



ARAB HIGH-LEVEL
FORUM on WSIS
and 2030 AGENDA
for Sustainable Development



Second Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

المنتدى الثاني العربي الرفيع المستوى للقمة العالمية لمجتمع المعلومات وأجندة 2030 للتنمية المستدامة
UN-House, Beirut, 19-21 March 2019

Information Note

1 Background

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly renewed the mandate of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) for 10 years, from 2015 to 2025, during the ten-year review of WSIS high-level event,¹ and called for close alignment of between the WSIS process and the Sustainable Development process. In 2025, a review of the implementation of the WSIS outcomes will be an input into the review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this context, the WSIS process convenes an annual WSIS Forum for discussing the role of information and communications technology (ICT) as a means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and alleviation of poverty.

The United Nations General Assembly endorsed the convening of the WSIS in 2001, based on a proposal from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The WSIS has the objective of reducing and eventual elimination of the digital divide and was held in two phases, in 2003 in Geneva and in 2005 in Tunis. The WSIS outcomes included the Geneva Plan of Action that included 11 WSIS Action Lines² and the Tunis Commitment,³ aiming to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, focused on key subject areas: Internet governance and financial mechanisms, in addition to universal access to information and knowledge, democracy, sustainable development, freedom of expression and the free flow of information.

Following the 2005 WSIS, the United Nations Secretary General established the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to address the concerns raised on Internet governance in the Tunis WSIS, and operate as a platform for dialogue amongst all key stakeholders with an interest in Internet policies – including governments, the private sector, civil society, technical practitioners, the academic community and regional organizations – to engage in open dialogue on Internet-related public policy issues. The mandate of the IGF has extended over three phases, the latest of which was from 2015 to 2025.

In 2012, ESCWA and the League of Arab States established the Arab IGF, and the first phase of its process extended until 2015; and this was followed by a review phase (2016-2017) that aimed at the development of its process and has resulted with a Charter for the forum and a new issue of the Arab Roadmap for Internet governance. Following the Arab IGF review phase, the second phase of the Arab IGF will start in 2018 with two preparatory meetings, an [Open consultations and Arab Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group meeting](#), planned to be held in July 2018.

¹ <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN95707.pdf>

² WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/5-E, Para.4, (12 December 2003), <http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html>

³ WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/007-A, (15 November 2005), <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/7.html>

In the 2015 ten-year review of the WSIS, the overarching message was that **development is digitally based, and that the WSIS process has strong links with the Sustainable Development Agenda and goals; additionally, new topics were emphasized, including human rights, trust, security and Internet Governance.**

The **WSIS Process, which is led by the ITU, facilitates the development of the knowledge society and digital economy and supports the implementation of the SDGs, and has prepared in 2015 the WSIS-SDGs Matrix⁴** that links the WSIS 11 action lines with the SDGs. The linkages emphasize the crucial role of ICTs as catalysts for the achievement of all the 17 SDGs,⁵ and the analysis of the connections and relations between the action lines and the targets of SDGs strengthen the link between WSIS aim of harnessing ICTs to achieve the development goals.

The mandate of **United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs)**, including ESCWA, within the WSIS process received a similar extension in 2015 to that stipulated in the Tunis Agenda of 2005. ESCWA continue to play a leading role in the WSIS process in the Arab region, the regional preparatory activities for which has started since the inception of the WSIS and included, among others, regional preparatory meetings (2003, 2004, 2009), profiling of the information society in a series of biennial reports (from 2003 to 2015), a regional plan of action for building the information society (2004).⁶ In addition, activities in partnership with the League of Arab States included the initiative entitled "Arab dialogue on Internet governance"⁷ that resulted with a number of outcomes, including the launch in 2012 of the Arab IGF and its process (2012-2015), and the review of its process (2016-2017) that produced a Charter for the Arab IGF and a new Arab Roadmap for Internet Governance.

With its continuous efforts to support member countries on leveraging opportunities of the digital economy and the information society, ESCWA has conceptualized a framework entitled "Information Society and Digital Economy Hub in the Arab Region" (ISDEHAR) that encompasses its programme activities and fosters partnerships with various stakeholders towards increasing the readiness of the region to achieve the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, and a sustainable and inclusive information society in the Arab region.

Additionally, in this context, ESCWA launched in 2017 the [Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(Beirut, 8-12 May 2017\)](#) that focused on the linkages between the WSIS action lines and the 2030 Agenda and resulted in the [Beirut Consensus on "Transformation and Digital Economy in the Arab Region – Towards the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"](#) (in Arabic). The Forum was planned to be held periodically and it serves as a regional platform for the exchange of experiences and lessons learned and for building partnerships in the area of technology for sustainable development.

In 2019, the Arab High-Level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be held in Beirut, in March 2019, and will bring together various stakeholders in the information society, digital economy and Internet governance in the Arab region, to review and discuss the linkages of the information society and sustainable development as well as the Internet governance issues and priorities for the Arab region with a particular focus on the theme of HLPF 2019, on empowerment and inclusiveness. It will focus on how digital economies and smart societies can accelerate the implementation of WSIS action lines, themes and priority areas, as well as contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in the Arab Region.

This year, the Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would encompass six tracks, namely: 1) AHLF Thematic Sessions/Workshops, 2) ESCWA 2nd Inter-Governmental Meeting on Technology for Development, 3) ITU Regional Development Forum (RDF), 4) ESCWA Meeting on the National and Arab Digital Development Reports, 5) ESCWA-LAS Meeting for the Arab IGF Multistakeholder Programme Advisory Committee (AMPAC), 6) ESCWA meeting for Arab e-Government Directors. The outcome of the Forum would be an input to the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, and subsequently would contribute to the report of ESCWA to the global High-level Political Forum.

⁴ <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/>, <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2016/Outcomes/#sdgs>

⁵ <http://www.itu.int/en/sustainable-world/Pages/default.aspx>

⁶ <http://isper.escwa.un.org/RegionalActionPlans/RegionalPlanofAction/RPoADocument/tabid/68/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

⁷ For more information, please check <https://www.unescwa.org/sub-site/arabDIG>

2 Objectives

The **Second Arab Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** will bring together various stakeholders and experts from different sectors in the Arab region to review and discuss the linkages in the areas of information society, digital economy and Internet governance, with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. It enables engagement and dialogue among the various stakeholders on crucial issues pertaining to digital development. It also enables building institutional capabilities of Arab states through specialized technical cooperation tracks.

3 Topics

The Forum will be composed of a cluster of events and would address the linkages of the various thematic areas covered with sustainable development. The topics would encompass those related to both the WSIS and SDGs processes, including, among others, Internet governance, digital financial inclusion, digital economy, Arab digital horizon 2030, Arab digital agenda, social inclusion, economic growth, partnerships for sustainable development, and dialogue on the WSIS action lines and SDGs targets and the way forward.

4 Outcomes

The event is expected to result with an outcome document on the way forward regarding the linkages between the WSIS process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with specific messages targeting strengthening the contributions of the information society and digital technologies to the implementation of sustainable development in the Arab region.

5 Organization

The High-level Forum is organized by the ICT Policies Section of the Technology for Development Division (TDD) of ESCWA, in partnership with the ITU Arab Regional Office, Lebanese Government, OGERO Telecom-Lebanon, and the League of Arab States (LAS). The Forum will be held at the UN-House in Beirut, from 19 to 21 March 2019. The event will be organized to cover the main six tracks:

- WSIS Community Thematic Plenaries/Workshops (19-20 March 2019)
- [ITU Regional Development Forum for Arab States](#) (19 March 2019)
- ESCWA-LAS Meeting of the Programme Advisory Committee for ArabIGF-5 (19-20 March 2019)
- ESCWA Meeting on National and Arab Digital Development Reports (19-20 March 2019)
- ESCWA Meeting of Arab e-Government Directors (19 March 2019)
- ESCWA Inter-governmental Meeting on Technology for Development (20-21 March 2019)

6 Participants and Registration

Forum participants will include policy- and decision-makers who are directly involved in the process towards developing the information society and the attainment of the SDGs in the Arab region. Experts in the field of ICTs and Internet policies, applications and services, and ICT for SDGs, as well as representatives of the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations, and international and regional organizations will also attend. **Registration in the Forum is required through the link: <http://reg.unog.ch/e/AHLF2019>**

7 Languages

Arabic and English are the working languages of the Forum. There would be simultaneous translation among English, French, and Arabic languages, in some of the parallel sessions.

8 Additional information and correspondences

The event's web page <https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-forum-wsis-sdgs-2019> provides updated information on the Forum. For further inquiries, please do address your correspondences to Mr Ayman El-Sherbiny, Chief of ICT Policies Section, TDD, ESCWA, to the email ESCWA-TDD@un.org.