

Highlights and Outcomes 2020

The WSIS Forum goes virtual this year!

After careful consideration and in light of the global health crisis and pervasive travel restrictions, the co-organisers decided to hold the WSIS Forum 2020 in a virtual format. The WSIS Forum 2020 strived to create a meaningful virtual experience for WSIS stakeholders and to scale the event to reach a wider audience. The WSIS Forum is an open and inclusive space for all, harnessing the potential of ICTs and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs through the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines.

This year's theme is **“Fostering digital transformation and global partnerships: WSIS Action Lines for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”**, featured special tracks with thematic topics, high-level sessions, regional workshops, as well as a series of WSIS Action Line facilitation meetings to keep up the momentum of this special year that marks the 15-year milestone since the creation of the World Summit on the Information Society. For the last 15 years, WSIS Forum has proven to be an efficient global multistakeholder platform that is open and inclusive for all to exchange knowledge and information, enhance collaborative networks, and to share best practices in the ICTs sector.

The agenda and programme of the WSIS Forum 2020 were spread over the summer months to culminated in the final week of the Forum running from 7 to 10 September. As with the physical event, attendees were able to watch and listen to all live sessions, interacted with panellists through a Q&A, engaged and network with different communities, shared emerging technologies and recent developments in the ICT sector in facing COVID-19 pandemic to continue working towards building inclusive information and knowledge societies.

“This year is also special because it marks the 15-year milestone since the creation of the World Summit on the Information Society. This period has seen a remarkable growth in the use of digital technologies, transforming people's lives around the globe,” said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao.

The Forum garnered a lot of interest and excitement worldwide – with a cumulative attendance of over 15,000 attendees from around 150 countries who took part in about 160 virtual sessions with 846 different speakers. The virtual session were organised by WSIS stakeholders to highlight the role of ICTs in sustainable development.

The Forum officially kicked off with the High-Level Opening Ceremony of the Virtual WSIS Forum 2020 Workshops and Special Tracks on 22 June 2020. The Chairman of the WSIS Forum 2020, His Excellency Mr. Gustavo Montalvo, Minister of the Presidency of the Dominican Republic, was appointed on this occasion.

An inauguration of the Virtual WSIS Forum 2020 exhibition space took place on 7 July 2020. The virtual exhibition space enables more than 130 exhibitors to fully showcase their initiatives and products and allows attendees to access and explore no matter where they are.

Social and networking elements of the Virtual WSIS Forum 2020 can be enjoyed by participants through imeetyouatWSIS platform, a dedicated online networking space that provides opportunities

to meet other attendees, start conversations, interact with scheduled speakers and build personalized schedule of sessions.

The outstanding outcomes also manifested in a good regional and gender balance participation, which shown the positive energy and commitment towards the WSIS Process and the strengthening of WSIS implementation activities to achieve the SDGs.

The concrete outcomes of WSIS Forum 2020 will enable stakeholders to strengthen implementation of WSIS Action Lines and the alignment of the WSIS and SDG processes, and include among others:

- UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) reiterated commitment to the WSIS Action Lines implementation and alignment of the WSIS and SDG processes, with contributions to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2020; submitted a written contribution and held a side-event at the HLPF 2020 (www.ungis.org). UNCTAD assumes the Chair of UNGIS for the year 2020-2021. As the current Chair of UNGIS, UNCTAD has initiated a Dialogue on the Role of Digitalization in the Decade of Action to raise awareness of both the importance of digitalization in achieving the SDGs and of the unique opportunity that UNGIS presents for more effective collaboration in this area within the UN System.
- UN Regional Commissions organised a series of workshops to highlight the regional activities in implementing the WSIS Action Lines for the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Many announcements have been made calling on all regional partners and stakeholders to join forces and collaborate in joining upcoming WSIS-related events and activities. WSIS will continue to be included in the UN Regional Coordination Mechanisms and WSIS4SDG will become one of the pillars of the regional SDG Forums. UN ECLAC was nominated as the Chair of the WSIS UN Regional Commissions group for 2020-2021.
- Dominican Republic, Chair of the WSIS Forum 2020, has been nominated as the Chair of the ITU-Group of Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC).
- Launched the first ever ICTs and Older Persons track at the WSIS Forum 2020. The reference of this activity was included in the Secretary General Report “Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing” submitted pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 74/125. Para 42: *Another barrier to the participation of older persons in the labour force are labour markets that do not offer the flexibility that would benefit older persons. Offering flexible and part-time work arrangements, which are highly valued by older workers, as well as exploiting the potential of new digital technologies, including robotics and artificial intelligence, to support employment among older persons can incentivize older workers to extend their working lives. While information and communications technologies (ICT) have become ubiquitous in the economic and social life of both developed and developing countries, digital divides continue to prevent ICT from achieving their full development potential, particularly in the least developed countries (see A/75/62-E/2020/11). Highlighting the importance of older persons as a cross-cutting topic, in 2020 the World Summit on the Information Society Forum, for the first time, has dedicated a special track to older persons and ICT. In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the new track will address the role of ICT in combating age-based discrimination in the workplace, achieving healthier ageing, building*

smarter cities, ensuring the financial inclusion of older persons and supporting millions of caregivers across the world and in digital inclusion across the generations to enable the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020–2030.

- UNDESA has launched United Nations E-Government Survey 2020. Since its inception in 2001, the United Nations E-Government Survey has become an indispensable “ranking, mapping and measuring” tool for policymakers and analysts engaged in comparative analysis and contemporary research on e-government.
- Strengthened the engagement with ITU Study Groups in line with the WSIS Process
- Ministerial Round Table participants committed to bridging the digital divide and connecting the unconnected.
- ITU and University of Geneva collaborated for the virtual Hackathon through the Open Seventeen Summer Challenge.

The Forum also included the announcement of the WSIS Prizes 2020 winners and champions, which represented all seven continents and all WSIS stakeholder groups. In addition, the winning entries of the WSIS Forum Photo Contest 2020 were unveiled, highlighting how ICTs are playing a vital, enabling role on the road to achieving the SDGs.

WSIS Forum 2020 was made possible through the generous support of its strategic partners:

- United Arab Emirates - Platinum Partner
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- Japan - Partner for Specific Activities
- The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) - Partner for Specific Activities
- Internet Society (ISOC) - Contributing Partner
- Rwanda (Republic of) - Contributing Partner
- The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) - Contributing Partner
- International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) - Supporting Partner
- Global Coalition on Aging (GCOA) - Supporting Partner
- University of Geneva – Geneva Tsinghua Initiative - Supporting Partner