI to drive the next phase of technology driven development and is likely to stress the importance of promoting multilingualism on the internet, and to focus on balancing multistakeholderism with digital sovereignty in matters of cybersecurity and national security.

Indonesia

Indonesia has taken a supportive but critical stance on Internet governance and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process. Indonesia supports the multistakeholder model of Internet governance but, simultaneously, has emphasized the role of governments in maintaining national sovereignty, cybersecurity, and public order in the digital space. Indonesia supports the WSIS framework and advocates for a democratic, inclusive, and secure Internet governance ecosystem, with increased involvement of developing countries and government leadership in national contexts. Its government often calls for reforms that better address the needs of countries in the Global South in digital development discussions while advocating for a balanced approach in the governance of the Internet.

Russia

Over the years, Russia has consistently promoted the principle of digital sovereignty and has implemented domestic policies to reinforce its control over Internet activities within its borders. The 2019 "Sovereign Internet Law" granted the Russian government powers to monitor Internet traffic and potentially isolate the Russian Internet segment from the global network. At an international level, Russia is prioritizing the creation of international norms for cybersecurity, and, to this end, it has proposed several UN initiatives, including a successful UN Convention on Cybercrime, related to countering the use of ICTs for criminal or destabilizing purposes. In general, with regards to the governance and management of the Internet, Russia emphasizes state control, national security, and a shift from Western-led models to multilateral structures that prioritize governmental authority. It views the current global Internet architecture as biased and vulnerable and pushes for reforms that reinforce digital sovereignty.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been increasingly active in the global digital and ICT (Information and Communications Technology) policy arena, including in forums like the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), reflecting its national transformation goals. Central to its policy strategy “Vision 2030”, the country aims to become a regional digital hub, focusing on the expansion of 5G networks, broadband access and data centers. It is also actively promoting its innovation ecosystem, primarily concentrating on bridging the digital divide, especially among youth and women. The Saudi government is actively seeking to position the country as a regional digital leader, attracting foreign investment, shaping global norms, while exerting soft power. Saudi Arabia is likely to take a proactive role in shaping the post-2025 WSIS agenda, possibly pushing for more private-sector inclusive, secure, and investment-friendly digital environments.

South Africa

South Africa played a key role in the original WSIS process, chairing committees that shaped the Geneva Declaration and Tunis Agenda. Its delegation was notable for involving civil society, the private sector, and academia.

Despite leadership instability—14 ministers and 7 Directors-General since 2003—South Africa has remained committed to WSIS, engaging in follow-up processes and generally supporting multistakeholder principles. Internationally, it has advocated for equitable digital governance that balances government leadership with inclusive participation and equal participation for all nations.

The WSIS+20 review has reinvigorated its engagement. The Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies will chair the 2025 High-Level Event in Geneva, and national consultations are focusing on universal connectivity, AI and data governance, and regulating tech giants whose power exceeds national oversight capacities. South Africa also highlights the risks of geopolitical tensions undermining development agendas and upholds human rights in digital governance. While supporting the IGF and WSIS Forum, it calls for stronger multilateral cooperation and reforms to multistakeholder processes to better support resource-limited countries.

Switzerland

Switzerland views the WSIS+20 review as a unique opportunity to create a stronger, more inclusive, and better-integrated framework for digital governance. It supports aligning the WSIS process with the ambitions of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while streamlining processes to reduce duplication and improve cost-efficiency. The review is seen as a chance to build bridges across the UN system to better serve all countries and stakeholders. Human rights are a core priority for Switzerland, which advocates for a human-centric digital approach that reinforces rights-based governance. It has also highlighted the importance of gender-responsive policy, calling for the WSIS+20

review to expand gender-inclusive language, address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and close persistent digital divides. In addition, Switzerland can be expected to focus on Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs) into the WSIS framework, addressing digital divides, and improving artificial intelligence (AI) capacity building (particularly for the Global South).

Switzerland continues to champion the multistakeholder approach, pushing for an updated WSIS architecture that reflects the inclusive engagement that has defined the process since its inception. Domestically, Switzerland's WSIS+20 engagement is coordinated by the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM). The national multi-stakeholder platform, "Plateforme Tripartite," originally established during the first WSIS phase, remains the key national forum for information exchange and WSIS implementation.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom continues to play a proactive role in the WSIS process. Its engagement is rooted in a long-standing commitment to open, rights-based, and multistakeholder models of digital governance. The UK sees WSIS as a key vehicle to advance sustainable development, digital inclusion, and meaningful cooperation among stakeholders. In the lead-up to WSIS+20, the UK remains focused on preserving the core WSIS framework while updating its implementation to address the opportunities and challenges of emerging technologies. Key priorities include a permanent mandate for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), ensuring full stakeholder participation in the review process, defending human rights online, addressing gender digital divides and the environmental impact of ICTs and integrating the initiatives of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) into the WSIS process.

United States

The United States has historically played a proactive role in the WSIS process, reflecting its long-standing support for human rights, the open internet and the multistakeholder approach to internet and digital governance. In the lead-up to the WSIS+20, the government is in a period of flux under a new administration and is currently reevaluating its commitments to multilateral institutions and withdrawing from international bodies and processes which do not reflect its policy objectives.¹ This shift has already played out in the build-up to the WSIS review,² although how precisely this will impact on the formal review process is still to be determined.

At the same time, the US appears poised to maintain its support for the WSIS as a key framework to advance digital transformation, multistakeholder governance, and participatory modalities. The government is expected to uphold its support for the mandate renewal of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the preservation of the existing action lines, and the non-duplication of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and WSIS processes.

Zambia

Zambia has been engaged in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) from its inception, when it joined the 2003 Summit. In those initial meetings, Zambia highlighted the importance of bridging the digital divide and called for particular attention to the identification of possible mechanisms for the realisation of the resolutions of the Summit. Since then, senior government officials have participated in WSIS meetings, and Zambia has launched initiatives, including work with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), aimed at achieving the WSIS Action Line – C2 on Information and communication infrastructure.

Recent priorities have focused on leveraging Zambia's position as co-facilitator of the GDC to advocate for its priorities: inclusive policies addressing digital divides, capacity-building initiatives and fostering of partnerships that amplify the voices of the underrepresented regions in global digital governance discussions. Zambia's involvement in the WSIS process and its role as co-facilitator of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) reflect a growing ambition for leadership in shaping global digital governance, with a strong emphasis on inclusive development and regional cooperation.



Bangladesh

By Aditi Zaman | *Digitally Right*

OVERVIEW

Bangladesh's engagement with the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) has consistently reflected Global South priorities, including access, affordability, and technology transfer. However, while it initially embraced a multistakeholder model¹, its approach has gradually shifted toward a more centralised and state-driven form of digital governance.

Bangladesh participated actively in the 2003 Geneva Summit, sending one of the largest Global South delegations. But under successive administrations², civil society participation declined significantly due to digital repression, internet shutdowns, and restrictive legal frameworks³. Government involvement continued through the Aspire to Innovate (a2i) programme, BTRC, and relevant ministries, with a strong emphasis on development-focused digital platforms.⁴

Since the 2024 political transition, there has been renewed momentum for reform⁵. While no formal WSIS+20 position has been announced, discussions on digital governance and multistakeholder engagement are re-emerging. Civil society, academia, and the private sector are beginning to re-engage with the WSIS process in an effort to reshape Bangladesh's future role in global digital governance.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Bangladesh launched its “Digital Bangladesh” strategy in 2009 as part of Vision 2021⁶, aiming to integrate technology across government, education, healthcare, and the economy. Early priorities included building digital infrastructure, delivering online public services, and improving digital literacy⁷. A network of Union Digital Centres (UDCs) was created to facilitate access to services such as birth registration, land records, and tax filing.

In 2022, the government initiated “Smart Bangladesh”, an updated strategy aiming to create a connected society by 2041⁸. It focuses on four pillars: smart citizens, smart society, smart government, and smart economy. These efforts align with Bangladesh's longstanding ICT for Development approach and WSIS Action Lines C2 (Infrastructure), C3 (Access to Information), C4 (Capacity Building), C6 (Enabling Environment), and C7 (E-government). The a2i website also lists 18 WSIS prizes on its website, illustrating Bangladesh's state-led, service-focused ICT deployment priorities.⁹

After the 2024 change in government, the development-focused approach has remained central. A unified service delivery platform has been launched to provide around 100 public services, with a stated goal of improving transparency and reducing corruption.¹⁰

Internet Governance

Bangladesh's internet governance is widely viewed as control-centric and securitized, with limited space for participatory engagement or independent oversight. The Telecommunication Regulation Act (2001, amended in 2006 and 2010)¹¹ granted authorities sweeping powers. The Telecommunications Act¹² legally obliges operators to facilitate real-time surveillance, block online content, shutdown the internet, and provide infrastructure and data access to state agencies—often without any judicial oversight. These powers have been justified under broad and undefined notions of “national security” and “public order,” without clear procedural safeguards.¹³

Over the past decade—and up to 2024—the country witnessed government sanctioned internet shutdowns almost every year, ranging in scale and scope.¹⁴ These have included blocking of social media and messaging platforms, bandwidth throttling, and full network blackouts, often justified on grounds of public order, disinformation control, or national security. During the July–August 2024 student uprising, internet access was curtailed in what became one of the longest disruptions in the country's history, imposed amid reports of student protesters being killed.¹⁵

Given the new government, it is unclear at this point whether this historical approach to internet governance will be reflected in the WSIS+20.

Human Rights

To date, Bangladesh has not used its WSIS participation to advocate for stronger integration of international human rights norms—such as freedom of expression, data protection, or surveillance safeguards—within the WSIS+20 framework. While themes like inclusion and development equity are mentioned in national strategy documents, these lack a rights-based framing. Rather, Bangladesh experienced widespread online censorship and human rights violations, rooted in its authoritarian political system and restrictive legal environment.

National policies have led to criticisms about harm to human rights. The Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act) of 2006, and further amendment of the ICT Act in 2013, criminalised certain forms of online expression¹⁶. It laid the groundwork for the Digital Security Act

(DSA), enacted in 2018, which was criticized for repressing speech leading to arrests of journalists, human rights defenders, and citizens¹⁷, and later the CSA Cyber Security Act (CSA), which granted sweeping powers of arrest, search, and seizure without warrants, and while centralizing control under a government-led National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA).¹⁸ These laws have been used to arrest and harass journalists, activists, and academics for criticizing the government and its leaders.¹⁹ The chilling effect of such laws has led to widespread media self-censorship and increased attacks on dissenting voices and have been widely condemned by human rights organisations for enabling surveillance, criminalizing dissent, and restricting online freedom.²⁰

Following the change in government, the interim government-initiated reforms in digital governance, including replacing the CSA with a Cyber Safety Ordinance (CSO) that removed some speech-related offenses and introduced judicial oversight in content regulation.²¹ However, the process of lawmaking remained rushed, top-down, and lacked stakeholder consultation.²² The draft Personal Data Protection Ordinance by the same ministry has drawn concern, with Article 19 warning that its vague definitions and unchecked powers risk enabling arbitrary surveillance, discriminatory profiling, and suppression of dissent.²³ This indicates that the government is interested in digital policy reform but it is unclear how this will impact WSIS+20.

Review Modalities

Bangladesh does not currently have an official position for the WSIS+20 review modalities. Bangladesh's support for stakeholder inclusion in the WSIS process was inconsistent and often symbolic for a long time. Initiatives like the Bangladesh IGF (BIGF) and WSIS award submissions were criticized as being symbolic, tokenistic and dominated by a few actors. Since the change of government, the government has not conducted formal discussions or consultations with stakeholders, including reviewing progress on the WSIS Action Lines.²⁴

Stakeholders echoed concerns about exclusion, elite capture, and lack of consultation. While initiatives like the BIGF continue, they expressed frustration that the same voices dominate and that stakeholder engagement remains optics-driven rather than meaningful.

WSIS and the GDC

In the lead-up to the 2024 UN Summit of the Future, a2i, BIGF, and BNNRC initiated a national process to support the Global Digital Compact (GDC)²⁵, but participation from broader civil society was limited. The

resulting submission urged that the GDC avoid duplication, strengthen existing forums like the WSIS Forum and IGF, and aligning with WSIS Action Lines C1–C11, underscoring a belief that the GDC should build on the WSIS foundation rather than diverge from it.²⁶

A high-level consultation in September 2023—convened by the Parliamentary Caucus on Internet Governance, BNNRC, and BIGF—reinforced this view, calling for a harmonised national position.²⁷ The Speaker of Parliament proposed that existing WSIS-era institutions, including BIGF, draft a paper reflecting the country’s socio-economic priorities.²⁸

MAIN ACTORS

Bangladesh played an active role in the early WSIS process (2001–2006), led by the Ministry of Science and ICT through a national working group involving civil society, academia, and industry and with the eventual involvement of the Prime Minister’s Office²⁹. This engagement included national and regional consultations and led to the creation of the Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum (BIGF)³⁰ in 2006. Civil society participation was strong at the time³¹ but declined after political changes in 2007.

From 2009, digital governance became more centralised, with leadership shifting to the a2i programme under the Prime Minister’s Office and later the ICT Division. The Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) also gained visibility for its work on e-governance infrastructure and cybersecurity. While a2i highlighted its WSIS awards and stakeholder consultations, critics raised concerns over centralisation and limited genuine participation.

Industry actors described their involvement as minimal and reactive, with little opportunity to shape policy.³² BIGF and BNNRC remained engaged, but broader civil society participation narrowed, often shaped by political loyalty. Although many civil society groups lacked early capacity in digital governance, restrictive laws like the ICT and Digital Security Acts spurred increased domestic advocacy³³, laying a foundation for future engagement in forums such as WSIS+20.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Bangladesh positions itself as a “swing state³⁴” in global internet governance—expressing support for multistakeholderism in international forums while advancing a more state-centric model at home.

As a lower-middle-income country with ambitions to become a “Smart Bangladesh” by 2041, Bangladesh’s global engagement is often driven by

development, funding, and visibility rather than governance reform. At the UN, it has aligned with the G77 and China in calling for the removal of ICT access barriers, lower connectivity costs, and the transfer of emerging technologies—such as AI and green tech—for sustainable development and climate resilience.³⁵ It has also pursued South–South cooperation, hosting a BIMSTEC regional consultation on the GDC to promote a unified voice among developing countries.³⁶

Bangladesh’s international digital policy positions often mirror those of India, China, and Russia. It has not signed the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime or the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace.³⁷ Its endorsement of the 2024 UN Cybercrime Treaty alongside Russia and China raised concerns about expanded state powers and weakened rights protections.³⁸

Domestically, its legal frameworks echo regional peers. The draft Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA), as well as proposed OTT content regulations, borrow heavily from India’s laws, especially regarding surveillance and data localisation.³⁹ Its digital infrastructure, meanwhile, has been shaped by Chinese partnerships: key data centres and e-government systems were developed using Chinese financing and technology, notably from ZTE and Huawei.⁴⁰ A 2024 post-election policy shift saw Bangladesh withdraw from an agreement to lease submarine cable bandwidth to India⁴¹, reflecting realignment in regional digital cooperation⁴².

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

In the run up to the WSIS+20, the Bangladesh Parliamentarians’ Caucus on Internet Governance, (BIGF), and BNNRC—backed by UNDP Bangladesh and Manusher Jonno Foundation—organized a national consultation that collected input from youth, refugee, and women’s groups.⁴³

The Bangladesh national IGF (BIGF) also enables civil society and academia to run thematic workshops on WSIS priorities. In the face of limited opportunities for engagement, Bangladesh’s civil society actors are calling for a shift from security-driven digital governance toward an inclusive, rights-based approach.



Brazil

By research team

| *Data Privacy Brasil*

OVERVIEW

Brazil has been active in WSIS since the beginning of the process and, more broadly, in Internet Governance, establishing itself as a leading proponent of multilateral action rooted in the multistakeholder model. In recent years, especially under the current administration, Brazil has prioritized the digital agenda, focusing on issues related to connectivity, information integrity, digital public infrastructures, and artificial intelligence. These themes have been explored at the domestic and international level, linked to priorities such as reducing inequality and digital sovereignty and are likely to inform Brazil's positions during WSIS+20. Brazil's historic involvement with Internet Governance and regional influence could help to position the country as a key player in the WSIS+20 process.

The Brazilian government is prioritizing strengthening both the multistakeholder and multilateral models. More specific positions are still under discussion at the time of writing, with government representatives highlighting the review's rushed timeline, operational and capacity challenges arising from the government's structure, and the lack of clarity on coordination between the WSIS and the Global Digital Compact (GDC).

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Brazil has several agendas related to digital transformation that could influence its priorities for the WSIS process in the event of future updates. The country has been investing significantly in topics such as Digital Public Infrastructure, Meaningful Connectivity, and Environmental and Space Sustainability.

Brazil focused on inclusive digital transformation during its Presidency of the G20 in 2024, highlighting both the opportunities and harms raised by digital technologies through the Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG). This recent focus is likely to be carried into the WSIS negotiations.

Other priority topics for the Brazilian government include information integrity and intellectual property, which are being handled directly by agencies other than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Brazilian diplomats have brought some aspects of this agenda into WSIS-related discussions, as was the case during the 28th session of the CSTD, when Brazil highlighted issues such as promoting media literacy with a human rights-based

approach, particularly through public policies that support education for digital citizenship and democratic resilience, and the enhancement of international cooperation to promote a sustainable cultural ecosystem in the digital environment, and supporting and appropriately paying creators, artists, authors and other rights holders for the use of their works.

❏ Human Rights

In relation to Human Rights, Brazil's position is to maintain the language agreed upon in the Global Digital Compact — anything beyond that is seen as unlikely. Brazil has a strong track record of working with a human rights-based approach to Internet governance issues, as evidenced by the Marco Civil da Internet (Law No. 12,965 of 2014), which established Brazilians' rights to privacy, freedom of expression online, and access to the Internet. In 2018, the country passed its General Data Protection Law, and in 2022, personal data protection was recognized as a fundamental right, formalized through Constitutional Amendment No. 115/2022. Currently, Brazil is in the process of acceding to the Council of Europe's Convention 108+, strengthening its commitment at the international level to ensure digital rights.

❏ Internet Governance

Brazil's historical engagement with internet governance, has particularly focused on the promotion of multilateralism grounded in a multistakeholder approach. This has been primarily exemplified through the work of the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee ([CGI.br](https://cgl.br)), a multistakeholder body responsible for establishing strategic guidelines related to the use and development of the Internet in Brazil. The country has a long-standing support for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF); it is the only country to have hosted the global IGF twice, and it called for a permanent mandate for the IGF during the WSIS+10 review⁴⁵. Brazil has also pushed for multistakeholderism through CGI's organization of NetMundial (2014) and NetMundial+10 (2024)⁴⁶, which resulted in influential guidelines for enhancing multistakeholder participation in Internet Governance and digital policy processes (the consideration of these outcomes is a priority for CGI in the WSIS+20 process). The Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has reaffirmed the defence of the IGF as a fundamental priority, while acknowledging the need to address its purpose and to strengthen its mandate. The MFA also stated that the outcomes of NetMundial+10 will be a basis for their positions on the WSIS review.

In recent years, Brazil has shown a growing state interest in the governance of digital technologies. Ahead of WSIS+20, concerns have emerged within

the government on the effectiveness of the IGF and the legitimacy of participating actors. At the same time, the Brazilian government has a sense of greater legitimacy and trust in the role of CGI.br, as it is a naturally multistakeholder space which can serve as a forum which brings together civil society.

Also, the government's diverse agendas within digital governance have revived debates about the definition of Internet Governance and the name of the IGF and the proposal to change it to "Digital Governance Forum". Civil society actors generally understand the definition of Internet Governance as sufficiently broad to encompass new themes, such as AI, an understanding that also applies to the WSIS Action Lines.

Review Modalities

Brazil has shown some openness to dialogue with non-state actors, primarily through the MFA. Diplomats are generally open to dialogue and accept meeting requests. The MFA held an open consultation in a hybrid format to gather input for the WSIS+20 review and conducted in-depth interviews with actors such as CGI and MAG members in order to better inform their position. The lack of stakeholder engagement with WSIS, as evidenced by the low attendance during the consultation, has been highlighted by the Ministry. It is also important to note that, despite supporting the NetMundial principles, the Brazilian government did not directly address the modalities established by the WSIS process, merely emphasizing its openness at the domestic level to receive inputs to be taken by the delegation to the international process.

WSIS and the GDC

The Brazilian government recognises that coordination between the GDC and WSIS remains unresolved. The MFA raised concerns that some states may prioritize the GDC to the detriment of WSIS, leading to WSIS being primarily perceived as a bureaucratic process, particularly by Global North countries. This could risk intensifying inequalities between developing and developed countries. Brazil is supportive of the WSIS due to its focus on development while recognising the GDC encompasses emerging issues like AI and DPs which Brazil is prioritizing. Outside of government, Brazilian stakeholders acknowledge the GDC's relevant contributions but express concern about its lack of transparency, unclear implementation and coordination with WSIS, potential fragmentation of governance spaces, and the need for a common structure aligned with the SDGs, particularly given limited UN resources.

MAIN ACTORS

The WSIS+20 process is being led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has the task of consolidating other national agencies' positions and leading intergovernmental negotiations. According to the MFA, the involvement of other agencies has been lower for WSIS+20 in comparison to other processes. This was suggested to be due to a lack of clarity about the WSIS process and how to engage. Inputs were provided by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Communications, and especially the Office of Social Communication (SECOM), the agency responsible for the topic of Information Integrity in the current government. Government representatives indicated that reaching consensus can be tricky as the government agencies have competing agendas.

There has been low stakeholder attendance in consultations and general discussions on WSIS, however, some actors have consistently participated. In the private sector: the Brazilian Association of Internet and Telecommunications Providers (Abrint); in civil society: CGI, organizations such as Data Privacy Brasil, InternetLab and the Brazilian Institute for Consumers Defence (IDEC), which are also involved in international civil society coalitions for the WSIS process; in academia: Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV); and lastly, the IGF's MAG has also been consistently represented.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Brazil's positions on strengthening multistakeholderism and multilateralism and promoting convergence between the WSIS and the GDC are influenced by its institutional and geopolitical standing. Brazil generally aligns itself with the G77 bloc; however, there has not been a cohesive attempt by the bloc so far to make institutional improvements or agenda updates. In this context, Brazil has been advancing its digital agenda in other forums that are gaining geopolitical prominence such as Group of 20 (G20) and BRICS—an informal intergovernmental organization comprising ten countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Holding the presidency of these two blocs in, respectively, 2024 and 2025 Brazil succeeded in including a reference to WSIS in the BRICS Ministers' Declaration on Technology and Communications.⁴⁷

Brazil has consistently supported the multistakeholder model, prioritizing development as the foundation for engagement on issues such as connectivity, infrastructure, and access. The protection of personal data

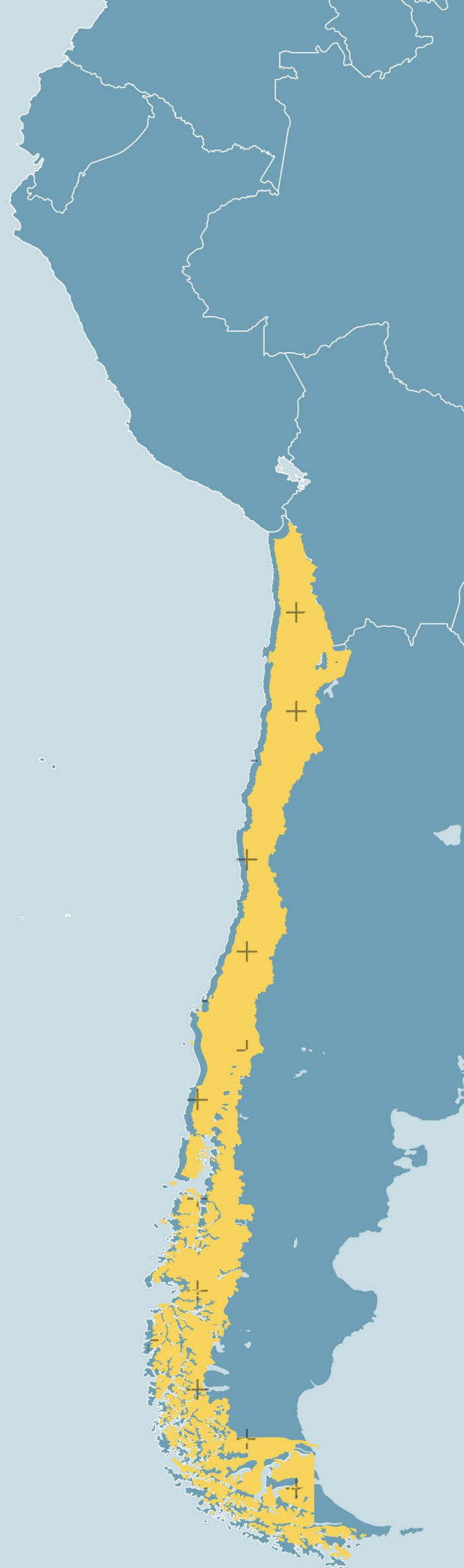
is also a core value for the country, which is joining Convention 108+ in 2025, in addition to recognizing this right in its Federal Constitution. Some positive engagement with the Global South in this regard can be seen in the G20, especially with the Troika India, Brazil, and South Africa, positioning Brazil as a potential Global South leader.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

The government is open to the input of non-state actors, as evidenced by the government conducting in-depth interviews with stakeholders and organizing a consultation with all stakeholders to gather input for WSIS+20. However, Brazilian stakeholders have suggested some ways the government could improve. The WSIS+20 consultation was announced only one week in advance. Although conducted in a hybrid format, this allowed little time for stakeholders to organize and prepare themselves for effective participation and there have not been many opportunities for engagement. In general, when engagement opportunities happen, they are fairly inclusive and open to all stakeholders and topics.

Chile

By Lucía Camacho Gutierrez | *Derechos Digitales*



OVERVIEW

Chile's overall foreign policy agenda is focused on the defense of human rights, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and gender equity. In regional discussions on digital policy, Chile has established itself as a leading and vocal advocate for the responsible governance of artificial intelligence (AI).

In the context of the Global Digital Compact negotiations, Chile's position—aligned with the G77 + China—centered on defending the continuity and relevance of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) agenda. Chile also emphasized the importance of the multistakeholder mechanisms established through that process. Given its consistent commitment to multilateralism and the protection of human rights in international forums and processes, Chile is expected to prioritize these topics during the WSIS+20 review.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

During the WSIS+10 review, the Chilean delegation—represented by the Ministry of Transportation—identified three critical areas of concern. First, the implementation of the SDGs, in particular Goal 1, on ending poverty, and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in advancing all SDGs across their social, economic and environmental dimensions. Second, the exercise of human rights, in particular the right to freedom of expression online, privacy and data protection, and the right to net neutrality, with an explicit defense of human rights both online and offline. And third, the importance of pursuing the closure of the digital divide.⁴⁸

In recent years, Chile has made substantial efforts to advance its digital transformation within the public sector through the adoption of information and communication technologies (Law 21180 of 2019). More recently, it has embraced artificial intelligence (AI) systems as public policy tool.

Key initiatives include the development of policies such as the National AI Plan (first published in 2021) and the application of AI technologies in sensitive areas with direct implications for human rights. Examples include AI-powered municipal patrol systems⁴⁹, and predictive tools for identifying risk situations affecting children.⁵⁰ More recently, Chile has spearheaded, through its National Center for Artificial Intelligence (CENIA),⁵¹ the creation of Latam-GPT—the first large language model

developed in the region—a project that Brazil has since joined.⁵² This initiative aims to become a “key step towards digital integration and the development of innovative solutions with a regional and sustainable approach”.⁵³ During the WSIS+20, the country may prioritize the SDGs, e-education and digital literacy, and AI.

Additionally, during the Global Digital Compact (GDC) negotiations via the G77 + China, Chile supported the view that the outcomes of the WSIS+20 should be “preserved as a guide for international cooperation and for internet governance, since it [the Summit] is based on on principles that favor development”.⁵⁴

During preparations for the WSIS+20, Chile emphasized three key points⁵⁵ on the implementation of goals and in WSIS+20. First, the importance of prioritizing meaningful connectivity, going beyond the material access gap. Second, the need to place both human rights and gender equality at the center of digital policies, as well as strengthening multistakeholder cooperation. And third, the importance of establishing ethical, transparent and accountability frameworks that integrate human rights throughout the lifecycle of technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI).⁵⁶ The Chilean delegation also highlighted the importance of advancing technological development in line with the commitments made in the WSIS Summits of 2003 and 2005.⁵⁷ The SDGs agenda is particularly important for the country, which is ranked 32nd in the Sustainable Development Index, first among Latin American countries.⁵⁸

Human Rights

For the first time, Chile’s 2023 National Human Rights Plan included specific goals related to the protection, promotion and respect of digital rights.⁵⁹ These goals are accompanied by the upcoming renewal by 2024 of the National Artificial Intelligence Policy, the creation of the Zero Digital Divide Plan and the recent adoption of key digital legislation, such as the Internet as a Public Service Law, the Cybersecurity Law,⁶⁰ and the General Data Protection Law.

According to recent implementation reports of the Human Rights Plan, the goals concerning the protection and promotion of digital rights received the highest allocation of public funding, an indication of the strategic priority they hold for the country.⁶¹

During the 4th cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) that took place in 2024, Chile acknowledged “the need to address the challenges new technologies could pose to democracy”,⁶² and committed to ensuring digital environments free from gender-based violence, bridging the digital divide, and safeguarding the security and privacy of individuals online.⁶³

Recent initiatives also illustrate Chile's support for press freedom, information integrity, and inclusive AI. In 2024, Chile hosted the 31st meeting of World Press Freedom Day, under the theme "A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis". The event spurred discussions that led the country, together with Brazil, to join the Latin American position in support of UNESCO's initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change.⁶⁴ In 2025, Chile took part in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Action Summit in Paris, where it co-led the Latin American regional position on AI governance alongside Mexico and Brazil. In this forum, Chile focused on data access and management for the development of AI and on efficient and inclusive governance, emphasizing approaches that align digital technologies governance with human rights.⁶⁵

More recently, at the high-level event commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, Chile reaffirmed its strong commitment to human rights, gender equality⁶⁶ and multilateralism.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the country is currently seeking reelection for a fourth mandate on the Human Rights Council for the 2026–2028 term, pledging to maintain an agenda "focused on environmental protection, gender equity, and the human rights situation in Latin America," among other key priorities.⁶⁸

Internet Governance

Chile is a proponent of the multistakeholder approach to internet governance, reflected in recent domestic legislation that supports stakeholder participation in cybersecurity discussions. This is specifically set out in Article 20 of the Cybersecurity Law, which provides for the creation of a "Multisectoral Council on Cybersecurity" that includes civil society, the private sector, public institutions, and academia.

Likewise, during the Global Digital Compact (GDC) negotiations, Chile supported the statement issued by the G77 + China, which affirms that "governance should be addressed in a global setup, backed by the UN system, through extensive participation of all States with a multi-stakeholder approach as set out in the WSIS outcomes".⁶⁹

Chile co-sponsored the Latin American and Caribbean Internet Governance Forum (LACIGF), holding the 17th meeting of the Forum in the country in 2024. Chile also took part in NETMundial+10, which was held in Brazil in April of the same year.⁷⁰ Additionally, the government is an active participant in the national Internet Governance Forum, which is organized by other local stakeholders.

Review Modalities

So far, Chile has not publicly elaborated further on its position regarding the WSIS+20 modalities or other issues related to this review process, such as the status of the WSIS Action Lines or the renewal of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) mandate. To date, there has also been no official public confirmation as to whether the country's delegation will participate in the first High Level Event, to be held in Geneva from July 7th to 11th.

Chile's past participation in the WSIS+10, as documented by Derechos Digitales in 2015,⁷¹ suggests that, once the review process is underway, the country's position on the achievements and progress of WSIS will gradually be made public through various consultation and interaction spaces between the delegation and other stakeholders.

WSIS and the GDC

During the negotiations of the GDC, Chile, as a member of the G77 + China, expressed clear support for WSIS, including the Tunis Agenda, the Declaration of Principles, and the Geneva Plan of Action, recognizing these as key milestones in Internet governance that should remain central and fully integrated into the GDC.⁷²

Among the aspects most strongly emphasized by the G77 + China were the need for integration and articulation of the relationship between WSIS and GDC; the value and relevance of the multistakeholder model; the importance of the Internet Governance Forum as a decentralized and binding space for stakeholder engagement — with a particular emphasis on the need for its continuity and sustainability—; and the importance of closing the digital divide by adopting a “meaningful connectivity” approach.⁷³

MAIN ACTORS

During the WSIS+10 process, Chile's position was led by the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications.⁷⁴ Since then, the national institutional framework for digital public policy has expanded and become more diversified, which may prove beneficial in building a more robust and better-informed national position. For instance, new public sector actors could contribute to the process, such as the Secretariat for Digital Government (under the Ministry of Finance), the National Cybersecurity Agency, as well as the Ministry of Economy, which participates in digital policy discussions linked to international trade agreements signed by the country.

Likewise, ministerial departments that gained experience in multilateral and multistakeholder processes during discussions and negotiation of the Global Digital Pact or the Cybercrime Treaty —such as the Human Rights, Hemispheric Affairs, Multilateral Affairs, and Energy, Science and Technology divisions, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs— could also be involved in this process.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

While Chile is set to hold presidential elections in November 2025, the current government has made efforts to consolidate and affirm its international digital policy legacy.⁷⁵ For example, at a regional level, Chile led the First Artificial Intelligence Summit in 2024 which resulted in the Santiago Declaration in 2024 and the creation of the Regional AI Council for Latin America and the Caribbean.⁷⁶

In 2024, Chile also played a visible and vocal role in the Summit of the Future and its accompanying Pact for the Future. The country's interventions focused on the protection of human rights, sustainable and inclusive development, and wealth redistribution, as well as the climate crisis as a central concern.⁷⁷ Chile reaffirmed its commitment to the Pact and the goals to “address emerging risks that threaten all humankind”.⁷⁸

A noteworthy initiative was the “We the Women” project, led by UN Chile in collaboration with national authorities. This initiative informed Chile's position on gender at the Summit of the Future and fostered intergenerational dialogue between women and adolescents. Within the process, advancing a feminist foreign policy was identified as an “opportunity for the international community in multilateral relations,” with an emphasis on how “it is important for Chile to bring this to the world.”⁷⁹

In addition, Chile has actively promoted a foreign policy centered on economic openness and trade integration. This includes its participation in the Pacific Alliance, membership in the OECD, involvement in the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), and more recently, the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA) with New Zealand, Singapore and the Republic of Korea, which has been in effect since 2021. The DEPA covers critical digital policy issues, including chapters on digital identity, the free flow of data, emerging technologies and trends (including AI), and digital inclusion, among other topics that are not explicitly tied to the WSIS Action Lines.⁸⁰

Until now, Chile's national position was mainly built through inter-ministerial consultations led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While there is no formal mechanism for consultation with other actors and stakeholders to develop and inform the country position to be presented at the WSIS+20 review, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has shown, in the context of past processes (such as the Universal Periodic Review, or the Global Digital Compact negotiations), a willingness to engage in informal exchanges and consultations with civil society actors. This has included inviting members of civil society to be a part of its national delegation in other multilateral processes where States retain a leading role in the negotiation process, for example, during sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the upcoming 10th Conference of States Parties to the Belém do Pará Convention in Brazil and the XVI Regional Conference on Women. Chile may consider doing the same during the WSIS+20 review.



China

By Konstantinos Komaitis

*Democracy and Tech Initiative,
Atlantic Council*

OVERVIEW

China views the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) as a strategic platform to advance its interests in global Internet governance, technological development, and digital sovereignty. China advocates for a multilateral model of Internet governance, where states play the central role, as opposed to the multistakeholder model favoured by Western democracies that includes civil society, the private sector, academia and the technical community. This vision aligns with China's preference for state control over information flows. China also uses WSIS to reinforce the idea of "cyberspace sovereignty", the right of each country to regulate the Internet within its own borders and without external interference. This principle is a core part of China's broader cyber strategy. To this end, China leverages WSIS as an opportunity to promote its Digital Silk Road initiative, part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes building digital infrastructure and exporting Chinese technology standards to developing countries. China participates actively in WSIS and related UN processes but is careful to shape the agenda in ways that do not compromise its domestic control over Internet content and infrastructure.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

❖ Development

China has expressed strong support for the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since the first phase of WSIS and subsequently during its 10-year review. In its position paper⁸⁷ for the WSIS+10 review, China called for international efforts to promote universal access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), emphasizing the need to support developing countries in enhancing their communication infrastructure and capacity-building. The paper stressed the importance of strengthening ICT infrastructure and fostering global sharing of advanced technologies to drive sustainable economic and social development, while advancing increased international cooperation to address cybersecurity threats.

A similar approach should be expected at the upcoming WSIS+20 review. In its submission to the Global Digital Compact (GDC), China had to say the following on development: "Economic digitalization has offered significant opportunities to all States [...]. States should respect others' cyber sovereignty [and] should put an equal emphasis on development and security, forge an open, inclusive, fair, just and non-discriminatory environment for digital development, and refrain from overstretching and

abusing the issue of security to contain and suppress the legitimate economic and technological development of other States.”⁸²

In general, China has invested heavily on the development agenda and has become one of the key financial contributors to UN agencies dealing with issues of development.⁸³ Specifically, China’s investment in the SDGs has grown significantly, from 29 billion yuan (USD 4.2 billion) in 2015 to 56.2 billion yuan (USD 8.1 billion) in 2018, according to a report by the UNDP and China Foundation Center.⁸⁴

Human Rights

China’s position on human rights, particularly in the context of WSIS, has reflected its broader approach to sovereignty, development priorities, and information control. In general, China has emphasized that state sovereignty is paramount and it has resisted international pressures to conform to universal standards of freedom of speech.

In particular, China frames human rights through a development-first lens, often promoting economic and social rights (such as education, poverty reduction, and digital access) over civil and political rights (such as freedom of speech or press). This approach is aligned with China’s Communist Party (CCP) broader foreign policy of prioritizing stability and development over what it sees as Western-imposed values. While China officially endorsed the WSIS Declaration of Principles⁸⁵, which includes Article 4 affirming the importance of human rights like freedom of expression, it has insisted on contextual interpretation. In their various interventions to UN fora, Chinese diplomats argue that such rights must be exercised within the bounds of national laws, public order, and moral standards.⁸⁶

During the two phases of WSIS and, subsequently, during the WSIS+10 review, China strongly opposed attempts by Western countries and NGOs to use WSIS as a platform to criticize its Internet censorship (e.g., China’s “Great Firewall”) or its treatment of dissidents. It viewed such efforts as interference in its internal affairs.⁸⁷

A similar approach to human rights should be expected this time around as China continues to advocate for states to be able to exercise human rights in accordance with the laws and jurisdictional limitations they are operating under. In its submission to the GDC, China stated: “States should oppose the abuse of unilateral coercive measures that undermine other States’ capabilities to develop digital economy and improve people’s livelihood or pose consistent and systemic violation of human rights. States should refrain from politicizing human rights issues or interfering

in others' domestic affairs and challenging others' judicial sovereignty under the excuse of protecting online human rights."⁸⁸

Internet Governance

China's views on Internet governance are rooted in the principles of cyber sovereignty, state control, and multilateralism. China strongly advocates for the idea that each country should have the right to govern and regulate its own Internet without external interference, including controlling content within its borders, regulating the infrastructure as well as data flows and setting rules for how its citizens and companies use the Internet. This approach is in direct conflict with the open, global, and decentralized model supported by many Western countries.

In line with its view on other international issues, such as climate and health, China supports a multilateral approach to Internet governance, where governments play the leading role in international decision-making processes. For the past years, China has been strategic in promoting this vision⁸⁹ through a multitude of fora, including – but not limited to – the World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS alliance as well as through its engagement with the United Nations, especially the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Finally, through its Digital Silk Road initiative (part of the Belt and Road Initiative), China promotes its Internet governance philosophy abroad by actively exporting surveillance and smart city technologies; offering infrastructure and technical standards aligned with its model; and train officials in its regulatory and control techniques.⁹⁰

With regards to the IGF, over the past few years, China has become supportive but cautious, participating in the annual gathering and sending a sizeable delegation to engage in the discussions. At the IGF, China consistently advocates for the principle of cyber sovereignty and uses the forum to present itself as a responsible and cooperative digital power, showcasing its technological achievements and digital development model. However, while it acknowledges the IGF's inclusive format, China often questions the effectiveness of the multistakeholder approach in making decisions that can have an impact. In its submission with the G77 group, to the GDC, China sought to retain the limiting role of the IGF, stating that "the GDC should acknowledge the relevance of the contributions of the Internet Governance Forum on public policy issues relating to the Internet".⁹¹

Review Modalities

In its 2015 position paper on the WSIS review, China advocated for a “multilateral, democratic, and transparent international Internet governance system” that ensures equal participation of all stakeholders. This includes governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations. However, China emphasized that this model should not marginalize governments, underscoring the importance of upholding the roles and responsibilities of national governments in regulating and securing the Internet.⁹²

China’s approach to stakeholder engagement aligns with its broader “cyber-sovereignty” doctrine, and during the 10-year WSIS review (WSIS+10), alongside Russia, it successfully lobbied for the inclusion of the term “multilateral” in the final document, signalling its preference for state-led governance structures over the traditional multistakeholder model.

As the WSIS+20 High-Level Event approaches in July 2025, China’s emphasis on multilateralism suggests a continued focus on intergovernmental cooperation. While China acknowledges the contributions of various stakeholders, its approach may prioritize state-led initiatives and frameworks within the WSIS+20 discussions.⁹³ This perspective may influence its approach to stakeholder inclusion in the WSIS+20 process, potentially leading to debates on the balance between state sovereignty and the participatory roles of non-governmental actors in shaping the future of global Internet governance.

WSIS and the GDC

China views both the WSIS and the GDC as important, but it does not favour the GDC over WSIS as the lead forum for digital policy. Instead, China sees them as complementary, with WSIS continuing to play a foundational and legitimate role in global digital governance.

China has consistently emphasized the centrality of the WSIS framework and the Tunis Agenda in shaping international digital policy. Throughout the years⁹⁴, it has advocated for the ongoing role of the WSIS Forum, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in leading multilateral cooperation. And, while not opposing the GDC, throughout the negotiations, China remained cautious about its potential to shift power to multi-stakeholder processes. To this end, China participated in the GDC discussions but also called for it to align with existing WSIS principles and not duplicate or override established mechanisms.⁹⁵

MOTIVATIONS

China's policy goals are predominantly determined by cyber sovereignty. In recent years, however, the intensifying strategic competition with the US, especially in digital infrastructure, AI, and 5G has made China more assertive in international digital governance. China has been using fora, like WSIS and the GDC, to promote alternative Internet and governance models, build alliances with developing countries to counterbalance US influence and support the UN as opposed to other multistakeholder bodies, like ICANN. For example, China has used the ITU to promote its "NewIP" proposal by framing it as a technical upgrade for the future of the Internet and positioning it as a boom for developing countries. The effort reflects a broader geopolitical competition over who sets the rules of the Internet and seeks to embed state control mechanisms in global Internet standards.

Regionally, security and stability concerns play a major role in China's digital policy strategy.⁹⁶ Issues like the unrest in Xinjiang, tensions over Taiwan, and the status of Hong Kong motivate and influence the way China frames its positions around national security and anti-terrorism, especially when it comes to encryption and Internet content.

Internationally, China is strategic in using fora, like WSIS+20 as a stage for norm entrepreneurship,⁹⁷ the effort to promote the adoption or change of social norms, seeking to position itself as a champion of global digital equity and as an influencer of future Internet governance mechanisms.

MAIN ACTORS

In the years since the WSIS+10 review, China has expanded the actors that participate, influence and facilitate Internet governance. At the top of the hierarchy, the decision-making body that sets the political direction for Internet governance is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), chaired by its Secretary General, Xi Jinping.

A host of government agencies are responsible for performing different functions. The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)⁹⁸ is the main regulatory agency for Internet content, data security and cybersecurity and it enforces online censorship, data localization laws and oversees the Chinese Internet companies. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)⁹⁹ regulates telecommunications, Internet infrastructure, and industry standards, while the Ministry of Public Security (MPS)¹⁰⁰, handles cybercrime and enforces online surveillance measures. Finally, the Ministry of State Security (MSS)¹⁰¹ is responsible for counterintelligence and cyber espionage activities.

At the same time, standards and research are conducted by two major entities: the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT)¹⁰², which is the research arm of the MIIT and is the main body for shaping standards and tech policy; and the National Information Security Standardization Technical Committee (TC260)¹⁰³, which drafts and promotes cybersecurity and data protection standards.

Finally, local governments also play a significant role in enforcing China's Internet governance agenda. Their main responsibility is to implement national policies at the provincial and municipal levels, often experimenting with their own regulatory and censorship mechanisms (e.g. pilot programs for smart city surveillance).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

China typically engages with international digital policy processes, such as WSIS, through state-led mechanisms. Civil society organizations are often government-aligned or state-sanctioned NGOs (commonly referred to as GONGOs)¹⁰⁴. This includes groups like the China Internet Development Foundation or the Internet Society of China, which are closely linked to government bodies like the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC).

In general, China does not foster an open or independent civil society space domestically, especially in sensitive areas like Internet governance, digital rights, or cybersecurity. To this end, independent or critical CSOs have no formal role in the WSIS+20 preparations while, in the limited cases public consultations may be held, they are generally not transparent or inclusive of diverse perspectives. When it occurs, engagement tends to be technocratic and focused on showcasing China's digital development achievements (e.g., digital infrastructure, poverty alleviation via ICTs).



Colombia

By Pilar Sáenz | *Fundación Karisma*

OVERVIEW

Colombia is an active participant in the implementation and review of the WSIS. However, the country's priorities for the WSIS review remain unclear.

Global internet governance processes —historically the Internet Governance Forum (IGF),¹⁰⁵ Latin American and Caribbean Internet Governance Forum (LACIGF)¹⁰⁶ and ICANN¹⁰⁷, and recently the Global Digital Compact (GDC)—¹⁰⁸ have served as spaces for successive Colombian governments to present their digital agendas. Areas of interest have mainly included Internet connectivity, inclusion, e-government and, more recently, data infrastructure and artificial intelligence.¹⁰⁹ In general, Colombia's approach aligns with principles of human rights, multistakeholder participation, sustainability, and digital equity.

An official statement is expected during the WSIS+20 review process — likely similar to those issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the GDC negotiations¹¹⁰ and during WSIS+10¹¹¹ — outlining national programs and activities in line with the plan of action. It is anticipated that the Colombian Internet Governance Board (Mesa Colombiana de Gobernanza de Internet) will follow up on any eventual position shared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Recent governments have focused their digital strategy on ensuring connectivity, implementing inclusion programs, developing a digital governance and e-government strategy. Recently, efforts to develop positions in the field of artificial intelligence have begun. There are significant regional collaboration efforts in these areas. On the ITU page dedicated to the stocktaking of activities for WSIS implementation, over one hundred Colombian projects are registered.¹¹²

Some World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank programs are shaping the country's development agenda. These include investments aimed at reducing the digital divide and expanding connectivity infrastructure coverage. In cybersecurity, the CICTE/OAS Cybersecurity Program and the World Bank play a central role.

Colombia has also developed a 2030 agenda to advance progress toward the SDGs. This agenda is monitored by the National Planning Department (DNP).¹¹³ DNP defines the National Digital Strategy.¹¹⁴ The definition of these

public policies includes participatory processes where input is gathered from multiple sectors and specific working groups are held.

However, Colombia's WSIS+20 agenda has not been released, as so far, the focus is on implementation. The Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) compiles and publishes sectoral indicators to measure the progress of the information society, which show progress in the country's ICT agenda.¹¹⁵

Human Rights

Colombia often adopts human rights language in its statements regarding its digital strategy. This was evident at the GDC, where it was stated that “governments must commit to providing women and girls, in all their diversity, youth and children, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant communities, older persons and persons with disabilities with the relevant tools, knowledge and skills to know and defend their rights online, while mitigating the risks associated with the use of digital technologies”.¹¹⁶

Colombia's National Digital Strategy 2023 – 2026 includes a strategic focus on leveraging a digital society for an inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, and the implementation of public policy initiatives that address the protection and promotion of individual rights in the digital environment.¹¹⁷

It is possible to infer that this will also be the focus of the WSIS+20 review process. However, there is no public information currently providing evidence of this.

Internet Governance

The Internal Working Group (IWG) on the .CO Domain and Internet Governance of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies (MinTIC) explicitly supports the multistakeholder model.¹¹⁸ This is reflected in the participation of both MinTIC and the CRC in the multisectoral board since its inception. MinTIC has also been actively involved in different Internet governance forums (IGFs) in Colombia, participating in opening and closing sessions as well as in panels. Similarly, the CRC has been an active participant in the Internet Governance workshops held prior to the forum. Currently, MinTIC is part of the Multistakeholder Committee of the Latin American and Caribbean IGF (LACIGF). Thus, there is clear support for this multistakeholder model and for spaces that facilitate dialogue among these multiple parties. This support was also evident during discussions surrounding the GDC. However, there is no recent public information in the context of

WSIS that lays out Colombia's position on issues such as centralization, decentralization, or multilateralism.

Review Modalities

Considering the ongoing and active participation of both the CRC and MinTIC in multistakeholder forums —such as the Colombian Internet Governance Board— and their sustained presence in the national Internet governance forum, Latin American forums (LACIGF, eLAC), and international forums (IGF, ICANN), it is reasonable to infer Colombia's support for a multistakeholder approach. This position has also been officially defended by the country in its statements and discussions at the CDG. Nonetheless, there is no publicly available information providing evidence or clarifying the government's vision regarding WSIS+20.

WSIS and the GDC

There has been no public indication of whether WSIS might play a role in implementing the GDC. Colombia participated and made interventions during the GDC discussions, where it advocated for the multistakeholder model of Internet governance.¹¹⁹ However, in the absence of recent official communications regarding the WSIS+20 process, it is not possible to ascertain Colombia's current position. Nonetheless, it is expected that the country will continue to uphold human rights language and support the multistakeholder model.

MAIN ACTORS

There are several main government actors involved. The Foreign Ministry, which leads the processes in Geneva and New York and delivers official statements. The Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies (MinTIC), through its GIT division, defines the technical position.¹²⁰ By law,¹²¹ the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) is responsible for compiling and annually publishing progress reports of the Colombian government on its WSIS commitments. The CRC maintains a dedicated microsite with statistical information on each of the indicators developed to monitor WSIS implementation.¹²² This information is the foundation of the statistics provided by the Ministry of Science, Technology, Information and Communications (MinTIC), the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) and the Ministry of Education. Besides MinTIC, the Office of Digital Transformation of the Presidency of the Republic, and the Digital Development Directorate of the National Planning Department (DNP) also play important roles in defining the digital agenda.

Other relevant actors from civil society, the technical community, academia, and the private sector, together with State representatives, are brought together by the Colombian Internet Governance Board.¹²³ To date, the Board has organized 11 national Internet Governance Forums and holds monthly meetings to follow-up on the national agenda on related topics. Since its establishment, the Board has become the focal point for stakeholder groups.¹²⁴ In recent years, it has managed to reconcile diverse positions, producing contributions such as the input document to the GDC¹²⁵ and inputs for NetMundial +10¹²⁶ and shaping policy agendas on issues such as digital rights, connectivity, spectrum governance, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and data protection. However, unlike countries such as Mexico, Board members do not participate in the country's official delegations. While the Board has succeeded in bringing together a diverse range of actors, some sectors remain underrepresented, such as rural communities, indigenous communities, small grassroots organizations, and youth.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Colombia's national digital policy generally aligns with regional priorities through the Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC), where it currently serves on the steering committee for the 2024–2026 term. In the past, participation in the OECD was important, but it does not currently appear to be guiding the conversation. Colombia's National Digital Strategy 2023–2026 acknowledges the country's regional leadership in digitization and digital governance. It also states that Colombia has positioned itself as “a benchmark in Latin America for the implementation of data governance and capacity building for data use and exploitation,”¹²⁷ and has taken on “a leading role in the formulation of public policies to promote the responsible use of AI and data as a key input for development.” The strategy further recognizes Colombia as “a pioneer in adopting internationally endorsed ethical frameworks and recommendations for the ethical use of AI.”¹²⁸

Colombia's recent international interventions reveal mixed priorities. During Global Digital Compact (GDC) consultations, the emphasis was on protecting human rights online—especially for vulnerable groups—and on preserving the multistakeholder nature of internet governance. Colombia's current engagement at eLAC has focused on artificial intelligence, connectivity, education, and AI.¹²⁹ Colombia hosted the Latin American and Caribbean AI Ministerial Summit, which focused on enabling ecosystems, digital education, and governance and resulted

in the Cartagena Declaration. This calls for strengthened cooperation in digital governance within the GDC framework and promotes regional dialogue that builds on eLAC progress and includes multistakeholder participation.

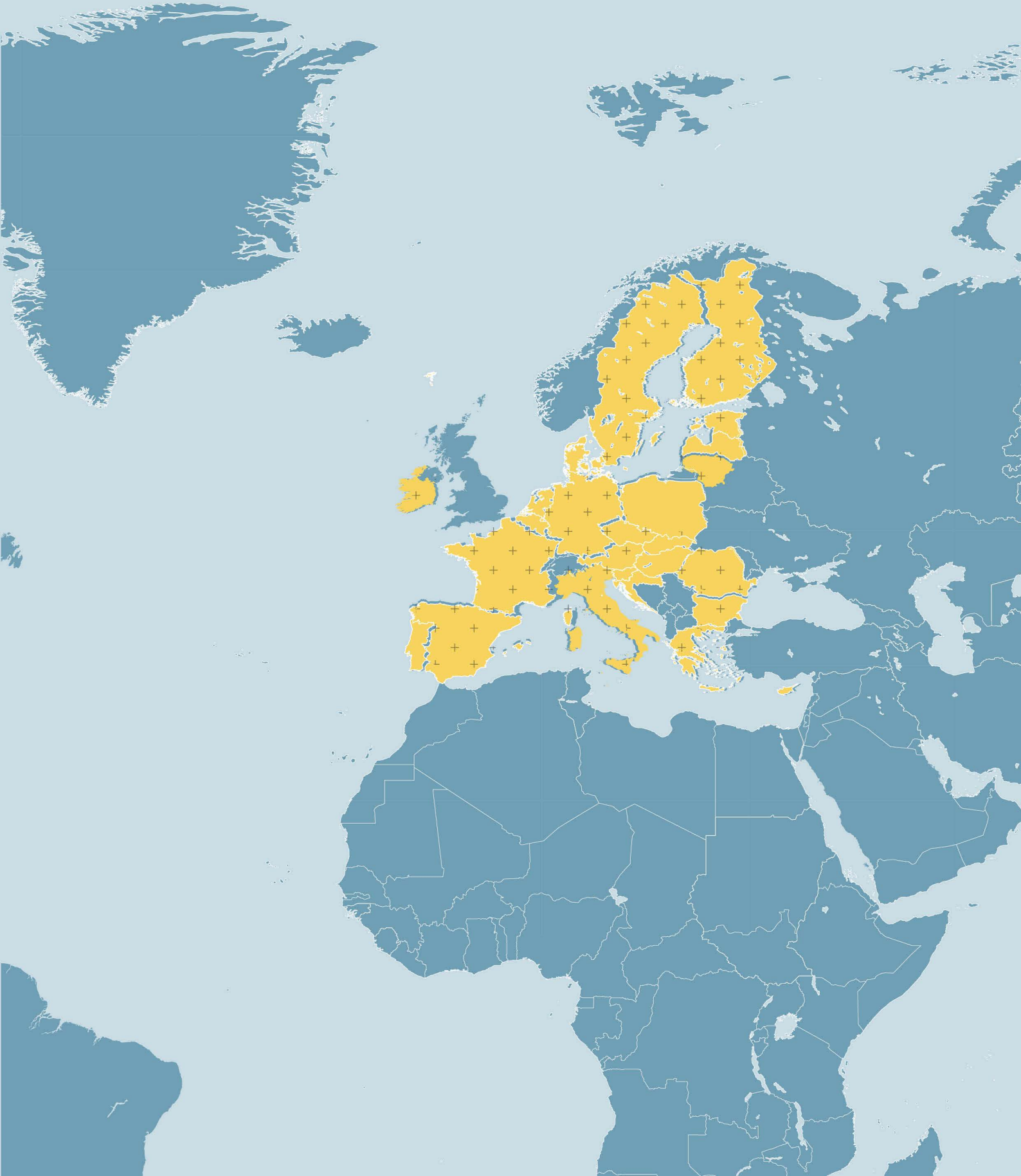
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

There is currently no structured process which enables stakeholders to provide feedback to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Colombia's official WSIS+20 position. While the Colombian Internet Governance Board allows for multistakeholder participation, the Board's effectiveness varies.¹³⁰ However, it remains the most consistent and accessible forum for engagement. Nonetheless, institutions participating in the Board have shown genuine openness, which allows these spaces—albeit informally and with limited influence—to contribute to the national position.

The European Union

By Rose Payne

| *Global Partners Digital*



OVERVIEW

The European Union (EU) has played an active role in the WSIS process since it first began twenty years ago, seeing it as a vehicle to expand access to digital technologies, advance digital cooperation, and to enable socio-economic development.¹³¹ Since then, digital technologies have become a core element of the EU's international strategy.¹³² The EU seeks to play a leadership role in WSIS+20 focusing on reinforcing a multistakeholder, rights-based, and open approach to digital governance, while promoting alignment with other global processes including the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The EU favours incremental changes to the original WSIS framework and opposes updates or additions to the Action Lines while considering how to best address technological developments and societal and geopolitical challenges. Key priorities include protecting and enhancing the multistakeholder approach to digital governance, defending the open and decentralised model of the internet, aligning the initiatives of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) into the WSIS process, and advancing human rights and democratic values in the digital age.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

❖ Development

The EU views human-centric, rights-based digital transformation as a driver of economic and social development and supports targeted interventions that address infrastructure gaps, build digital skills, and promote fair and inclusive access to connectivity. It sees the WSIS process over the last twenty years as playing an instrumental role in addressing digital divides and inequalities, and highlights that it has helped to put digital development on policy agendas.

The EU maintains that the WSIS framework must remain closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), noting that the Action Lines have played a critical role in advancing global connectivity, infrastructure, and digital skills. As discussed below, it supports the development of concrete implementation roadmaps linking the WSIS Action Lines with the SDGs principles and emerging policy frameworks. It argues that meaningful progress towards the SDGs depends on a human-centric, rights-based digital transformation.

Human Rights

The EU is taking a leading stance on the advancement of human rights in the WSIS+20. It is advocating for robust and, where possible, unprecedented language in the WSIS+20 outcome document that builds upon the previous review, the GDC, and UNGA resolutions and calls for recognition of the role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the WSIS follow-up. This approach is anchored in the universality and indivisibility of human rights as a necessary foundation for sustainable development. It rejects any dichotomy between human rights and development. The EU seeks to embed human rights safeguards in response to concerns about rising surveillance, censorship, discrimination, and online harms throughout the technology lifecycle, particularly highlighting risks to children. Emerging technologies, and their potential for heightened human rights risks, has been highlighted as an area of concern for the EU during the WSIS+20.

Internet Governance

The EU's vision for internet governance within WSIS is firmly multistakeholder and decentralised. It reaffirms the Tunis Agenda and opposes both the creation of new Action Lines and efforts to replace the multistakeholder approach with a more state-centred model. The EU proposes strengthening the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as the primary venue for inclusive dialogue and recommends institutionalising its mandate beyond 2025, enhancing its structure, improving participation from developing countries and marginalised groups, and securing stable funding. The EU also supports the use of multistakeholder sandboxes within existing institutions as spaces to collaboratively explore solutions to new governance challenges.

Review Modalities

The EU is aiming to consolidate the multistakeholder approach to governance of digital technologies during the WSIS+20, but also expects that through this reinforcement, this will become a broader guiding principle of governance within the UN. It advocates for the review to be conducted in line with the 2024 NetMundial+10 guidelines¹³³, which outlines how to operationalise multistakeholder principles. The EU calls for the establishment of a Multistakeholder Sounding Board¹³⁴ which would help consolidate stakeholder inputs, provide feedback to negotiators, and ensure transparent and structured engagement throughout the process. The EU suggests that the Sounding Board could be composed of volunteers from the IGF's Multistakeholder Advisory Group and Leadership Panel, and that it should ensure gender, geographical and

linguistic balance. While it is careful to emphasize that this Board would not be the sole stakeholder mechanism, it does suggest the Board should play an intermediary function between Member States and the wider stakeholder community during WSIS+20.

WSIS and the GDC

The EU emphasises the need for an implementation roadmap that connects WSIS outcomes with the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the achievement of the SDGs to ensure coherent and effective implementation and avoid duplication. The EU suggests that further WSIS reviews should be aligned with the post-2030 development timeline. Concrete suggestions on how to align these processes include a strengthened role for United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) and a broader composition including the UN Office on Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and other relevant UN bodies and agencies, and an update to the workings of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) to better involve stakeholders.

MAIN ACTORS

The EU's engagement in the WSIS+20 process is coordinated through a number of different agencies and bodies. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT) leads the development of the EU's digital policy input to WSIS+20, aligning it with internal strategies such as the Digital Decade and Global Gateway. The European External Action Service (EEAS) plays a key diplomatic role, ensuring coherence with broader EU foreign policy goals. The Council, particularly through the Working Party on Telecommunications and Information Society, coordinates Member State positions and provides political endorsement. Over the past twenty years, as digital technologies have become more prominent on the EU policy agenda, the coordination between institutions has become more structured and strategic.

There is a well-developed ecosystem of civil society organisations focused on digital technologies within the EU and many of those organisations have actively participated in the WSIS since its inception. EuroDig plays a central role in facilitating discussions and coordinating stakeholder action on internet governance, drawing on the national IGF's that many EU countries hold. The EU-based private sector, although present, has had modest visibility in the WSIS+20 process, often participating through associations such as DigitalEurope or industry coalitions. The

EU-based technical community is also a strong presence in bodies like the “Technical Community Coalition for Multistakeholderism” which are active in the WSIS.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

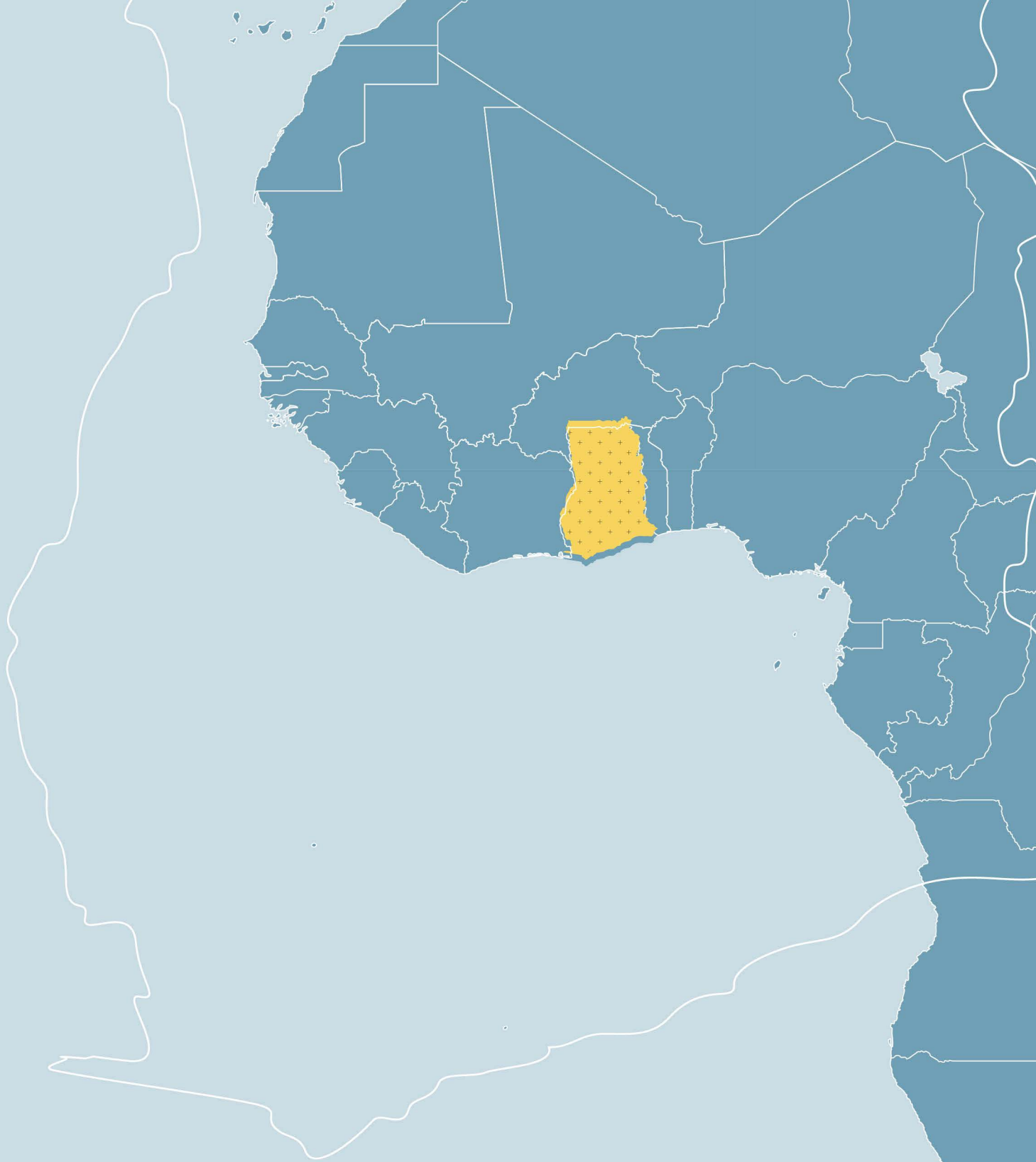
The EU has played a leading role in creating policy frameworks related to digital technologies and will likely seek to reinforce its regulatory leadership through the WSIS+20. The EU is motivated by a belief that a human-centric, multistakeholder, and rights-based model of governance is vital to delivering economic stability and addressing digital inclusion. The EU positions itself as a counterweight to state-led approaches that risk internet fragmentation and centralisation.

The current geopolitical landscape introduces an element of unpredictability, as long-standing alliances are shifting. It also aims to build coalitions with Global South countries, particularly within the G77, to promote inclusive development and address emerging digital divides. These efforts are part of a broader diplomatic strategy to embed EU values in global digital governance frameworks.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

The EU explicitly calls for transparent and inclusive stakeholder engagement in the WSIS+20 review and supports formal mechanisms to facilitate this, including the proposed Multistakeholder Sounding Board.

To prepare for the WSIS+20 process, the EU held stakeholder consultations including a consultation on internet governance¹³⁵ and during the Global Multistakeholder High Level Conference on Governance of Web 4.0 and Virtual Worlds¹³⁶, which served as a mechanism to gather stakeholder input particularly on emerging technologies. In addition, the EU has encouraged Member States to conduct consultations with their national stakeholders in preparation for WSIS+20. In addition, Member States have been encouraged to engage with global stakeholders to better understand their thoughts and concerns regarding the WSIS+20 process as well as positions.



Ghana

By Vivian Affoah

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OVERVIEW

Ghana has been a long-standing and active participant in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), regularly aligning its national digital policies with WSIS Action Lines. The country's engagement is grounded in multistakeholder principles, with the Ministry of Communications and Digital Technology and Innovation (MoCTI)¹³⁷ leading initiatives that prioritise digital inclusion, e-governance, and rights-based ICT development. Civil society and private sector partners, such as the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, have played a significant role in shaping the national digital agenda.

Recent policy initiatives reflect Ghana's alignment with WSIS objectives, including broadband expansion for rural communities,¹³⁸ digital education through smart classrooms¹³⁹, and gender empowerment via the Girls-in-ICT programme.¹⁴⁰ Ghana's continued participation in the WSIS Forum and efforts to strengthen cybersecurity capacity demonstrate its commitment to inclusive, sustainable digital development and active global engagement.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Ghana sees WSIS as a crucial enabler of its digital transformation agenda and national development goals. The WSIS Action Lines, especially, C1 (The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development), C3 (Access to information and knowledge), and C7 (e-Government and ICT applications), are primary to Ghana's plan. Initiatives like the e-Transform Ghana Project and the Digital Ghana Agenda highlight the country's commitment to using ICT for economic growth and improved service delivery.¹⁴¹

While Ghana supports the preservation of the WSIS Action Lines, it also advocates for their contextual reinterpretation to reflect emerging issues such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), data sovereignty, digital trade, and green ICTs.¹⁴²

Human Rights

Ghana supports the inclusion of strong human rights language in the WSIS+20 outcome documents, especially around access to information, freedom of expression, privacy, and digital rights. As a member of the UN Human Rights Council (2020–2022), Ghana highlighted

the interdependence of development and rights related to digital technologies, and national stakeholders such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) have encouraged for digital rights to be included in development policies.¹⁴³

Ghana has on many occasions supported the need for stronger human rights protections in cyberspace.

In September, 2019 Ghana's statement at the first substantive session of the Open-Ended Working Group on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security (2019-2021), indicated its support for the FOC joint statement on human rights impact of cybersecurity laws, practices and policies together with its recommendations.¹⁴⁴ At the same meeting, Ghana, also affirmed that "a responsible state behaviour in the cyber space can only be realized in an environment where rules, norms and principles exist and are consistent with human rights, the rule of law and the protection of the digital rights of citizens."¹⁴⁵

However, implementation gaps persist, particularly in ensuring redress for digital harms and inclusive protections for women and vulnerable populations. Both state and state actors in Ghana see the need to address issues of accessibility and gender digital divide.

Internet Governance

Ghana favours a multistakeholder model for internet governance, balancing state-led policies with inputs from academia, the private sector, and civil society. The country advocates for decentralized, transparent, and inclusive governance structures and is actively involved in the African Union's digital policy processes.¹⁴⁶

Ghana actively engages with international internet governance platforms, such as ICANN and the African Internet Governance Forum (AfIGF), and has partnered on national IGF events. Ghana's approach reflects a preference for decentralized governance with strong stakeholder inclusion.¹⁴⁷ For example, the country encouraged stakeholder consultation on digital policies such as the Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038).¹⁴⁸

However, civil society has expressed concern about the need to ensure policies and practices on internet governance meets international norms and standards.

Review Modalities

Ghana is supportive of inclusive review modalities. National WSIS preparations have included consultative sessions with actors like Media Foundation for West Africa, the Internet Society (ISOC Ghana), and other advocacy organizations. In the absence of further public statements, Ghana's previous engagement in international digital policy processes indicate their commitment to stakeholder inclusion. Ghana previously called for the inclusion of stakeholders in the Open-Ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies processes¹⁴⁹.

WSIS and the GDC

Ghana acknowledges the complementary roles of WSIS and the GDC. The country advocates for WSIS to remain a core forum for digital development discourse due to its structured action lines and long-term institutional memory. Ghana supports synergy between WSIS and GDC to avoid duplication and promote coherent digital policy development.

MAIN ACTORS

Ghana's approach to WSIS+20 is shaped by a partnership of public institutions and non-state actors. The Ministry of Communications and Digital Technology and Innovation leads the national WSIS+20 process, setting digital policy and coordinating international engagement.

Supporting agencies such as the National Information Technology Agency (NITA) concentrate on infrastructure development and interoperability standards¹⁵⁰ while the Cyber Security Authority ensures a secure digital environment through regulatory oversight and implementation of the Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038).¹⁵¹

On the non-governmental side, civil society organizations such as the Internet Society Ghana, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), Child Online Africa, Africa Open Data and Internet Research Foundation (AODIRF), Ghana Youth IGF, Penplusbytes etc are instrumental in raising awareness on digital rights and fostering accountability in policy execution. These organizations regularly produce advocacy tools, policy briefs, and host multistakeholder dialogues that shape national digital rights discourse.

The private sector, led by major telecom companies like MTN Ghana and Vodafone Ghana, has invested heavily in digital literacy programmes, aligning their CSR with WSIS Action Lines. These initiatives have targeted youth, women, and rural populations to bridge digital access gaps.¹⁵²

Academic institutions like the University of Ghana and the Ghana Institute of Journalism contribute through policy research and capacity-building, creating a knowledge ecosystem that supports evidence-based digital governance¹⁵³.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Ghana's WSIS+20 engagement is shaped by a desire to position itself as a regional ICT hub. As part of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Ghana aligns its digital policy with regional priorities, especially those related to internet access, cybersecurity, and economic integration.¹⁵⁴ The country's digital transformation strategy is underpinned by democratic values, openness, and inclusivity, reflecting its constitutional commitment to freedom of information and expression.¹⁵⁵ Ghana joined other countries at the 2025 WSIS+20 Africa Regional Review Meeting convened in Cotonou, Benin and Ghanaian stakeholders contributed to a Declaration which reaffirmed States commitment to implementing the WSIS Action Lines and Targets.¹⁵⁶ Ghana's participation illustrates its commitment to the WSIS+20.

Another critical motivation is Ghana's ambition to improve its global digital competitiveness through innovation-led growth. The government has prioritized the development of a digital economy through initiatives such as the Digital Financial Services Policy and the Ghana Innovation Hub. These platforms not only foster entrepreneurship and youth employment but also position Ghana as an attractive destination for tech-based investment. Additionally, Ghana's increasing participation in multilateral digital cooperation through institutions including the ITU Council and the Digital Cooperation Organization reflects a broader geopolitical interest in shaping global digital norms. By actively engaging in WSIS+20, Ghana aims to amplify its voice in international fora, protect its digital sovereignty, and secure more equitable outcomes for countries in the Global South.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Civil society engagement in Ghana's WSIS+20 process is becoming more organized, with structured consultations led by the Ministry of Communications, Digital Technology and Innovation. These efforts aim to incorporate perspectives from across stakeholder groups, but in practice, most consultations are concentrated in the capital, limiting the inclusion of grassroots voices and rural-based actors. The challenge remains to create a more geographically and demographically balanced participation framework. Civil society organisations are, however, yet to coordinate on the WSIS+20 process.



India

By Fawaz Shaheen
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OVERVIEW

India has consistently supported the multistakeholder model of digital governance since the WSIS process began. It hosted the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in 2008 and has continued to participate in subsequent reviews, advocating for affordable access, development-oriented policies, and more inclusive management of critical internet resources.¹⁵⁷

While reaffirming support for multistakeholderism, India also highlighted the lack of progress on enhanced cooperation.¹⁵⁸ Based on its historical position, India continues to support the multistakeholder model of internet governance, support for IGF, and development-oriented digital governance. In recent years, India has been undergoing a rapid process of digitisation that is geared towards transformation of governance, capacity building, and promotion of technological innovation. India has also been positioning itself as a global technology leader, particularly through its emphasis on building Digital Public Infrastructure ('DPI') and by articulating Global Majority concerns at various international fora.¹⁵⁹

As the WSIS+20 progresses, India is seeking to leverage the potential of AI to drive the next phase of technology driven development and is likely to stress the importance of promoting multilingualism on the internet, and to focus on balancing multistakeholderism with digital sovereignty in matters of cybersecurity and national security.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

In the last 10 years, India has primarily focused on digital connectivity and access. In the past, India has expressed support for the 'formulation of public policies aimed at bridging the digital divide'¹⁶⁰ through expansion of telecom and broadband connectivity. In his statement at the 2024 WSIS+20 Forum High Level Event,¹⁶¹ the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) chairman emphasised India's cheap data tariffs, high fintech adoption rate, and highlighted several DPI initiatives including Aadhaar, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), Co-WIN and ESanjeevani. The Indian Delegation emphasised the need to ensure inclusive, accessible and affordable technologies bridge the sustainability gap.¹⁶²

AI development and governance has become central to discussions on development in India, with the IndiaAI Mission,¹⁶³ launched in March 2024,

aiming to further develop India's AI innovation ecosystem for social good. More recently, India has focused on open AI and open data development, alongside building of Indic language models.¹⁶⁴ India is likely to focus on AI governance at the WSIS+20 review, prioritising domestic AI innovation, mitigating the resource gap and new digital divides arising from AI.

India has also emphasised on the use of technology to promote Sustainable Development Goals ('SDGs')¹⁶⁵ in its participation at recent multilateral declarations, such as at the G20. In the context of technology driven development, the government has been focused on building ICT infrastructure (Action Line C2)¹⁶⁶; capacity building (Action Line C4), such as under the Digital India initiative,¹⁶⁷ IndiaAI Mission¹⁶⁸, and through capacity building support to other countries; and promoting technological applications in different aspects of life such as agriculture,¹⁶⁹ health¹⁷⁰, education,¹⁷¹ and governance (Action Line C7).¹⁷²

Human Rights

India recognises the need for protecting human rights on the internet while also giving due consideration to national security priorities. In recent years, India's human rights priorities have largely centred on inclusive development, improving digital access by bridging the gender gap in cyberspace, and multilingualism. India has also linked its push for DPIs to achieving inclusive development through digital transformation. The rapid scale of the digital transformation of essential services was noted by the Supreme Court of India in a recent judgement,¹⁷³ which recognised the right to digital access as a component of the right to life and liberty.

Recently, the TRAI has highlighted Indian initiatives that leverage digital technologies to promote inclusive development,¹⁷⁴ including improving accessibility through digital transformation in the fields of healthcare, disaster management and agriculture. Promoting multilingualism on the internet has been a key part of India's push for a more inclusive and accessible internet.¹⁷⁵

Internet Governance

India has continued to maintain its support for the multistakeholder approach to internet governance,¹⁷⁶ while stressing the need to respect sovereignty in matters of cybersecurity and national security.¹⁷⁷ Since 2021, it has been conducting the India IGF as a "a multi stakeholder platform bringing together representatives from various groups, considering all to be at par to discuss public policy issues related to the Internet."

India has been positioning itself as the leading Global South voice in internet governance.¹⁷⁸ For the past few years, India has been holding the 'Voice of Global South Summit', with the latest edition held under the theme 'An empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future.'¹⁷⁹ The summit was a platform for sharing perspectives and priorities on complex issues affecting developing nations. India has also announced its ambitions to lead international telecom supply chains and enable digital connectivity in emerging economies.¹⁸⁰ In its participation at the High-Level Event, India highlighted its efforts to develop the standards for responsible and trustworthy AI.¹⁸¹

Approaching the WSIS+20 Summit, various stakeholders in India have voiced concerns for the future of the multistakeholder model of internet governance. With the emergence of the GDC and challenges related to emerging technologies like AI, multilateral and bilateral forums have come to occupy a more prominent space. At the same time, India has also noted the need to ensure that the forthcoming WSIS+20 maintains global support for and enhances the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance.¹⁸²

Review Modalities

India has historically supported inclusion of different stakeholders in the review processes. However, stakeholders in India have suggested a need to improve the way the review of WSIS outcomes is conducted. For instance, stakeholders have suggested the need for greater clarity on timelines connected to the review, as well as the modalities for commenting on outcome documents to enable more effective participation. There is also a need to assess funding and other resource constraints to ensure that the articulation of India's positions may be made sharper, more transparent and participative through stakeholder engagement.

WSIS and the GDC

India has welcomed the GDC as a critical instrument for advancing the future governance of the internet while remaining focused on the WSIS as a key process which advances the multistakeholder model of internet governance. While the adoption of the GDC as an international legal instrument signals the move towards a more multilateral approach all over the world, India has also continued to show vocal support for the WSIS process, as well as forums like the IGF.¹⁸⁴ This must also be viewed in the context of India's support for technology-driven growth at platforms like BRICS and the G20. For instance, during its presidency of the G20, India stressed on the need to leverage DPIs augmented by AI in order to make progress towards achieving SDGs.¹⁸⁵ India relies on multistakeholder

processes to shape the future of the internet and is concerned around the fragmentation of different international processes around internet governance.

India is likely to support the continuation of the WSIS process, as well as renewal of the IGF's mandate. However, this might be accompanied by a call for greater financial support for the IGF by the UN, to reduce its dependence on voluntary contributions by private entities and strengthen the credibility of the IGF as an independent space for diverse stakeholders to convene and take forward critical conversations around internet governance.

MAIN ACTORS

India's involvement in the WSIS process is overseen by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), with input from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology ('MeitY'), with aspects concerning international relations being coordinated by the Ministry of External Affairs ('MEA'). Other agencies like the Ministry for Health, TRAI and the National Internet Exchange of India, also contribute to the process.

Among non-governmental actors, civil society and academic groups play the most active role at the domestic level. They play a critical role in bringing together different stakeholders to host conversations and convene multistakeholder deliberations, given the lack of formal government-led processes. While industry stakeholders are not very active domestically, some industry bodies like the Communication Multimedia and Infrastructure Association of India regularly participate at the WSIS forum and

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

India's approach to digital sovereignty is characterised by a push for domestic technological and resource development, alongside support for Global Majority concerns in digital governance conversations. It has recently been at the forefront of international conventions for digital governance, particularly focussing on AI and DPI, chairing the GPAI,¹⁸⁶ G20, Global Digital Compact ('GDC') Asia Consultations,¹⁸⁷ and upcoming the AI Summit.¹⁸⁸ These summits have generally concluded with outcomes aim to advance safe, secure, ethical trustworthy AI; drive DPI adoption towards achieving SDGs;¹⁸⁹ capacity building; and ensuring access, especially in the Global South.¹⁹⁰

India's approach to digital sovereignty is reflected in initiatives such as Make in India or Digital India, and most recently, in its approach

to AI development.¹⁹¹ It has been pushing for furthering indigenous AI capabilities. It is also leveraging its AI agenda towards establishing leadership in the Global South. At the same time, it has also seen participation in multilateral convenings on internet governance and has used those opportunities towards advancing DPI adoption in other countries and developing AI capabilities. The latter has also led the government to enter public-private partnerships to account for the resource constraints for AI development, such as compute power.¹⁹² It has also tried to assert digital sovereignty through incorporating provisions on data localization in the yet to be enforced Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules released for consultation under the DPDP Act, 2023.¹⁹³ Additionally, cyber security as a means of protecting national security, shaped by its long history of complex geopolitical relations with U.S., China, Russia and Pakistan, continues to be a major arena for exercise of digital sovereignty for India.¹⁹⁴

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

While MEA and other government stakeholders do engage with civil society and participate in multi-stakeholder conversations, there are no formal organised processes in place. Different stakeholders engage informally before events and discussions to understand country position including civil society, academia, and independent experts. Stakeholders from different government departments have been open to engage in civil society-led conversations, as well as bi-lateral meetings with other stakeholders when requested. In the lead-up to WSIS+20 review, there have been at least two conversations organised by academic and industry groups which were attended by a cross section of stakeholders from government, industry, and academia. However, these conversations are mostly ad hoc and in response to specific events, such as the upcoming WSIS+20 review.



Indonesia

By Konstantinos Komaitis

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OVERVIEW

Indonesia has taken a supportive but critical stance on Internet governance and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process. Indonesia supports the multistakeholder model of Internet governance but, simultaneously, has emphasized the role of governments in maintaining national sovereignty, cybersecurity, and public order in the digital space. Indonesia supports the WSIS framework and advocates for a democratic, inclusive, and secure Internet governance ecosystem, with increased involvement of developing countries and government leadership in national contexts. Its government often calls for reforms that better address the needs of countries in the Global South in digital development discussions while advocating for a balanced approach in the governance of the Internet.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Indonesia's position in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) aligns closely with its national agenda for digital transformation and technology-driven development. Indonesia actively supports the WSIS Action Lines, especially those related to ICT infrastructure and development, digital inclusion, e-government and e-services, cybersecurity and capacity building.¹⁹⁵

Moreover, under the "Indonesia Digital Vision 2045"¹⁹⁶ and following its commitments established in the "Digital Indonesia Roadmap 2021–2024,"¹⁹⁷ the government aligns its national strategies with the WSIS goals and, in particular, with those relating to expanding Internet access in rural and underserved areas, enhancing digital literacy for citizens and SMEs, promoting smart cities and digital government services and, encouraging tech innovation, startups and digital entrepreneurship.¹⁹⁸

As a G20 member and ASEAN leader,¹⁹⁹ Indonesia uses the WSIS platform to advocate for equitable digital development in the Global South and, often emphasizes the need for affordable technology, digital sovereignty, and data governance while, at the same time, advocating for fairness in the global digital ecosystem.

Human Rights

Indonesia's position on enhancing human rights language and commitments in the WSIS+20 process reflects a blend of international

advocacy and domestic challenges. As a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2023–2026 term, Indonesia has pledged to promote human rights globally²⁰⁰ and, domestically, strengthening its National Action Plan on Human Rights (RANHAM).

Internationally, in UN deliberations, Indonesia has expressed support for integrating human rights into digital technology governance. During the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee discussions, Indonesia joined the consensus on a resolution addressing human rights and digital technologies, emphasizing the state’s primary role in safeguarding human rights online, advocating for responsible technology use that balances freedom of expression with social cohesion.²⁰¹ Domestically, however questions remain about its effectiveness in addressing human rights violations. For instance, the Electronic Information and Transactions (EIT) Law has been criticized for criminalizing defamation and disseminating “false news,” leading to the suppression of dissenting voices online.²⁰² Moreover, Amnesty International has also reported²⁰³ that Indonesia has made use of spyware technologies even though it is lacking a comprehensive legal framework to regulate such surveillance tools, thus posing significant risks to freedom of expression and privacy rights. More broadly, Indonesia’s revised Criminal Code, set to take effect in 2026, has been criticized for provisions that may infringe on civil liberties, such as criminalizing consensual sexual relations outside of marriage and imposing strict penalties on insults to the President.²⁰⁴

Internet Governance

Indonesia supports the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, however it places a greater emphasis on government involvement compared to fully decentralized or private-led approaches. This approach is shaped by national concerns including sovereignty, cybersecurity, digital economy regulation and content control/online harms.

While Indonesia recognizes the decentralized, global nature of the Internet’s infrastructure and supports technical cooperation at that level (e.g., with ICANN, IETF), it advocates for national jurisdiction and oversight over content, data, and platforms operating within its borders. This means that Indonesia supports a decentralized, bottom-up and multistakeholder approach to governance of the technical layer while arguing that policy and content governance should be more centralized, top-down and state-led.²⁰⁵ To this end, Indonesia has been actively advancing its digital and data sovereignty agenda, intertwining national security, economic development, and technological independence. Specifically, Indonesia is constructing a network of national data centers to centralize and secure data storage within its borders²⁰⁶ and, at the same time, it is fostering the

development of “Sovereign AI” in alignment with its national interests and regulatory frameworks.²⁰⁷

Specifically, when it comes to Internet governance, Indonesia focuses²⁰⁸ on bridging the digital divide, especially for remote islands and underserved populations; digital literacy and capacity building, ensuring citizens can meaningfully participate in the information society; respect for cultural values, pushing for content governance that respects national cultures and religions; and, cyber sovereignty, allowing the government to control the digital space within its territory, similar to physical sovereignty.

Indonesia established its national Internet Governance Forum (ID-IGF) in 2012, founded on principles of transparency, openness, and multistakeholder participation²⁰⁹. The ID-IGF has promoted human rights, net neutrality, and decentralised internet governance in regional and global IGF initiatives.

Indonesia has played an active role in regional and global IGF processes. It hosted the 8th global IGF in Bali in 2013 and helped launch the Southeast Asia IGF²¹⁰, focusing on regional issues such as cybersecurity and digital rights. At the 2021 and 2023²¹¹ global IGFs, Indonesia called for stronger support for national IGFs, inclusive AI governance²¹², and policies to advance digital literacy and support SMEs²¹³ as part of its digital development agenda.

Review Modalities

Indonesia supports a multistakeholder approach to digital governance on a domestic level and international discussions but emphasises the need for this to be a support to strong government leadership to uphold national sovereignty, public order, and security. It sees WSIS+20 as an opportunity to reinforce inclusive digital development and calls for reform that better reflects Global South priorities.

WSIS and the GDC

Indonesia sees both the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the Global Digital Compact (GDC) as complementary rather than competing processes in shaping global digital policy.²¹⁴ While the country has not publicly declared a preference for one over the other as the lead forum, its official statements and participation in multilateral processes provide clues about its positioning.

Indonesia has consistently supported the WSIS framework, particularly the principles of multistakeholderism, digital inclusion, and bridging the

digital divide. It views WSIS as an established and proven platform for coordinating international digital cooperation, especially within the UN system and through the ITU. Indonesia often references WSIS+20 review as an opportunity to assess progress and reinforce digital development goals.²¹⁵

Regarding the GDC, Indonesia has expressed constructive support, especially on issues like connectivity, digital trust and safety, and inclusive digital governance. However, there is some caution in not letting the GDC duplicate or undermine existing processes such as WSIS or the IGF, which Indonesia supports. In its interventions during UN discussions, Indonesia is quick to emphasize the importance of avoiding fragmentation of digital governance efforts.²¹⁶

All in all, Indonesia advocates for developing country perspectives and insists on capacity building and equitable digital development being central to both WSIS and the GDC. This aligns with other Global South nations in calling for balanced governance structures that do not overly concentrate power in a few states or corporations.

MAIN ACTORS

The Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika, or Kominfo)²¹⁷ is leading the domestic coordination of the WSIS+20 process. While specific details about other Indonesian agencies involved in the WSIS+20 process are not readily available, potential collaborators may include a variety of different agencies tasked with different responsibilities ranging from the development of standards to the creation of national strategies and cybersecurity.²¹⁸

In terms of non-government actors, Indonesia has a host of different stakeholders that engage in Internet governance. Major telecom companies, like Telkomsel, Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison as well as national tech companies, like Gojek (GoTo Group), Bukalapak, Tokopedia, Traveloka collaborate with government bodies on digital infrastructure, cybersecurity and data governance.²¹⁹ There is also a strong presence of civil society organizations, like ELSAM²²⁰, SAFEnet²²¹ and LBH Pers²²², that predominantly focus on digital rights, freedom of expression and surveillance.²²³

MOTIVATIONS

Indonesia is a leading member of ASEAN and plays a central role in regional digital cooperation initiatives, such as the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025²²⁴. Indonesia wants WSIS+20 to reflect developing

countries' priorities, especially those of Southeast Asia and advocates for greater global support in closing the digital divide in Southeast Asia, with a focus on infrastructure, capacity building, and affordability.

Indonesia often positions itself as a bridge between developed and developing countries. In WSIS+20, this translates to pushing for a more inclusive, equitable digital order, where developing nations are not merely consumers of technology but active participants. This is the reason, the government has consistently favoured multilateral, inclusive governance over a centralized or private-sector-dominated Internet governance model, reflecting its support for sovereign control over national digital policies.

In general, Indonesia carefully navigates the growing digital and technological competition between China and the US. It avoids taking sides and prefers frameworks that are non-aligned, open, and not dominated by either power. To this end, Indonesia also engages with both China and the United States and pushes for reforms in global Internet governance institutions, ensuring that voices from the Global South are adequately represented and influential.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Indonesia has expressed strong support for the WSIS process as a catalyst for harnessing ICT for sustainable development goals. The country emphasises the importance of inclusivity in Internet governance and development, advocating for the participation of all stakeholders, including civil society, in shaping digital policies.²²⁵

Furthermore, Indonesia is involved in the Civil Society Alliance for Digital Empowerment (CADE) project,²²⁶ co-funded by the European Union and led by DiploFoundation. The CADE project aims to enhance CSO participation in global digital policy processes by providing tailored training to improve skills in Internet governance and facilitate constructive dialogue with policymakers. This initiative seeks to address challenges such as limited opportunities for CSOs to contribute meaningfully, financial barriers, and the overrepresentation of organisations from the Global North.²²⁷



Russia

By Konstantinos Komaitis

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OVERVIEW

Over the years, Russia has consistently promoted the principle of digital sovereignty and has implemented domestic policies to reinforce its control over Internet activities within its borders. The 2019 “Sovereign Internet Law”²²⁸ granted the Russian government powers to monitor Internet traffic and potentially isolate the Russian Internet segment from the global network. At an international level, Russia is prioritizing the creation of international norms for cybersecurity, and, to this end, it has proposed several UN initiatives, including a successful UN Convention on Cybercrime, related to countering the use of ICTs for criminal or destabilizing purposes. In general, with regards to the governance and management of the Internet, Russia emphasizes state control, national security, and a shift from Western-led models to multilateral structures that prioritize governmental authority. It views the current global Internet architecture as biased and vulnerable and pushes for reforms that reinforce digital sovereignty.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Russia supports the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) as a strategic platform that aligns closely with its broader goals of digital transformation and technology-driven development. For Russia, WSIS represents a process that is UN-backed, multilateral and a venue for discussing international ICT policies without the dominance of any one country. It sees WSIS as an alternative to Western-led forums (like the OECD or G7), and advocates mainly for the protection of cultural and linguistic diversity and the support for state-led digital development models.²²⁹

Insisting on the need for a multipolar world order²³⁰, especially in the context of driving the development agenda, Russia actively promotes the need for national control over digital infrastructure, the equality of rights for all countries in digital governance while opposing, what it considers to be, a monopolization of the Internet by a handful of western countries and institutions.²³¹ This reflects its desire to shape global digital norms in ways that protect national sovereignty and support diverse models of digital development.

At the same time, Russia uses WSIS to showcase and align its national digital development strategies, including its program on “Digital Economy of the Russian Federation”²³², with particular emphasis on sectors like AI, 5G, cybersecurity, and e-government, linking them to WSIS Action Lines (especially C2 – ICT infrastructure, and C7 – ICT applications).²³³

Finally, Russia also supports global efforts to close the digital divide²³⁴, particularly in the Eurasian region, aligning with WSIS’s goals for inclusive information societies.

Human Rights

Russia’s broader human rights record raises questions about its commitment to the principles espoused in international forums. Domestically, laws such as the “foreign agent” legislation²³⁵ have been used to suppress independent media and civil society organizations, drawing criticism from international human rights bodies. Internationally, Russia has faced censure for its actions in Ukraine, leading to its suspension from the UN Human Rights Council in 2022.

In the lead-up to the WSIS+20 review, Russia, along with allies such as China, Saudi Arabia, and Cuba, formed a bloc advocating for a state-centric model of Internet governance.²³⁶ Historically, while Russia supported the final agreement resulting from the two-phase WSIS in 2003 and 2005, which emphasized the centrality of human rights—particularly privacy and freedom of expression—its support for these principles appears to be conditional and framed within its broader emphasis on state sovereignty and traditional values.

In its official submission²³⁷ to the WSIS+10 review, Russia acknowledged the importance of protecting human rights, including privacy and freedom of expression. However, it stipulated that such protections should be “subject to national legislation,” indicating a preference for national interpretations of universal standards.

Overall, Russia’s approach to human rights is characterized by strong state control and suppression of dissent, under a legal system that often serves the interests of the ruling authorities. While it maintains the appearance of legal protections, the reality on the ground frequently contradicts those guarantees. This has resulted in sustained international criticism and growing isolation in global human rights forums.

Internet Governance

Russia strongly advocates for the principle that states should have sovereign control over the Internet within their own territories. This aligns with its broader political agenda of limiting foreign influence (particularly from the U.S. and private Western tech companies) in domestic affairs. To this end, Russia has historically rejected the multistakeholder model, pushing instead for multilateral governance, ideally through the United Nations and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

However, during its February 2025 submission to the ITU's Council Working Group on WSIS and SDGs, Russia, alongside Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and its largest provider for digital services in Russia, "Rostelcom" stated about multistakeholder Internet governance: "One of the most important outcomes of the WSIS process is the establishment of a definition of Internet governance that includes multistakeholder participation. These stakeholders include governments, international intergovernmental organizations, private sector, technical community, and civil society, including selected expert communities. After 20 years of using the multistakeholder model, it can be concluded that there is a vital need for evolution and tuning of the model. Today we are witnessing a crisis of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, which does not guarantee that this model will be sustained and further strengthened".²³⁸

Moreover, Russia is also a strong advocate for developing national segments of the Internet, including the possibility of a "sovereign Internet" or "Runet"²³⁹, which could operate independently from the global Internet in times of crises. This reflects Russia's broader strategy of "Internet balkanization". This idea is shared by other authoritarian countries within the BRICS²⁴⁰ block in which Russia actively participates and also uses to promote international norms and agreements that prioritize cybersecurity, combating cybercrime, and limiting the use of ICTs for "destabilizing" purposes. This reflects its domestic focus on controlling online content, reducing dissent, and protecting critical infrastructure from foreign influence.

Finally, for Russia, the perceived U.S. monopoly over critical Internet resources, especially the role of ICANN and the control over the root servers, has always been a major issue. To this end, Russia consistently advocates for the UN to be responsible for the overseeing the Internet's infrastructure and resource management.²⁴¹

Review Modalities

While publicly reaffirming the importance of all stakeholders, as recognized in the Tunis Agenda, Russia strongly supports a state-led model of digital governance and has suggested that the multistakeholder approach entrenches the position of transnational corporations.²⁴² It is supportive of the WSIS structures and their continuation as a multilateral mechanism.

WSIS and the GDC

In general, Russia emphasizes the importance of WSIS, particularly the Geneva Declaration, as foundational frameworks for digital governance and has called for the GDC to acknowledge and build upon the achievements and challenges identified in the WSIS process, highlighting its role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).²⁴³

Specifically, on the GDC, Russia has expressed concerns that, in its current form, it does not adequately incorporate proposals from the Russian delegation and overlooks key documents like the Geneva Declaration and the Tunis Agenda. Additionally, Russia criticized the GDC for proposing new structures, such as the Annual High-Level Forum on GDC and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, which Russia perceives as creating an unaccountable governance architecture that could undermine existing institutions like the ITU, CSTD, WSIS process, and IGF.²⁴⁴

Overall, however, Russia's attitude towards both WSIS and the GDC derives from its longstanding emphasis on state sovereignty. Anything that departs from the idea that digital governance must respect state sovereignty is seen as something that, ultimately, dilutes Russia's ability to exert national control over Internet governance.

MAIN ACTORS

The Russian Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media²⁴⁵ (often referred to as the Ministry of Digital Development) is the primary government agency leading Russia's domestic preparations for the WSIS+20 process. The ministry has historically overseen major digital initiatives, including broadband expansion and e-government infrastructure, aligning with the objectives of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).²⁴⁶

In addition to the Ministry of Digital Development, Russia's approach to the WSIS+20 process involves collaboration with other governmental bodies. In general, Russia's broader digital and information security strategies are coordinated through various agencies, including the Federal Security Service (FSB)²⁴⁷ and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These agencies contribute to shaping Russia's positions in international forums related to information and communication technologies.²⁴⁸

With regards to non-governmental entities, the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation serves as a consultative civil society institution, facilitating dialogue between citizens and government bodies. Russia's

technical community engages at WSIS+20 through organizations like the International Affairs Council (RIAC)²⁴⁹, which operates as a link between the state, scholarly community, business, and civil society, facilitating communication and cooperation on foreign policy decisions. Finally, the Civic Chamber’s “Community” forums and the CIC’s All-Russian Civil Forum serve as platforms for dialogue and collaboration among civil society, academia, and government representatives. These gatherings aim to consolidate positions and develop recommendations on issues relevant to Russia’s interests.

However, the extent of coordination within and across stakeholder groups, particularly between the technical community and other sectors, is less clear. While organizations like RIAC aim to bridge gaps between different communities, the overall integration and collaborative efforts among all non-governmental actors in the WSIS+20 review process may vary depending on the specific initiatives and institutional frameworks in place.²⁵⁰

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Russia advocates for a multipolar world order, opposing what it views as Western dominance in global Internet governance structures. This shapes its positions at the WSIS+20 negotiations, where it pushes for greater state control and a diminished role for private and Western-led multistakeholder model.

Additionally, given the international sanctions and tech export restrictions it faces, Russia has become more focused on reducing its dependence on Western digital infrastructure and platforms. This fuels its drive to localize Internet infrastructure, promote national platforms, and advocate for a sovereign model of Internet governance. To this end, Russia often aligns itself with countries in the BRICS bloc and the Global South, which share similar concerns about the state of Internet governance. Notably, the Regional Commonwealth in the Field of Communications (RCC)²⁵¹, which includes Russia and several neighbouring countries, has been active in advocating for a state-led model of Internet governance, presenting a unified stance that emphasizes national sovereignty in digital policy.

Finally, regional security concerns—particularly related to NATO and perceived information warfare—shape Russia’s preference for state-centric control of the Internet. It uses this to justify strong surveillance, content filtering, and cyber defense mechanisms, and to promote policies that favor national jurisdiction over global Internet architecture.²⁵²

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

In the WSIS+20 preparatory process, there is no clear evidence that Russia has actively involved independent civil society organizations (CSOs) in either a systematic or transparent manner. Participation tends to be limited to government-aligned NGOs or academic institutions, particularly those that echo state narratives around digital sovereignty and cybersecurity.

Within Russia, there have been domestic forums and consultations on ICT and digital development (e.g., the Russian Internet Governance Forum²⁵³), but these often lack diverse representation and are primarily top-down in structure. Critical or independent civil society voices are generally absent from these spaces, largely due to the restrictive legal and political environment for NGOs and dissenting actors in Russia.



Saudi Arabia

By Konstantinos Komaitis

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OVERVIEW

Saudi Arabia has been increasingly active in the global digital and ICT (Information and Communications Technology) policy arena, including in forums like the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), reflecting its national transformation goals. Central to its policy strategy “Vision 2030”, the country aims to become a regional digital hub, focusing on the expansion of 5G networks, broadband access and data centers. It is also actively promoting its innovation ecosystem, primarily concentrating on bridging the digital divide, especially among youth and women. The Saudi government is actively seeking to position the country as a regional digital leader, attracting foreign investment, shaping global norms, while exerting soft power. Saudi Arabia is likely to take a proactive role in shaping the post-2025 WSIS agenda, possibly pushing for more private-sector inclusive, secure, and investment-friendly digital environments.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Saudi Arabia is a regular participant and contributor to WSIS fora where it shares progress and strategies related to its own digital transformation goals. It often highlights its alignment with the WSIS Action Lines, particularly in areas such as ICT infrastructure (C2), access to information (C3), and capacity building (C4).

The Kingdom’s Vision 2030²⁵⁴ and the National Transformation Program²⁵⁵ serve as the backbone of its digital development strategy, emphasizing innovation, smart government, digital economy, and ICT investment. These initiatives directly support WSIS goals of fostering inclusive information societies and sustainable development through technology.

Saudi Arabia has been recognized for advancements in e-government services, while projects like NEOM²⁵⁶ and other smart city initiatives showcase cutting-edge applications of IoT, AI, and sustainable technologies. Through the National Cybersecurity Authority, Saudi Arabia supports secure digital environments, echoing WSIS principles on trust and security in the use of ICTs.

Overall, Saudi Arabia uses the WSIS platform to forge partnerships, contribute to global ICT policy discussions, and support UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through technology.

Human Rights

While Saudi Arabia publicly endorses principles of digital rights and human rights in international forums, its domestic actions sometimes contradict these commitments. The suppression of human rights discourse during the 2024 IGF in Riyadh²⁵⁷ and the continued persecution of online activists suggest that the Kingdom's support for human rights in digital technology is more rhetorical than substantive. This discrepancy raises concerns about the country's role in shaping international digital policies and its genuine commitment to upholding human rights standards.

This, however, has not stopped the Kingdom from seeking membership within the UN's Human Rights Council. Saudi Arabia became a member of the HRC in 2006 and served until 2019. In October 2020, the Kingdom failed to secure a seat due to its poor human rights record. In October 2024, Saudi Arabia again sought a seat on the Council, prompting a global campaign from human rights activists urging UN member states to reject the bid.

When it comes to WSIS+20 Review, the expectation is that Saudi Arabia's focus on human rights will be under the lens of development and economic rights.²⁵⁸ In this context, in 2024, during the WSIS+20 High Level Forum in Geneva, the Saudi Data & AI Authority (SDAIA) received recognition for its National Data Bank and Estishraf projects, aiming to enhance data quality and promote a data-driven economy²⁵⁹ and its "AI Principles Project" was acknowledged for focusing on ethical AI development throughout its lifecycle.²⁶⁰ Similarly, the "Elevate" program²⁶¹ trained over 1,000 women from 28 countries in data and AI fields, promoting women's empowerment in technology, while the "SmartTruck" initiative, in partnership with Huawei, provided digital skills training to seniors, aiming to bridge the digital divide.²⁶²

Internet Governance

Saudi Arabia advocates for a central role of governments in Internet governance and its government plays a dominant role in regulating online content, data flows, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure. Saudi Arabia emphasizes national sovereignty over cyberspace, advocating for each country's right to control internet content and infrastructure within its borders.

Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia also supports the WSIS action lines and formally recognizes the multistakeholder approach; however, its commitment to multistakeholderism has generally been inconsistent in practice. More specifically, stakeholder involvement—especially from civil

society and independent actors—is limited. Engagement often occurs within state-approved frameworks, meaning that stakeholders must align with national policy objectives.

One particular area where Saudi Arabia has used the multistakeholder model is the adoption of IPv6 and created the Saudi IPv6 Task Force, coordinated by the Communications, Space and Technology (CST) Commission. Besides government agencies, the Task Force included ISPs, academic institutions, large enterprises and data centers as well as equipment vendors and technical experts.²⁶³ As a result of this multistakeholder approach, Saudi Arabia has shown steady growth in IPv6 adoption, with several large ISPs offering dual-stack (IPv4 and IPv6) connectivity, and public awareness increasing.

In general, however, the Kingdom supports a centralized management of Internet infrastructure, often working through state entities like the Communications, Space and Technology Commission (CST), the Saudi National Cybersecurity Authority and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT). These bodies coordinate and regulate internet development, security, and digital policy.

All in all, Internet governance is viewed as a strategic tool in the Vision 2030 agenda, which aims to diversify the economy through digitization and innovation.²⁶⁴

Review Modalities

While the Kingdom formally supports multistakeholderism, its approach is largely state-led, with limited space for independent civil society. Saudi Arabia's choice to host the 2024 IGF might indicate greater openness to multistakeholder digital governance processes but, as previously discussed, the suppression of human rights concerns during the Forum suggests that there is a limit to the Kingdom's openness.

WSIS and the GDC

Saudi Arabia emphasizes that WSIS and the GDC should work in synergy, not in competition. They see WSIS as having a well-established track record, while the GDC presents an opportunity to address emerging digital challenges in a more inclusive and contemporary context. Saudi Arabia supports WSIS as a foundational framework, particularly in the areas of ICT development, capacity building, and digital inclusion. They have consistently advocated for preserving WSIS frameworks and mandates, especially regarding the role of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).²⁶⁵

During the GDC negotiations, Saudi Arabia was an active participant but it also exercised caution. They have been consistent in expressing the need for clarity on the GDC's relationship to existing processes, such as WSIS and the IGF and have said they wish to avoid duplication or undermining of established institutions.²⁶⁶ In digital policy forums, Saudi Arabia generally promotes the notion of intergovernmental oversight and leadership, focusing on a state-centric approach where governments play the primary role in shaping digital policies, as opposed to the multistakeholder-driven model.²⁶⁷

Finally, Saudi Arabia also sees both WSIS and the GDC as platforms to promote digital equity and capacity building in the Global South and they have called for more inclusive and fair digital development to bridge the digital divide.

ACTORS

The Communications, Space and Technology Commission (CST) is the primary government agency leading the domestic coordination of the WSIS+20 process. CST's leadership role is evident through its chairing of the Saudi delegation at the WSIS+20 Forum in Geneva and its organization of key events such as the "Accelerating SDGs Development" workshop, which showcased the Kingdom's digital transformation initiatives aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).²⁶⁸

Several other Saudi government entities are actively involved in the WSIS+20 process, including the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA)²⁶⁹, and the Ministry of Interior, which focuses primarily on national digital initiatives. Moreover, the Digital Government Authority (DGA) is responsible for projects like the Baladi Platform, which won an Excellence Award at WSIS 2023 for its AI-driven municipal services. Finally, the National Cybersecurity Authority (NCA) focuses on enhancing cybersecurity measures within the Kingdom's digital infrastructure.²⁷¹

At the same time, various non-government actors play increasingly prominent roles in digital policy, innovation, and internet governance. These actors span the private sector, the technical community, and academia, and their coordination and collaboration are evolving as the country implements its Vision 2030 goals.

Major tech and telecom firms like STC (Saudi Telecom Company), Mobily, and Zain are central to internet infrastructure, cloud services, and digital innovation. Similarly, large businesses such as Aramco and SABIC are investing in digital technologies, cybersecurity, and industrial innovation. Collaboration is seen in public-private partnerships (PPPs) in smart

city projects (e.g., NEOM) and the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) initiatives.²⁷²

Civil society in Saudi Arabia is relatively limited in scope and independent advocacy on digital rights or Internet governance is minimal due to regulatory restrictions.

Finally, the engagement of the technical community is also noticeable and increasing. SaudiNIC²⁶³ (under CITC/now CST) manages the .sa domain and is engaged in Internet governance. Entities like the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST)²⁷⁴ and SDAIA host research and infrastructure for data, AI, and cybersecurity.

MOTIVATIONS

Saudi Arabia's WSIS+20 posture is guided by a mix of domestic ambitions, geopolitical rivalries, strategic alliances, and a desire for greater digital sovereignty. While promoting ICT development and regional leadership, it also seeks to shape global norms in ways that align with state-centric governance and national security priorities. During the WSIS+20 Review, we should expect Saudi Arabia to use alliances, like the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as China and the countries in the BRICS alliance to advocate for a state-led Internet governance model while also pushing for specific policy issues around data localization and 5G/6G cooperation. Finally, we should also expect Saudi Arabia to present itself as a bridge between Global North and South, seeking this way to influence the WSIS+20 Agenda to include South-South cooperation.

All this is aligned with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which is a central driver of its engagement in international digital governance. The Kingdom seeks to position itself as a regional tech hub, develop a knowledge-based economy and, promote digital infrastructure and innovation (e.g., through investments in AI, cloud computing, and smart cities like NEOM). Saudi Arabia supports frameworks that enhance digital capacity-building, investment in ICTs, and technology transfer aligned with its national development goals.

Like other countries in the region, Saudi Arabia advocates for greater state control over Internet governance and multilateral rather than multi-stakeholder decision-making processes. The Kingdom is likely to support discussions that favour national sovereignty over Internet policy, cybersecurity norms controlled by states, and limits on cross-border data flows unless they benefit national interests.

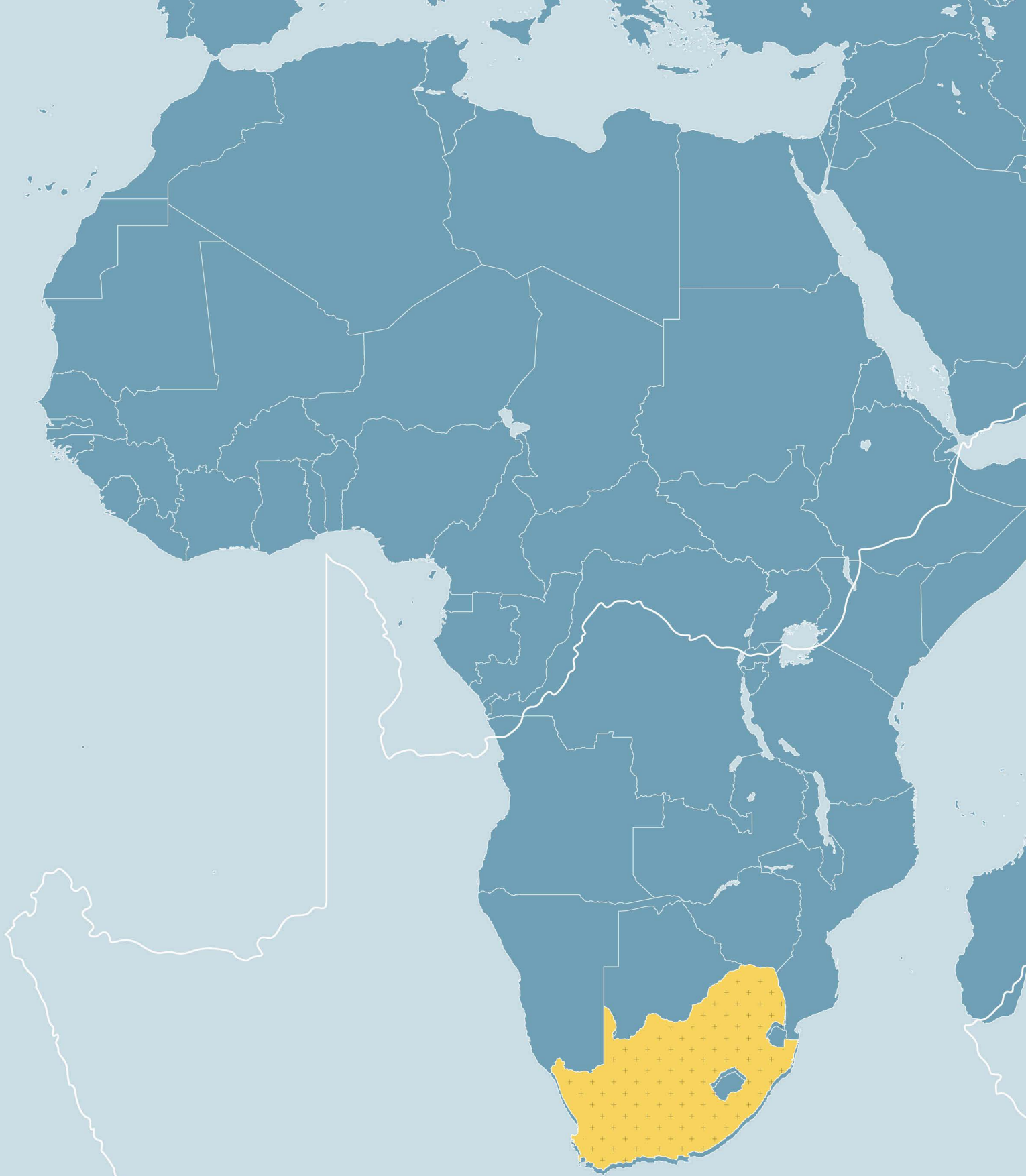
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Saudi Arabia has actively participated in the WSIS+20 process, hosting the 2024 Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Riyadh and leading a delegation to the WSIS+20 High-Level Event in Geneva in May 2024. During these events, the Kingdom emphasized its commitment to digital transformation and sustainable development goals (SDGs), highlighting initiatives like the National Data Bank and the “Elevate” program, which aims to empower women in data and AI fields.²⁷⁵

The IGF 2024 in Riyadh attracted over 11,000 participants, with discussions encompassing topics such as digital inclusion, AI, and the digital divide. Notably, the event saw a higher representation from the Global South, with less than 20% of participants coming from the Global North.²⁷⁶ At the IGF 2024, civil society participation decreased by 13% compared to the previous year, comprising only 11% of total participants. Some observers described the event as a “curated IGF,” noting that while discussions were open, the environment was tightly controlled, and participation was stratified into different badge categories, which is atypical for IGF events.²⁷⁷

Despite these initiatives, there have been significant concerns regarding the inclusivity of civil society engagement in Saudi Arabia. In 2020, over 220 civil society organizations, including Amnesty International and Transparency International, boycotted the Civil 20 (C20) process hosted by Saudi Arabia, citing the Kingdom’s human rights record and the lack of genuine space for independent civil society voices.²⁷⁸

Finally, international civil society groups have continued to express concerns about the WSIS+20 process. The Global Digital Justice Forum and the Association for Progressive Communications emphasized the need for genuine multistakeholder engagement, highlighting that meaningful participation requires political will and resources to include marginalized communities effectively.²⁷⁹



South Africa

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OVERVIEW

South Africa played a key role in the original WSIS process, chairing committees that shaped the Geneva Declaration and Tunis Agenda. Its delegation was notable for involving civil society, the private sector, and academia.

Despite leadership instability—14 ministers and 7 Directors-General since 2003—South Africa has remained committed to WSIS, engaging in follow-up processes and generally supporting multistakeholder principles. Internationally, it has advocated for equitable digital governance that balances government leadership with inclusive participation and equal participation for all nations.

The WSIS+20 review has reinvigorated its engagement. The Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies will chair the 2025 High-Level Event in Geneva, and national consultations are focusing on universal connectivity, AI and data governance, and regulating tech giants whose power exceeds national oversight capacities. South Africa also highlights the risks of geopolitical tensions undermining development agendas and upholds human rights in digital governance. While supporting the IGF and WSIS Forum, it calls for stronger multilateral cooperation and reforms to multistakeholder processes to better support resource-limited countries.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

South Africa's approach to WSIS+20 development priorities reflects both policy ambition and implementation challenges. A government official's stark assessment at a recent review meeting – "We feared digital exclusion would deepen inequality; twenty years later, that's exactly what happened" – encapsulates the central paradox. While the National Development Plan 2030²⁸⁰ formally prioritises digital inclusion through universal broadband targets and tech-driven job creation, execution has lagged due to delayed infrastructure roll-out, affordability barriers, and uneven rural access, compounded by inter-ministerial coordination gaps. Nevertheless, South Africa has made progress on specific WSIS Action Lines, particularly infrastructure (through mobile broadband roll-out and private-sector-led internet exchange points) and information access (via progressive legislation and an active information regulator). The country maintains the existing Action Lines require no amendment but would support updated interpretations, emphasising that meaningful inclusion

demands more than infrastructure – it requires building human capital and institutional capacity. Despite being a regional leader in connectivity metrics, domestic disparities in device access, affordability, digital skills and service quality and relevance remain acute, mirroring the global digital divide the WSIS process originally sought to bridge. Notably, South Africa has championed community-centred connectivity initiatives, providing both enabling regulation and some targeted funding to support local networks – a recognition that marginalised communities often require tailored solutions beyond mainstream infrastructure projects.

■ ■ Human Rights

South Africa has consistently advocated for digital rights, co-sponsoring key resolutions like the 2021 “Privacy in the Digital Age” at the United Nation’s Human Rights Council²⁸¹ and agreeing that offline rights must extend online. During the Summit of the Future, the Minister emphasised South Africa’s unique duty—rooted in its history—to champion human rights in digital governance by mitigating harmful risks that arise from private and state actors. He went on to say that it is “important to recognise that as we speak, there are state driven abuses of technology targeted at political opponents, the limiting of freedom of speech, surveillance, and abuses targeted against minorities and diverse communities.”²⁸²

However, domestic tensions persist. While civil society has successfully challenged overreach—like the 2024 Film and Publication Board’s misinformation rules, deemed unconstitutional—some within government continue advocating tighter online controls, particularly against hate speech. This internal debate may shape South Africa’s WSIS positions, balancing its pro-rights legacy with emerging regulatory pressures.²⁸³

■ ■ Internet Governance

South Africa’s approach to internet governance hinges on two key distinctions: the scope of governance (broad policy versus narrow technical definitions) and its level (national or international). Internationally, the country adopts a nuanced stance—championing multistakeholder models for technical matters like domain name management while insisting on multilateral frameworks for policy issues such as cybercrime, evidenced by its leadership in drafting the UN Convention Against Cybercrime.²⁸⁴

Domestically, South Africa institutionalises the multistakeholder approach through ZADNA, the .za domain authority, whose ministerially appointed multistakeholder board oversees the National Internet Governance Forum (ZAIGF). South Africa believes that global multistakeholder forums like the

IGF and the WSIS Forum are important but need to address the fact that resource disparities exclude meaningful participation from the Global South, undermining their legitimacy as truly inclusive spaces.

Review Modalities

South Africa generally supports multistakeholder decision-shaping but not multistakeholder decision-making. South African government critiques of the multistakeholder approach are motivated by concerns about asymmetries in power and influence that still characterise most multistakeholder internet governance processes, and, in many cases, the multilateral system itself. When it comes to the WSIS review it has strongly supported a multistakeholder process. The government invited selected non-state actors to join their delegation at the 2025 WSIS High-Level Event in Geneva in July and convened national consultations. They collaborated actively with civil society on advocacy for community centred connectivity during the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) meeting in April 2025. They have also committed to convening a briefing prior to the High Level Event. In general South Africa is open to consultation with other stakeholder groups as long as the final decisions are still made at multilateral level, as is the case for the WSIS+20 review.

WSIS and the GDC

South Africa views the WSIS as the “cornerstone for global digital cooperation and development”²⁸⁵ and Global Digital Compact (GDC) as an important but incomplete step forward in global digital cooperation. While supporting the GDC’s goals of promoting digital inclusion, human rights and development through technology, the country has raised two key concerns. First, it warns about insufficient institutional coordination between the GDC and existing WSIS bodies like the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nation’s Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), as well as the UN Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies, which could lead to fragmented implementation. Second, South Africa emphasises the need for more transparent and inclusive processes, particularly to ensure meaningful participation from Global South nations. The country notes that despite connectivity improvements, digital exclusion continues to worsen inequality; a core challenge that both the GDC and WSIS+20 must address through concrete, accountable actions rather than just rhetoric. South Africa stresses that true progress requires moving beyond aspirational statements to establish clear implementation frameworks with measurable outcomes. Most South African statements on the GDC convey a message that would suggest that while it sees merit in the GDC,

particularly to address emerging issues such as data governance and AI, South Africa still supports WSIS as the primary framework for cooperation on digital development.

MAIN ACTORS

The Department of Communications and Digital Technologies is the lead agency dealing with the WSIS review. Others involved are the communications regulator, the Independent Communications Authority (ICASA), ZADNA and the Directorate for International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).²⁸⁶

A few non-governmental actors are actively engaged including: ALT Advisory²⁸⁷, the Association for Progressive Communications²⁸⁸, Media Monitoring Africa²⁸⁹, Research ICT Africa²⁹⁰, the South African National Editors' Forum²⁹¹, The Press Council²⁹² and the South African Chapter of the Internet Society²⁹³, and community-led initiatives like the Soweto Wireless User Group²⁹⁴. There are other entities who are engaged in relevant topics to WSIS on a national level without engaging in global processes. Examples included the Internet Service Providers Association (ISPA)²⁹⁵.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

South Africa generally supports multistakeholder decision-shaping but not multistakeholder decision-making. As a result they support multistakeholder internet governance processes, but not, outside of narrow technical governance, multistakeholder policy-making. South Africa is usually strongly aligned with the G77 in international negotiations except when it comes to human rights and gender justice where it tends to take on a stronger pro-rights stance than its peers.

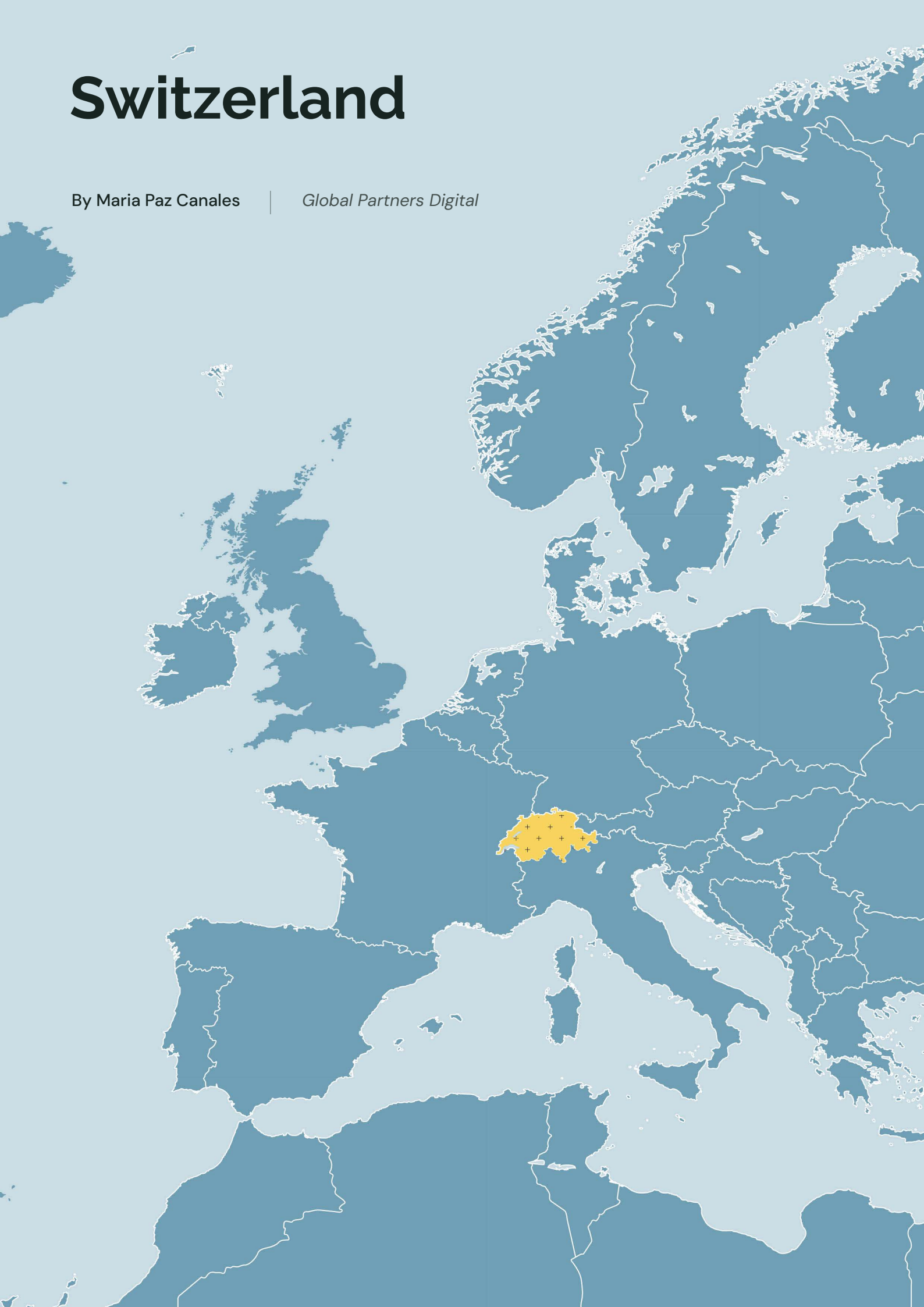
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

The DCDT has demonstrated a spirit of openness by inviting contributions to key processes, including the 2024 ITU Council Working Group on WSIS and SDGs—chaired by South Africa's Cynthia Lesufi—alongside a mid-2025 workshop convened by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to gather input for South Africa's WSIS review report, and an upcoming pre-High-Level Event briefing organised by ZADNA. During May 2025 they also contributed to a WSIS panel at the ZAIGF and a Research ICT Africa-convened WSIS event. To sustain this momentum, non-state actors must actively engage, particularly as the final WSIS review negotiations approach their December 2025 conclusion. Proactive participation will be crucial to ensure continued opportunities for consultation and influence by non-state actors.

Switzerland

By Maria Paz Canales

| *Global Partners Digital*



OVERVIEW

Switzerland views the WSIS+20 review as a unique opportunity to create a stronger, more inclusive, and better-integrated framework for digital governance. It supports aligning the WSIS process with the ambitions of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while streamlining processes to reduce duplication and improve cost-efficiency. The review is seen as a chance to build bridges across the UN system to better serve all countries and stakeholders.

Human rights are a core priority for Switzerland, which advocates for a human-centric digital approach that reinforces rights-based governance. It has also highlighted the importance of gender-responsive policy, calling for the WSIS+20 review to expand gender-inclusive language, address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and close persistent digital divides. In addition, Switzerland can be expected to focus on Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs) into the WSIS framework, addressing digital divides, and improving artificial intelligence (AI) capacity building (particularly for the Global South).

Switzerland continues to champion the multistakeholder approach, pushing for an updated WSIS architecture that reflects the inclusive engagement that has defined the process since its inception. Domestically, Switzerland's WSIS+20 engagement is coordinated by the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM). The national multi-stakeholder platform, "Plateforme Tripartite," originally established during the first WSIS phase, remains the key national forum for information exchange and WSIS implementation.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Switzerland maintains that the existing WSIS Action Lines remain sufficiently flexible to accommodate new developments. Rather than creating new Action Lines, it proposes updating the implementation architecture to ensure continuity, technological neutrality, and integration with GDC and SDG commitments.

Switzerland supports addressing emerging gaps in the WSIS framework, including integrating the concept of DPIs to enhance their use for global development and expanding the approach to data governance based on agreed GDC language. It emphasises capacity-building focused on local

data policies, linguistic and cultural diversity (Action Lines C3 and C5), and protection of knowledge.

It also calls for enhanced efforts under Action Line C4 to support AI-related training in the Global South. This should include both skill development and policy capacity to enable equitable participation in global AI governance.

Human Rights

Switzerland is committed to embedding a strong human rights approach within the WSIS+20 review. It supports adopting agreed GDC language, including the application of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the use of due diligence and impact assessments throughout the technology lifecycle.

It calls for greater inclusivity in the review, particularly to address the persistent and evolving challenge of digital divides, with connectivity (Action Line C2) identified as a critical precondition to addressing other divides. Switzerland also stresses the importance of addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence under Action Line C5 to better facilitate women's participation in the digital public sphere and supports expanding gender-inclusive language.

Internet Governance

Switzerland argues for an evolution of the WSIS architecture to better address fast-paced digital developments. This evolution should strengthen the complementarity of multilateral and multistakeholder approaches and be guided by principles of openness, inclusivity, and equitable participation. It supports the use of the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines²⁹⁶ as a framework for stakeholder engagement.

It has proposed a vision for updated governance architecture, including:

- A joint implementation roadmap led by an updated UNGIS and a new Strategic Multistakeholder Steering Group;
- A WSIS+ Helpdesk;
- Enhanced multistakeholder cooperation through the CSTD.

Switzerland supports strengthening and institutionalising the IGF through a permanent mandate, improved funding (mix of UN core and voluntary contributions), stronger Global South participation, and better integration with the WSIS architecture. It has suggested renaming the forum to the Digital Governance Forum (DGF) or Digital Cooperation Forum (DCF).

Review Modalities

Switzerland supports inclusive review modalities consistent with its broader commitment to multistakeholder digital governance and has been an advocate for a process which meaningfully engages stakeholders both before the release of the modalities resolution and afterwards during discussions on its implementation.

Position on WSIS–GDC Link

Switzerland supports streamlining processes to help avoid duplication and support efficient use of resources (at the UN, Member State, and stakeholder level). To that end, Switzerland supports integrating the GDC commitments into an updated WSIS architecture to ensure that the GDC's implementation benefits from WSIS's proven multistakeholder approach. It proposes a joint implementation roadmap, led by an updated UNGIS and presented at the CSTD, as a mechanism to align the WSIS Action Lines and GDC commitments. The IGF would form an integral part of this unified governance framework.

MAIN ACTORS

At the national level, WSIS activities are coordinated by OFCOM²⁹⁷. The Plateforme Tripartite serves as Switzerland's multi-stakeholder platform for digital governance dialogue, with around 300 members including civil society, academia, government, and private sector representatives. An administrative committee of about 80 members coordinates activities across the Federal Administration. It serves as a national forum for exchange of information on WSIS implementation and follow-up activities²⁹⁸.

The Swiss Internet Governance Forum (Swiss IGF) provides an additional national forum for inclusive dialogue on internet governance, engaging stakeholders from government, business, academia, and civil society.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Switzerland has been one of the leading voices in internet-related public policy discussions in recent years. Its role in the WSIS+20 review builds on the government's engagement in other fora, including the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD).

At the outset of the WSIS+20 review, Switzerland proposed a "WSIS Plus" which would create a stronger, more interconnected, and inclusive framework for digital governance and cooperation and integrate the

GDC, ensuring inclusivity, avoiding process proliferation, and fostering cost-efficiency.

Switzerland is part of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), committed to protecting and promoting human rights both online and offline, domestically and abroad. FOC Members agree to work together through joint activities and adhere to FOC commitments. Throughout the review it is expected that Switzerland will continue to work closely with European countries and FOC, among other allies.

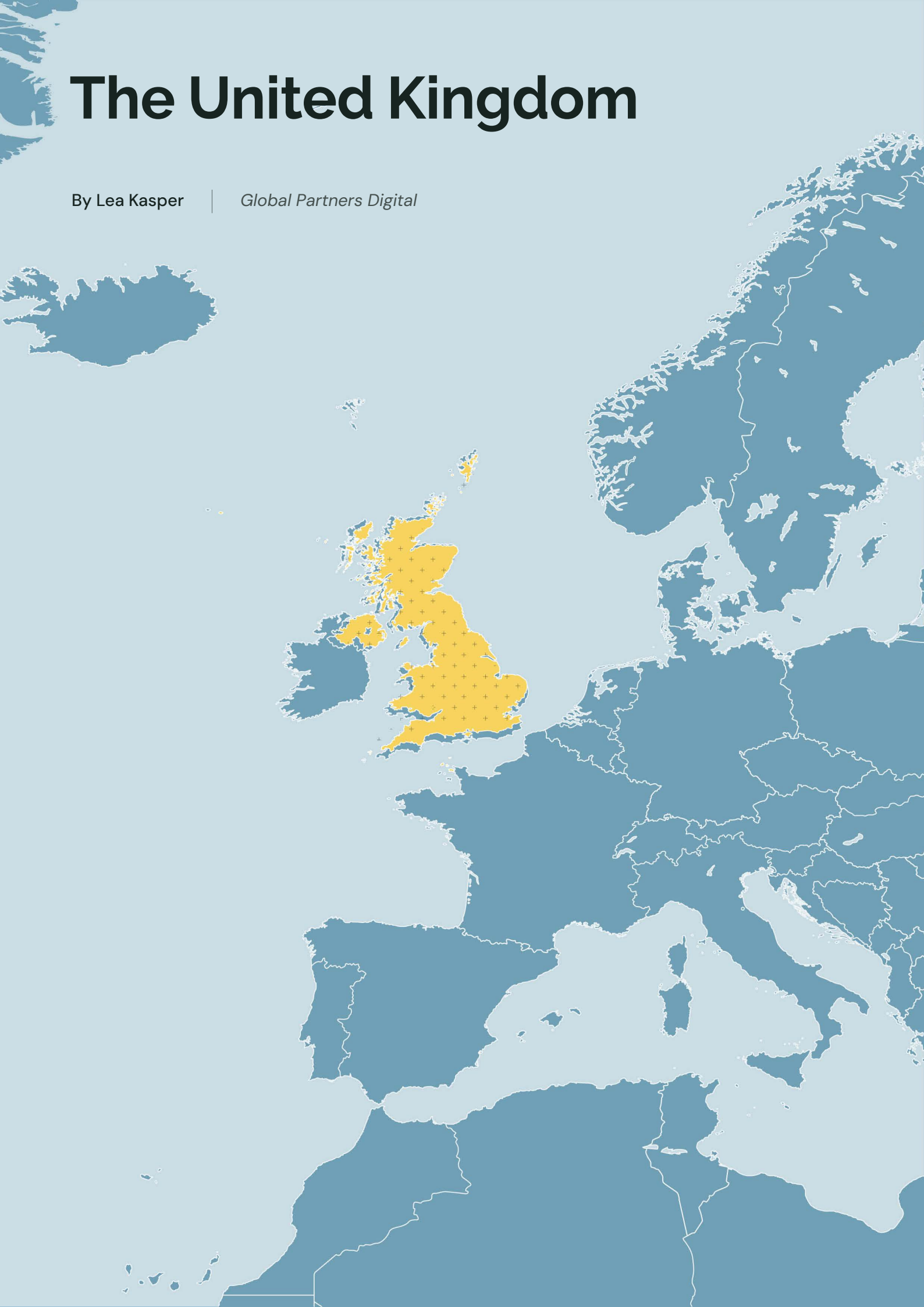
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Beyond the Plateforme Tripartite, the Swiss government is open to informal engagement with civil society actors. It regularly shares non-paper–informal papers which explore potential positions and ideas—to solicit feedback. During the 28th session of the CSTD, Switzerland included civil society representation in its delegation, reflecting its commitment to inclusive multistakeholder dialogue.

The United Kingdom

By Lea Kasper

| *Global Partners Digital*



OVERVIEW

The United Kingdom continues to play a proactive role in the WSIS process. Its engagement is rooted in a long-standing commitment to open, rights-based, and multistakeholder models of digital governance. The UK sees WSIS as a key vehicle to advance sustainable development, digital inclusion, and meaningful cooperation among stakeholders. In the lead-up to WSIS+20, the UK remains focused on preserving the core WSIS framework while updating its implementation to address the opportunities and challenges of emerging technologies. Key priorities include a permanent mandate for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), ensuring full stakeholder participation in the review process, defending human rights online, addressing gender digital divides and the environmental impact of ICTs and integrating the initiatives of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) into the WSIS process.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

The UK positions WSIS as a practical and inclusive platform for delivering digital transformation and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It continues to prioritise efforts to connect the unconnected, improve affordability and accessibility, and support the development of multilingual and locally relevant content. The UK promotes the creation of enabling regulatory environments that encourage private sector investment and innovative solutions, such as community networks. While it does not advocate revising or restructuring the WSIS Action Lines, the UK supports updating their implementation to reflect contemporary opportunities and challenges, including artificial intelligence, virtual reality, online safety, and the environmental impact of digital technologies. Alignment with the SDGs is seen as a natural outcome of effective WSIS implementation, not requiring new institutional arrangements or frameworks.

Human Rights

Human rights remain at the core of the UK's approach to WSIS+20. The UK advocates for strong protections for freedom of expression and access to information, including the safety of journalists and media workers, and the prevention of internet shutdowns and arbitrary restrictions. It also supports granting a more formal role to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) within the WSIS process.

Internet Governance

The UK strongly upholds the multistakeholder model of internet governance, viewing it as essential to the continued openness, resilience, and global utility of the internet. It supports the establishment of a permanent mandate for the IGF, along with reforms to enhance its impact. These include clearer policy outputs, a more focused agenda, and increased representation of stakeholders from the Global South. It supports greater recognition of the roles of local and regional IGFs, in order to promote inclusion and give a stronger voice to local communities. The UK opposes attempts to centralise internet governance under intergovernmental or state-led models, warning that such shifts could jeopardise innovation, access, resilience and the protection of fundamental rights. The UK instead promotes distributed, inclusive governance rooted in broad participation and consensus.

Review Modalities

The UK advocates for an inclusive and participatory WSIS+20 review process that fully reflects the perspectives of all stakeholder groups. It supports meaningful engagement by civil society, the private sector, academia, and the technical community at all stages of negotiation and decision-making. The UK also highlights the importance of recognising and empowering national and regional WSIS and IGF initiatives, particularly those in developing countries. Such engagement is not viewed as symbolic, but as essential to ensuring legitimacy, diversity of input, and responsiveness to real-world needs.

WSIS-GDC Link

The UK supports a coherent and coordinated approach to global digital governance. While it recognises the potential value of the Global Digital Compact (GDC), it emphasises the importance of ensuring that GDC outputs are aligned with, and integrated into, the existing WSIS framework. The UK cautions against institutional duplication or fragmentation between Geneva-based and New York-based digital policy processes. It supports strengthening UN system coordination by enhancing platforms such as the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS), and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD).

MAIN ACTORS

The UK's engagement in the WSIS+20 process is led by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), which coordinates national positions and stakeholder input. The Foreign, Commonwealth

and Development Office (FCDO) contributes expertise on human rights and international cooperation, while OFCOM and other regulatory bodies provide policy and technical insight on infrastructure and standards. Outside government, UK-based actors are involved in shaping WSIS priorities through ongoing stakeholder consultation and the broader UK IGF community, including civil society organisations (e.g. ARTICLE 19, Global Partners Digital and Open Rights Group), academic and research institutions (e.g. Oxford Internet Institute, the LSE, and Chatham House) and a range of private sector and technical community stakeholders.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

The UK's position is shaped by a blend of normative and strategic factors. Its digital diplomacy is grounded in a belief in democratic governance, open markets, and human rights. At the same time, the UK is motivated by a geopolitical interest in countering authoritarian models of internet governance and ensuring that global digital policy frameworks remain inclusive, stable, and innovation friendly. The UK favours incremental, evidence-based reform through consensus, and has consistently supported strengthening existing institutions rather than creating parallel structures. Its approach reflects a conviction that distributed governance and stakeholder collaboration produce more effective and legitimate outcomes in managing the opportunities and risks of digital transformation.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

The UK offers several entry points for civil society and public interest groups to contribute to its digital policy processes. These include stakeholder consultation organised by DSIT, participation in the UK Internet Governance Forum, and opportunities to engage through public inquiries, policy reviews, and multistakeholder events. UK-based civil society organisations and research organisations also contribute to international WSIS advocacy. While the UK has historically supported stakeholder involvement, there remains scope for greater transparency and consistency in stakeholder inclusion, particularly in the preparation and negotiation phases of WSIS+20.



The United States

By Ellie McDonald

| *Global Partners Digital*

OVERVIEW

The United States has historically played a proactive role in the WSIS process, reflecting its long-standing support for human rights, the open internet and the multistakeholder approach to internet and digital governance. In the lead-up to the WSIS+20, the government is in a period of flux under a new administration and is currently reevaluating its commitments to multilateral institutions and withdrawing from international bodies and processes which do not reflect its policy objectives³⁰⁰. This shift has already played out in the build up to the WSIS review³⁰¹, although how precisely this will impact on the formal review process is still to be determined.

At the same time, the US appears poised to maintain its support for the WSIS as a key framework to advance digital transformation, multistakeholder governance, and participatory modalities. The government is expected to uphold its support for the mandate renewal of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the preservation of the existing action lines, and the non-duplication of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and WSIS processes.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

❏ Development

The US continues to position WSIS as a key framework in catalysing and shaping rapid digital transformation. However, the US has dissociated itself from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) arguing that they are inconsistent with state sovereignty³⁰². The US now places emphasis on the WSIS as enabling the use of digital technologies to achieve digital transformation and economic prosperity, without reinforcing its institutional connection to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs³⁰³. Previously, the US has voiced its support for the 2030 Agenda as a universal, indivisible and interlinked framework for global development³⁰⁴, and has affirmed the mutually reinforcing relationship between the SDGs and international law.³⁰⁵

Consistent with its position at the ten-year review of the WSIS outcomes, the US has reiterated that it does not support the alteration of the action lines, praising the existing action lines for their flexibility and technological neutrality.³⁰⁶

Human Rights

The US continues to credit the WSIS framework as enabling and progressing the exercise of human rights and promotes digital technologies as a means of empowerment. Despite this continuity, the new administration has departed from previous US policy in key areas with implications for the WSIS+20 review. The US is currently reevaluating its engagement in multilateral fora and has rejected international bodies and policy frameworks which do not reflect its policy positions, including by dissociating from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and from references to climate change and specific categories of rights-holders, in particular sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) rights.³⁰⁷

Internet governance

The US appears set to maintain its position that the current system of multistakeholder and decentralised internet governance works well. The US has praised the multistakeholder model of internet governance and respect for human rights” as the success of the WSIS framework,” and credited the former as enabling the open, interoperable, secure and reliable internet.³⁰⁸ The US opposes top-down regulation of the internet and digital technologies in favour of voluntary guidelines and best practices.³⁰⁹

The US has maintained its support for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), one of the major institutional outcomes of the WSIS. In line with its support for voluntary and decentralised governance, it supports the IGF as a forum for dialogue between all stakeholders which has helped to guard against “top-down governmental regulation and bureaucratic inertia that stifles innovation and attempts to restrict human rights.”³¹⁰ It has called for the WSIS+20 review to extend the mandate of the IGF and strengthen its work as a bottom-up, multistakeholder fora to discuss Internet public policy issues.³¹¹

Review modalities

The US has so far remained consistent in its support for preserving the multistakeholder model, recently referring to it as a key ingredient to the success of the WSIS.³¹² The US supports the WSIS review as a process requiring the full engagement of all stakeholders, and has recently spoken in support of the delivery of “an open, transparent, and participatory process” to conclude the WSIS+20 review.³¹³

WSIS and the GDC

The US has consistently supported the need to leverage and strengthen existing processes. In negotiations of the Global Digital Compact (GDC), the US emphasised the need to ensure coordination with the WSIS, and in the preparatory process for the WSIS+20, it has continued to encourage coherence among processes and to advocate for the alignment of the WSIS+20 with the GDC to “avoid duplication of effort and additional budget obligations”.³¹⁴ The US has not yet elaborated on how it sees this alignment functioning in practice.

MAIN ACTORS

The government’s engagement in the WSIS+20 is coordinated by the State Department in collaboration with other agencies. The nature of the State Department’s engagement is due to be shaped by the outcomes of an ongoing reorganisation.³¹⁵ The Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy (CDP), which leads and coordinates the government’s foreign policy on cyberspace and digital technology, is expected to play a key role, although there are proposals to eliminate some of its current functions. Formerly, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) also shaped the course of international digital policymaking processes, however it is anticipated that most of its current functions will be eliminated, and it will be replaced by a proposed new Office on Natural Rights. Outside of the State Department, the Department of Commerce is also anticipated to contribute through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which has a mandate to work to achieve a single, open, and secure internet worldwide.

Outside of government, non-government actors have been actively involved in the WSIS and have historically shaped the government’s priorities. In the WSIS+20 review, representatives of each stakeholder group have engaged in the international preparatory process, including civil society organisations (Association of Progressive Communications, Access Now, and the International Center for Not-for Profit Law), industry associations (United States Council for International Business) and research and academic institutions.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

The US approach has been shaped by both economic and normative considerations. Historically, the US has supported an open market and business-oriented approach to digital technology governance, driven by its position as an early adopter of the Internet and as the territorial home of many of the dominant technology companies³¹⁶. It has promoted

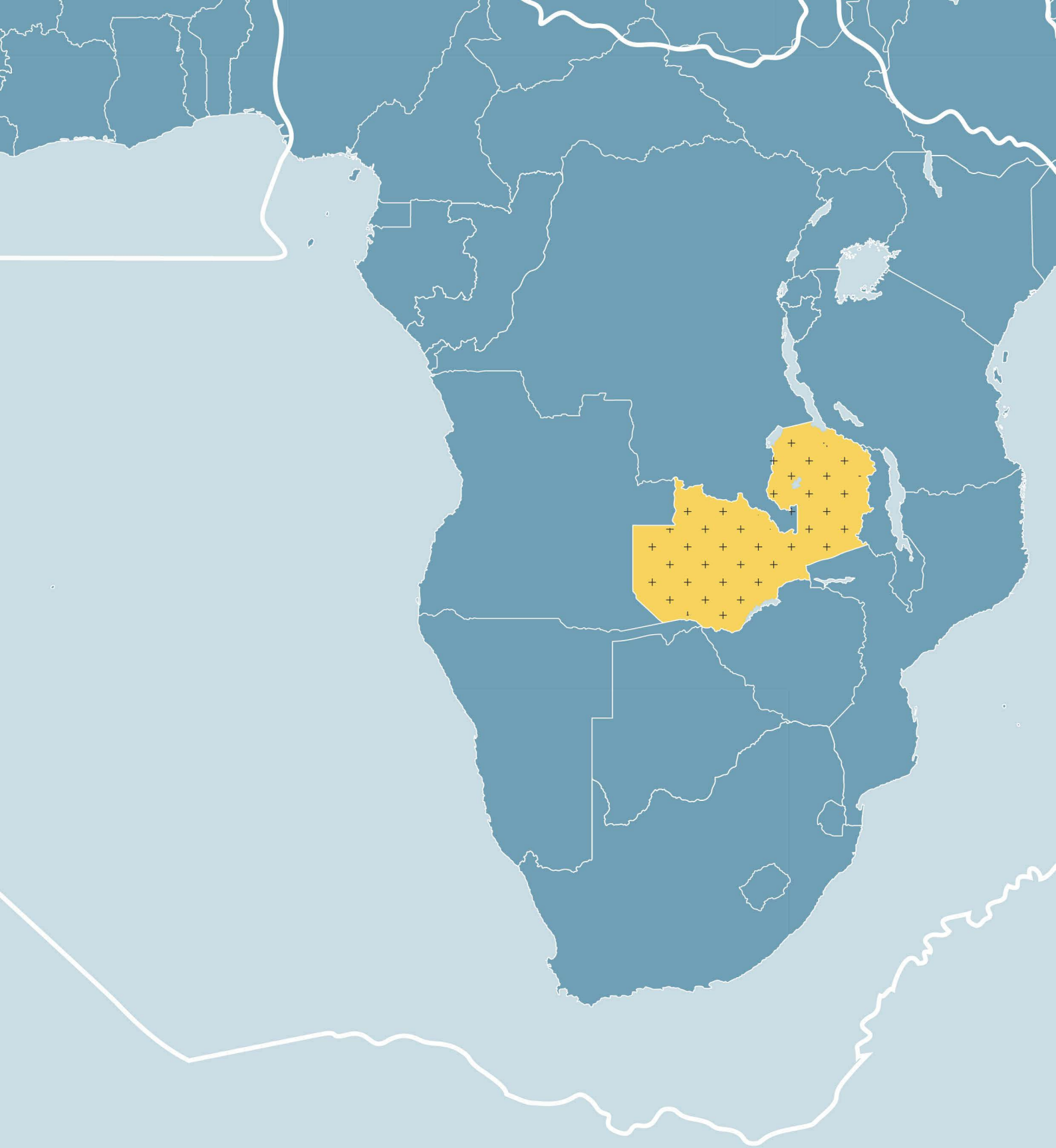
“Internet Freedom” as a policy objective, a concept characterised by the recognition that human rights and fundamental freedoms must be protected both online and offline, and the promotion of the open internet as an enabler of human rights and democratic freedom.³¹⁷

While elements of these policy objectives persist, the change in administration has been marked by the rejection of some democratic and human rights norms. Regarding digital technology governance, it has enforced deregulation, withdrawn federal guardrails on AI and used tariffs as a lever for digital trade diplomacy.³¹⁹ It has also leveraged technology and public data to undermine human rights, for instance, using social media monitoring to target individuals on the basis of their political beliefs.³²⁰ Diverging from the Internet freedom agenda, the new administration has described its digital foreign policy approach as promoting a vision of American and Western values, focused on its perception of civil liberties and free speech, for instance.³²¹

The current administration’s intent to withdraw from international bodies which do not reflect its policy interests has already impacted the preparatory process for the WSIS+20. During negotiations of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) annual resolutions on Science, Technology and Innovation for Development (STI) and WSIS in April 2025, the US called for a vote and later dissociated itself from both resolutions due to the inclusion of language referencing the SDGs, climate change, and to specific categories of rights-holders.³²² This shift is poised to continue to shape the US position, with particular impacts for the negotiation of language relating to human rights in the context of the review and the future implementation of the WSIS outcomes.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

The US has previously provided opportunities for consultation with civil society and public interest groups to shape its approach to digital policy processes, including in the context of negotiations of the Global Digital Compact and the Convention on Combatting Cybercrime. While the government has signalled its support for an open, transparent and participatory approach to the WSIS+20 preparatory process, at the time of writing, it has not yet published an indication of the government’s own plans to engage with non-governmental stakeholders.



Zambia

By Thobekile Matimbe

| *Paradigm Initiative*

OVERVIEW

Zambia has been engaged in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) from its inception, when it joined the 2003 Summit³²³. In those initial meetings, Zambia highlighted the importance of bridging the digital divide and called for particular attention to the identification of possible mechanisms for the realisation of the resolutions of the Summit.³²⁴ Since then, senior government officials have participated in WSIS meetings, and Zambia has launched initiatives, including work with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), aimed at achieving the WSIS Action Line – C2 on Information and communication infrastructure.³²⁵

Recent priorities have focused on leveraging Zambia's position as co-facilitator of the GDC to advocate for its priorities: inclusive policies addressing digital divides, capacity-building initiatives and fostering of partnerships that amplify the voices of the underrepresented regions in global digital governance discussions.³²⁶ Zambia's involvement in the WSIS process and its role as co-facilitator of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) reflect a growing ambition for leadership in shaping global digital governance, with a strong emphasis on inclusive development and regional cooperation.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Development

Zambia views digital transformation as essential to national development and inclusive growth. The 2022–2026 Ministry of Technology and Science Strategic Plan prioritises stakeholder engagement and strengthening linkages with industry as critical to fostering collaboration. Its 2023–2027³²⁷ National Digital Transformation Strategy (NDTS) outlines strategic pillars including: digital infrastructure, platforms, services, literacy and skills, and innovation and entrepreneurship. The Smart Zambia Institute, operating under the President's Office, plays a central role in managing and promoting electronic government services, including through the Digital Transformation Change Management Strategy for the Public Service 2023 – 2026. These policies lay a foundation for the country's approach to the WSIS.

Significant investments have been made to support connectivity, including nearly USD 60 million in infrastructure in 2023. The government has partnered with private sector actors such as Airtel and IHS Towers Company in launching 152 towers to expand network coverage of 91.6%, a significant driver of digital inclusion. Zambia's focus on digital inclusion

and literacy, infrastructure investment, and e-government aligns well with the WSIS Action Lines. If Zambia's priorities in the WSIS+20 build on existing policy priorities and past engagement in WSIS, it will likely focus on ICT as a driver of progress in sectors like healthcare and agriculture.³²⁸

Human Rights

Human rights are essential to Zambia's digital policy approach, grounded in its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,³²⁹ the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights³³⁰ and the Zambian Constitution. However, despite these commitments, Zambia's implementation has been mixed, with the government shutting down internet access during the 2021 elections. The government has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to freedom of expression, most recently in January 2025 when Minister Haimbe reiterated constitutional protections in a meeting with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression³³¹, with the Special Rapporteur exhorting the government to protect freedom of expression by repealing repressive laws.³³² Government calls for the media to counter misinformation and disinformation through factual reporting may indicate a positive focus on access to information and the role of the media.³³³

Zambia's international engagement reflects these commitments. Zambia has announced interest in running as a candidate for membership in the Human Rights Council from 2026 to 2028.²³⁴ At the 2024 UN General Assembly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs endorsed the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and its emphasis on universality, equality, and non-discrimination. As co-facilitator of the GDC, Zambia played a key role in shaping a process that included strong human rights language.

Domestically, the government has framed digital inclusion as a rights issue, linked to equality of access, and is advancing digital inclusion by digitising all government services. At WSIS+20, Zambia is expected to advance priorities such as bridging the digital divide and implementing Action Line C2, aligned with its broader commitments to equality and non-discrimination. The government has underscored the importance of human rights safeguards in all digital processes and reaffirmed the value of civil society partnerships in achieving inclusive digital governance.

Internet Governance

Zambia supports an inclusive and cooperative model of internet governance. As co-facilitator of the Global Digital Compact, it took on a visible leadership role in UN-led digital governance discussions.

Domestically, the Ministry of Technology and Science leads on internet policy, emphasising collaboration with the private sector and development partners.

A lack of digital infrastructure in Zambia is a significant challenge for underserved communities. However, Zambia's focus on increasing internet penetration by addressing network coverage suggests that Zambia is prioritizing internet access for all. Together with UNDP, the Ministry of Technology and Science is establishing ICT hubs in rural areas. In 2024, Zambia launched a free wifi initiative in public spaces –Zamfree– through a partnership between the Ministry of Technology and Science, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the Presidential Delivery Unit, Smart Zambia Institute, and a technology partner, inq.Digital. The country has expressed support for extending the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and sees multistakeholderism as essential to effective governance. Despite previous instances of internet shutdowns, recent statements suggest a shift toward promoting openness and access, in line with WSIS.

Review Modalities

Zambia has shown openness to engaging with diverse stakeholders, with the Ministry of Technology and Science engaging civil society in various fora, including WSIS-linked sessions at DRIF25 and a stakeholder workshop in May 2025. While engagement historically focused more on digitalisation policy than WSIS specifically, recent steps suggest a willingness to broaden this approach.

Civil society actors were consulted on ICT-related laws and policies such as laws related to cybersecurity.³³⁵ These consultations have helped address some of the gaps raised by civil society concerning the Cyber Security and Cybercrimes legislation, although problematic provisions still exist in the laws. According to the Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Technology and Science, provisions of the Cyber Bills were revised due to stakeholder inputs to safeguard the delicate balance between national security and human rights. However, there are still concerns over the problematic legislation posing threats to human rights.³³⁶

These engagements with civil society and calls for collaboration illustrate that Zambia is likely to support stakeholder inclusion in WSIS+20. The government has acknowledged capacity constraints but affirmed its openness to listening to non-governmental stakeholders during WSIS+20.

WSIS and the GDC

Zambia has not explicitly articulated a position on the institutional relationship between WSIS and the GDC. However, through its parallel roles in both processes, the country can be inferred to support a complementary approach. Zambia's leadership in the GDC and its continued involvement in WSIS forums suggest a view that both initiatives have value and can coexist and mutually reinforce efforts toward inclusive, rights-respecting digital governance.

MAIN ACTORS

The Ministry of Technology and Science is leading the WSIS engagements domestically, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation facilitates engagements in global processes on internet governance.³³⁷ The Permanent Mission of Zambia to the UN plays a key role in representing Zambia's position in global processes, including the co-facilitation of the Global Digital Compact.

Domestically, the Smart Zambia Institute drives digital infrastructure efforts, while partnerships with UNDP and private actors such as Liquid Intelligent Technologies are expanding rural access and digital literacy.³³⁸ Beyond public-private partnerships on domestic matters, the private sector has not been well represented in the WSIS+20. Civil society organisations such as Paradigm Initiative and the Internet Society Zambia Chapter contribute to national and regional dialogues on digital rights and inclusion and are expected to contribute to WSIS+20.

UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS

Zambia's engagement is driven by both regional leadership aspirations and national development goals. It plays an active role in African digital cooperation frameworks, including the African Union Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy³³⁹ and the African Digital Compact³⁴⁰.

Zambia's ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) tariff schedules³⁴¹ and implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement³⁴² reflects its interest in promoting development in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, including through harnessing digital technologies for trade³⁴³, productivity, and regional integration.

Zambia's positions in the WSIS+20 review will likely be shaped through the Cotonou Declaration, adopted at the 2025 WSIS+20 Africa Review in Cotonou, Benin³⁴⁴ The Declaration called for the continuation of the WSIS

process, including the IGF and WSIS Forum, for the next decade, urging a unified African voice for an inclusive digital future to enhance Africa's leadership in digital governance and ensuring technology serves as a force for socio-economic progress, sustainability, and equity³⁴⁵.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Zambian government representatives have publicly highlighted the importance of civil society actors engaging with the government on WSIS+20. The Ministry of Technology and Science's Director of Communication and Digital Technologies highlighted Zambia's stance on partnerships, echoing that Zambia already broadly engages with private sector actors and is open to engaging with civil society actors. While the Ministry of Technology and Science engages stakeholders on digitalisation, it has not done so on WSIS, citing limited resources.

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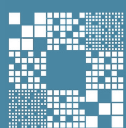
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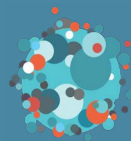
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