About the
Internet Governance Forum

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) – convened by the United Nations Secretary-General – is the global multistakeholder forum for dialogue on Internet governance issues.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The IGF as an outcome of WSIS

Internet governance was one of the most controversial issues during the first phase of the [World Summit on the Information Society](#) (WSIS-I), held in Geneva in December 2003. It was recognised that understanding Internet governance was essential in achieving the development goals of the [Geneva Plan of Action](#), but defining the term and understanding the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved proved to be difficult.

The UN Secretary-General set up a [Working Group on Internet Governance](#) (WGIG) to explore these issues and prepare a report to feed into the second phase of WSIS (WSIS-II), held in Tunis in November 2005. Many elements contained in the WGIG report – developed through an open process and multistakeholder consultations – were endorsed in the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (one of the main outcomes of WSIS-II). These included, among others, a definition of the term Internet governance, and a recognition that the process of Internet governance involves many stakeholders in a variety of roles.

> Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet. (Tunis Agenda for the Information Society)

WSIS-II requested the UN Secretary-General to convene an Internet Governance Forum, as a multilateral, multistakeholder, democratic and transparent platform for discussions on Internet governance issues.

IGF mandate

Paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda sets the mandate of the IGF to:

a) Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.
b) Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body.
c) Interface with appropriate intergovernmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview.
d) Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities.
e) Advise all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world.

f) Strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries.

g) Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations.

h) Contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise.

i) Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes.

j) Discuss, *inter alia*, issues relating to critical Internet resources.

k) Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users.

l) Publish its proceedings.

The initial mandate of the IGF was for five years, between 2006 and 2011. Recognising the importance of the Forum in fostering the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet, as well as its role in building partnerships among different stakeholders, the UN General Assembly renewed the IGF mandate for five years, in 2010[1], and for a further ten years, in 2015[2].

THE IGF PROCESS

The IGF functions as a year-long process including annual meetings and intersessional activities.

IGF annual meetings

Each year, the IGF annual meeting brings together stakeholders from around the world to discuss some of the most pressing Internet governance issues. Participants represent governments, intergovernmental organisations, the private sector, the technical community, and civil society (including academia). Normally spanning a week, IGF meetings facilitate the exchange of information and the sharing of good policies and practices related to the evolution, use and governance of the Internet.

Past IGF meetings	
IGF 2006 | Athens, Greece	IGF 2016 | Jalisco, Mexico
IGF 2007 | Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	IGF 2017 | Geneva, Switzerland
IGF 2008 | Hyderabad, India	IGF 2018 | Paris, France
IGF 2009 | Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt	IGF 2019 | Berlin, Germany
IGF 2010 | Vilnius, Lithuania	IGF 2020 | online
IGF 2011 | Nairobi, Kenya	IGF 2021 | Katowice, Poland
IGF 2012 | Baku, Azerbaijan	IGF 2022 | Ethiopia

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[1] Resolution A/65/141
[2] Resolution A/70/125

IGF 2013 | Bali, Indonesia	IGF 2023 | Japan
IGF 2014 | Istanbul, Turkey	IGF 2024 | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
IGF 2015 | João Pessoa, Brazil	IGF 2025 | To be confirmed

IGF meetings are built through an open and inclusive process, with the involvement of the Internet governance community and under the overall coordination of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) and the IGF Secretariat. The process typically involves calls for issues (to help determine the main topics to be covered during the meeting), calls for workshop and other session proposals, and several rounds of open consultations.

The structure of an annual meeting generally involves: main sessions (organised by the MAG), workshops (proposed and organised by the community), open forums (showcasing the work of international organisations), and sessions reflecting on the IGF intersessional work (details below). Recently, the programme has been extended to also include high-level sessions, a parliamentary track, and a youth track.

The proceedings of IGF meetings are reflected in Chair summaries. Starting 2017, **IGF Messages** are also developed to provide a high-level overview of the discussions and highlight the most important points raised during the discussions (in particular with regard to actions and steps needed to be undertaken to address certain Internet governance issues).

IGF 2017-2023 Messages
are integrated in the IGF meeting summary reports

Intersessional activities

In between the two annual IGF meetings, the community works on several substantive activities and presents and discusses them at the annual IGF meeting. These activities are collectively called the IGF intersessional work and are developed around:

☐ **Dynamic Coalitions (DCs)**

They are open, multistakeholder and community-driven initiatives dedicated to exploring a certain Internet governance issue or group of issues. DCs are self-organised, and their work – required to adhere to a series of guidelines and principles – spans multiple years. As of February 2021, there are 28 active dynamic coalitions focused on topics such as Internet rights and principles, innovative approaches to connecting the unconnected, accessibility and disability, child online safety, etc. The collective work of the DCs, including their participation at IGF annual meetings, is facilitated by the IGF Secretariat.

☐ **Best Practice Forums (BPFs) and Policy Networks (PNs)**

They provide a platform for stakeholders to exchange experiences in addressing Internet policy issues, and discuss and identify existing and emerging best practices. BPFs are expected to be open, bottom-up and collective processes, and their outputs to be community-driven. They are organised under the supervision of the MAG, which selects BPF topics, typically on an annual basis. Previous BPFs have dealt with issues such as spam, Internet Exchange Points, cybersecurity, gender and access, and local content. Between 2015 and 2018, an intersessional workstream explored Policy Options for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion(s). Following the Policy Network on Environment, so far implemented are three other Policy Networks, on Artificial Intelligence, Meaningful Access and Internet Fragmentation.

☐ **Other intersessional work**

The IGF Secretariat, supported by generous contributions from its donors, supports community-centred processes in developing Internet governance capacity. A number of activities focus particularly on developing countries. These range from: substantive support to community engagement in Internet governance, financial support given through grants to national and regional IGF initiatives (NRIs) to strengthen their IGF-like processes, to individual stakeholders enabling them to take active in-person participation in annual IGF meeting, and youth engagement and newcomers to the IGF support.

National, regional and youth IGF initiatives (NRIs)

Over the years, the IGF has triggered the launch of similar initiatives at the national and regional level, focused on facilitating dialogue and cooperation on Internet policy issues of utmost relevance for their respective communities. While being organic and independent, NRIs act in accordance with the IGF main principles (e.g. bottom-up, open, transparent, inclusive, multistakeholder and non-commercial). The NRIs collective work and cooperation is facilitated by the IGF Secretariat.

As of December 2023, there are over 165 NRIs recognised by the IGF Secretariat.

☐ National initiatives	☐ Regional initiatives	☐ Youth initiatives

PARTICIPATION IN IGF ACTIVITIES

As long as the Internet expands and evolves, it will continue to be the subject of policy debates. All stakeholders must take an active role in managing the Internet and addressing governing challenges. This is why the IGF is open to and encourages the participation of anyone interested – free of charge – both in its annual meetings and in intersessional activities.

Joining various IGF mailing lists is a good way for stakeholders to stay up-to-date with and contribute to the Forum's work.

Online participation

Since its early days, the IGF has dedicated efforts to facilitate the participation of those who, for various reasons, cannot travel to attend an annual meeting. Online participation has been part of all IGF meetings, as online participation tools were put in place to enable the engagement of those following the discussions online. The IGF has also encouraged the establishment of remote hubs, in which local communities gather together in various parts of the world to jointly follow and participate in the IGF discussions.

This experience with online participation has proved to be very useful in 2020, when the IGF hosted its first-ever fully online meeting.

COORDINATION OF IGF WORK

Multistakeholder Advisory Group

The MAG is appointed by the UN Secretary-General to advise on the programme and schedule of IGF annual meetings, as well as intersessional activities. The MAG comprises 40 members from governments, the private sector, civil society, academic and technical communities, from all five UN regional groups (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, GRULAC, WEOG). In addition, representatives of former IGF host countries and of intergovernmental organisations are invited to contribute to the MAG.

The MAG holds meetings throughout the year to review the progress of the IGF and to substantively plan the IGF annual meetings. Each year one-third of the MAG is renewed by the Secretary-General, following a nomination process across the IGF stakeholder communities. In addition, each year the Secretary-General appoints a MAG Chair.

☐ MAG composition   ☐ MAG Terms of Reference

IGF Leadership Panel
Newly established for the 2022 and 2023 cycles, the Leadership Panel is a strategic and empowered high-level body which addresses any urgent IGF issues, coordinates follow-up action on Forum discussions, and relays proposed policy approaches and recommendations to the appropriate normative and decision-making bodies. The 10 members of the Panel are appointed by the UN Secretary-General and represent the IGF's various regional and stakeholder groups.

IGF Secretariat and UN DESA

Secretariat support to the IGF and its MAG is provided by the IGF Secretariat, which resides at the UN Office in Geneva. Institutionally, the Secretariat is placed with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

FUNDING

The IGF Secretariat is sustained financially through the extra-budgetary Trust Fund Account managed by UN DESA. The nature of the IGF Trust Fund is such that it is voluntary and multi-donor driven, with varying contributions from governments and non-governmental organisations from the technical community, the private sector and the civil society. The IGF Trust Fund covers the administrative and operational costs of the IGF Secretariat including personnel, fellowships, and funds the travel costs of MAG members from developing countries. The Trust Fund also provides support to various intersessional activities, inter alia BPFs and PNs or other major policy initiatives.

The **Internet Governance Forum Support Association** **(IGFSA)** has played an important role in aggregating and handling small donations to support the IGF. It supports NRIs and contributes to the IGF Trust Fund. The legal framework for the relations between UN DESA and IGFSA is set forth in an exchange of letters.

The organisational and conference costs of annual IGF meetings (other than those described above) are covered by the government of the host country, administered through a Host Country Agreement signed between the government and UN DESA.

IMPACT

As a platform for discussions, the IGF brings various stakeholder groups to the table as equals to exchange information and share good practices. Over the years, it has identified a wide range of issues to be addressed by the international community and has shaped decisions taken throughout the world.

The IGF does not adopt resolutions or create any binding treaties. Its importance lies in its ability to facilitate discourse between governments, intergovernmental organisations, private companies, the

technical community and civil society organisations that deal with or are interested in Internet governance related public policy issues. The IGF – through its annual meetings and intersessional activities – facilitates discussion on proposed regulatory frameworks, potential risks, global trends, as well as best and worst practices that have been adopted or are currently under discussion. Participants also examine the impact of treaties, recommendations and other documents adopted in various international venues within the Internet governance ecosystem.

While the Forum may not have decision-making mandates, it informs and inspires those who do. It facilitates a common understanding of how to maximise Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges.

The IGF also gives stakeholders from developing countries the opportunity to engage in the debate on Internet governance and it contributes to capacity development, allowing these stakeholders to build knowledge and skills that will facilitate their participation in existing Internet governance institutions and arrangements. Ultimately, the involvement of all stakeholders, from developed as well as developing countries, is necessary for advancing dynamic public policies in Internet governance.

LOOKING AHEAD: STRENGTHENING THE IGF

The IGF in the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation's report

In July 2018, the UN Secretary-General appointed a High-level Panel to consider the issue of digital cooperation – the ways we work together to address the social, ethical, legal and economic impact of digital technologies in order to maximise their benefits and minimise their harm. In its report, published in June 2019, the panel highlighted the need for strengthened digital cooperation to address challenges and provide opportunities for all, and outlined three possible architectures/models for such cooperation. One of these models is an **'IGF Plus'**, which would build on the IGF strengths and include additional components (e.g. a cooperation accelerator, a policy incubators, an observatory and help desk). (The other two models are a distributed co-governance architecture and a digital commons architecture.)

> The proposed '*IGF Plus*' model is described in section 4.2 of the High-level Panel's report.

The IGF in the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and Our Common Agenda Report

In June 2020, the Secretary-General published a Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, building on the Panel's report. The Roadmap notes that, while discussions on the Panel's three proposed digital architecture models continue, 'there appears to be momentum in support of the IGF Plus model'. It then goes on to outline several measures intended to make the IGF more responsive and relevant to current digital issues (paragraph 93):

a) Creating a strategic and empowered multi-stakeholder high-level body, building on the experience of the existing multi-stakeholder advisory group, which would address urgent issues, coordinate follow-up action on Forum discussions and relay proposed policy approaches and recommendations from the Forum to the appropriate normative and decision-making forums;

b) Having a more focused agenda for the Forum based on a limited number of strategic policy issues;

c) Establishing a high-level segment and ministerial or parliamentarian tracks, ensuring more actionable outcomes;

d) Forging stronger links among the global Forum and its regional, national, subregional and youth initiatives;

e) Better integrating programme and intersessional policy development work to support other priority areas outlined in the present report;

f) Addressing the long-term sustainability of the Forum and the resources necessary for increased participation, through an innovative and viable fundraising strategy, as promoted by the round table;

g) Enhancing the visibility of the Forum, including through a stronger corporate identity and improved reporting to other United Nations entities.

In paragraph 94, the Secretary-General expresses support for these measures and the intention to implement them as appropriate.

In 2021, the United Nations Secretary-General also published the [Our Common Agenda Report](). In its paragraph 93, the Agenda says ''it is time to protect the online space and strengthen its governance. I would urge the Internet Governance Forum to adapt, innovate and reform to support effective governance of the digital commons and keep pace with rapid, realworld developments. Furthermore, building on the recommendations of the road map for digital cooperation (see A/74/821), the United Nations, Governments, the private sector and civil society could come together as a multi-stakeholder digital technology track in preparation for a Summit of the Future to agree on a Global Digital Compact. This would outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all. Complex digital issues that could be addressed may include: reaffirming the fundamental commitment to connecting the unconnected; avoiding fragmentation of the Internet; providing people with options as to how their data is used; application of human rights online; and promoting a trustworthy Internet by introducing accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content. More broadly, the Compact could also promote regulation of artificial intelligence to ensure that this is aligned with shared global values.''

The IGF actively contributes to the Global Digital Compact processes.