A Vision of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Beyond 2025

October 2024

Contents

Introduction

The document has been drafted by the co-chairs of the MAG Working Group on IGF Strengthening and Strategy based on the inputs and the discussions collected by the members of the WG. It includes a series of ideas and considerations for building a strategic vision for the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF) beyond 2025.

It aims to reaffirm the role of the IGF and foster shared understanding of the mandate of the IGF and its ecosystem, based on the framework established by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and documented in the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society[1]

It provides suggestions on how to improve the IGF, its structure, tools, and mechanisms, and how to sustain and strengthen the IGF multistakeholder model in support of an open, stable, secure, trustworthy, interoperable, and globally connected digital ecosystem.

The document also takes into consideration recent and ongoing discussions on how to improve the IGF (including the current preparations for the WSIS+20 review, NETmundial+10, the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, and the Global Digital Compact (GDC), as well as various IGF-related group discussions) and the role that the IGF can play to support GDC and digital cooperation at every level.

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[1] Tunis Agenda for Information Society

Background

The IGF was established by the UN's Secretary-General in 2006 following recommendations included in the Tunis Agenda of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

The mandate of the IGF (from the Tunis Agenda, in particular in articles 72-80) establishes that the Forum should facilitate discussion of public policy issues concerned with the governance of the Internet and of its wider impacts, interface with appropriate international organizations, strengthens and enhances the engagement of stakeholders, contribute to capacity building in developing countries, identify emerging issues and bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and - where appropriate - make recommendations.[2]

The WSIS envisaged the IGF as a discussion forum open to all stakeholders on equal terms, but with no oversight role or involvement in the day-to-day functioning of the Internet.

The Tunis Agenda proposed that the Forum should have "a lightweight and decentralized structure". UN-DESA provides the institutional home for the IGF, which is coordinated by a small Secretariat based in Geneva, with the programme for the annual Forum meeting developed by a Multistakeholder Advisory Committee (MAG) appointed by the Secretary-General. The Forum operates outside the UN budget, financed through a Trust Fund that seeks voluntary contributions.

All annual IGF meetings since 2006 were 4 day meetings with an additional day, usually called Day Zero, with open and equal participation of up to six thousand individual stakeholders in plenary, workshop, and other sessions. The 2020 Forum was held virtually and the 2021 Forum in a hybrid format. There has been an evolution in how the IGF takes place from "remote" participation to hybrid, with constant efforts to improve virtual participation (particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic). A range of intersessional activities (Best Practice Forums, Policy Networks, Dynamic Coalitions) and more than 170 national, regional, sub-regional and youth initiatives (known collectively as NRIs) have developed over the last two decades, creating a broader IGF ecosystem.

The IGF's initial mandate was for five years. It was renewed in 2010 and 2015, with the 2015 review extending its mandate to 2025. The next review will be conducted by the General Assembly in 2025 as part of its twenty year review of WSIS (WSIS+20).

Discussions about improvements to the IGF have occurred at various times within and outside the United Nations system, including by a Working Group on IGF Improvements of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) in 2012, a retreat organized by UN-DESA in 2016[3], and an IGF Expert Group Meeting (EGM)[4] convened by UN-DESA in 2022. These discussions have focused in particular on inclusive participation, particularly from developing countries, and the desirability of achieving more result-oriented, 'actionable' outcomes. The UN Secretary-General has also encouraged the Forum to reach

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[2] Drawn from the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, Article 72
[3] https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3367/711
[4] https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/report-from-expert-group-meeting

out beyond the Internet community, as the Internet has become more influential, to include a wider range of expertise in areas of public policy affected by the Internet.

Working groups of the IGF MAG, in particular the MAG Working Group on IGF Strengthening and Strategy which was established in 2020, have done extensive work on reviewing implementation of the recommendations of the CSTD WG and have made further recommendations on strengthening the IGF and its impact, drawing on input from the IGF community.
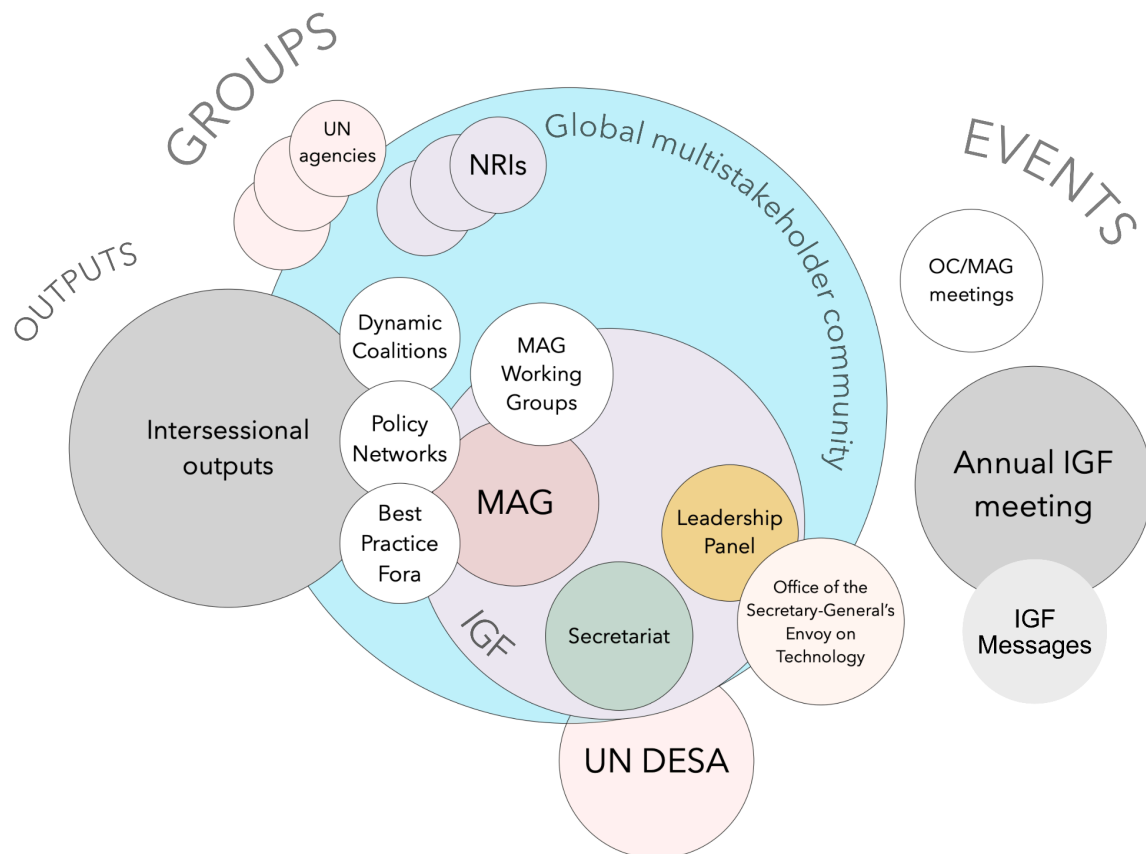

Figure 1 - IGF Ecosystem

In his Roadmap for Digital Cooperation[5], the Secretary-General expressed support for measures to make the IGF "more responsive and relevant to current digital issues", including a more focused agenda with high-level and/or parliamentary tracks, greater integration between the annual meeting and intersessional activities, stronger links between the annual meeting and the NRIs, the development of a stronger corporate identity, more visible relations with other UN entities, and a more sustainable financial basis. As part of this approach, the IGF Leadership Panel was established with a strategic focus to work alongside the MAG's operational responsibilities.

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[5] https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/

The Our Common Agenda report[6] also called for the IGF to "adapt, innovate and reform to support effective governance of the digital commons and keep pace with rapid, real-world developments."

Further, the Global Digital Compact[7], which includes a comprehensive framework for global governance of digital technologies and AI, highlights the role of the IGF in relation to global digital governance.

The Mandate of the IGF

The mandate of the IGF, as defined in the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, is notable for its breadth of scope and enduring relevance. It has allowed for IGF discussions to evolve and expand over the past two decades. But, it should be noted that not all elements of its mandate have been fully implemented over the past two decades. A more comprehensive implementation of the existing mandate could help to reaffirm and improve the effectiveness and impact of the IGF.

While the mandate of the IGF draws on a significant section of the Tunis Agenda on Internet governance (Articles 29-82), Article 72 provides a specific list of elements in that mandate (see Annex 1). The points listed below could be leveraged to activate new processes, responding to new demands and proposals regarding the role of the IGF that have emerged in the context of the Pact of the Future, the Global Digital Compact, the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, and the WSIS+20 review.

> *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.*
> *…*
> *G. Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations.*
> *…*
> *I. Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes.*
> *…*
> *K. Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users.*

It is also important to reaffirm the definitional scope of "Internet governance" and build awareness of the breadth of the IGF's scope and functions, as agreed via the WSIS process and drawing on the report of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG)[8].

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[6] https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda
[7] https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact
[8] https://www.wgig.org/docs/WGIGREPORT.pdf

The IGF Vision

Since 2006 the IGF, including its extensive network, has been an effective space for Internet governance debate, discussing the full array of Internet-related policy issues, including those related to emerging technologies. The platform provides an opportunity for full multistakeholder participation, allowing the community to share their views and contribute to the solutions that can shape multilateral negotiations on digital issues.

The National, Regional and Youth Initiatives (NRIs) reach multistakeholder communities at the national and regional level. NRIs stimulate the Internet governance debate through their annual events and related initiatives. Inputs collected by the NRIs are shared and discussed during the global IGF annual event and contribute to shaping its outputs and messages.

As stated in The Internet We Want[9] paper, the IGF and NRIs, and the multistakeholder model in general, can contribute to a common vision, with goals and targets for an Internet and digital governance that is aligned with the WSIS vision for people-centred development and a sustainable future for all.

There is no dichotomy between "Internet governance" and "digital governance" - the IGF, within its existing mandate, is a space to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the new and emerging digital technologies that shape our Information Society and the related digital policy processes.

The recent NETmundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement[10] adopted the term "Internet governance and digital policy processes" to make clear that these two aspects are inextricably linked. It should also be noted that paragraphs 27-29 and 68 of the Global Digital Compact reaffirm the role of the IGF in the global digital governance.

There has been concern expressed within the IGF community that the name, "Internet Governance Forum", may contribute to confusion regarding the forum's scope and mandate. A discussion could be activated during the upcoming IGF to consider whether it would be beneficial to change the name of the forum into e.g. the "Digital Governance Forum" (DGF), in order to better reflect the role and functions of the event and its surrounding ecosystem.

Over the last twenty years IGF has demonstrated the capacity to innovate and reinforce the multistakeholder approach. An important milestone on the journey of improvement and evolution is the Expert Group Meeting report (2022)[11], which highlights both the major achievements and remaining gaps in fulfilling the IGF's mandate.

These discussions found that while the importance of a multistakeholder approach is recognized, there is a lack of structured mechanisms for governments, multilateral processes, citizens, and international organizations to fully realize and incorporate the benefits. There is a need to discuss which mechanisms and procedures could be integrated or adapted in the current IGF ecosystem to help communities benefit from the IGF outputs.

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[9] The Internet We Want
[10] https://netmundial.br/pdf/NETmundial10-MultistakeholderStatement-2024.pdf
[11] https://intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/8/28258

The IGF has demonstrated itself to be an effective platform to leverage a networked multistakeholder approach to contribute to the ongoing multilateral processes. In line with paragraph 72(b) of the Tunis agenda, the IGF could have a role in the coordination of digital governance spaces, improving the dialogue and the links between global, regional and national initiatives, and also overcoming fragmentation and duplication of fora and siloed discussions in international bodies.

Rather than create new fora and new tools when a new technology comes out and multiplying the governance processes of the digital world (a concern expressed by many developing countries and other stakeholders), it would be prudent to make best use of existing structures and processes. This reduces the risks of duplicating processes, which can diminish the inclusiveness of these processes and result in many countries and regions of the world being underrepresented. For instance, the IGF has been hosting since 2017 multistakeholder discussions on Artificial Intelligence policies and governance as an important policy focus in the IGF program. The IGF is therefore ideally positioned to host the " [...] *Global Dialogue on AI Governance involving Governments and all relevant stakeholders* [...]" foreseen in paragraph 56 (b) of the GDC, which states that such a dialogue "[...] *will take place in the margins of existing relevant United Nations conferences and meetings (SDG 17).*").

Effective coordination of governance spaces is essential, and the IGF, given its broad mandate and global network of national and regional Internet governance initiatives, could serve as a venue for follow up of multilateral digital policy agreements.

Within the IGF itself, the multistakeholder collaboration needs to be improved in terms of representations and accountability. The IGF should focus on enhancing the representation of all stakeholder groups, engage those who are not represented, and reinforce diversity in the digital ecosystem. This needs to include closer interaction with governments, parliamentarians and regulators, and increasing the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises, microbusinesses and individual citizens.

This leads to another essential element of the IGF mandate, as captured in paragraph 72(g), regarding the issuing of recommendations and guidelines. This is an optional part of the mandate, as it has the qualifier "where appropriate". Nevertheless, it should be explored how the IGF could translate the results of the debates held at its annual event into recommendations that have an impact on concrete processes. Currently the IGF delivers a range of outputs: the annual "IGF Messages" document, session reports, Best Practice Forum and Policy Network reports, reports of the IGF's 32 Dynamic Coalitions including policy recommendations, guidelines and toolkits, and host country reports. Making these outputs more impactful will depend on coordination, innovation around format, and a focus on evolving and improving the delivery mechanisms to relevant stakeholders.

The MAG Working Group noted the invitation in the NETmundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement to have the IGF serve as a "depositary/caretaker" of the NETmundial+10 São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines. The MAG has commenced discussion on this invitation and the appropriate response, beginning at the June 2024 MAG meeting - this document does not intend to prejudge the outcome of those discussions, but notes their significance

and the need to reach agreement. There is clearly the potential for the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines, whose content is widely affirmed by the IGF community, to inspire IGF Policy Networks, Best Practice Forums, or Dynamic Coalitions in their efforts to develop recommendations or other normative outputs according to multistakeholder principles.

There is a need for adopting a better distribution process to socialize the IGF outputs, including the IGF messages throughout the IGF ecosystem and beyond, especially to the governments and bodies which make regulations or negotiate Internet-related policies. It may be useful to create specific points of contact or links between IGF and those organizations as the IETF, ITU, etc, that deal with the standards and policy processes development so that the IGF results may be more impactful.

Looking ahead, strengthening the IGF model and ensuring its sustainability may require greater institutionalization of the IGF. The WSIS+20 review will be an opportunity to have these discussions and strengthen the position of the IGF in relation to the rapidly shifting and developing landscape of relevant actors, bodies, and organizations. In practical terms, it is essential to look for ways to build on the current model of financing the IGF through voluntary contributions, ensuring a more predictable financial basis for the future evolution and sustainability of the IGF ecosystem.

The IGF serves as a unique model of a bottom-up forum for policy dialogue among all stakeholders. It complements both the WSIS Forum's role in monitoring progress regarding the WSIS Action Lines, and the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) which serves as a forum for intergovernmental discussions. The relationship between these institutions (and other WSIS partners organizations, especially Action Line Facilitators) should be reinforced and better coordinated.

WG-Strategy's Proposed Actions

For the MAG to develop and implement in the coming cycles:

1. **Formalize regular discussion on IGF evolution and the IGF strategic model in the IGF event schedule**
   Agree on structured processes to implement improvements that are required and well understood. Many recommendations for the evolution and strengthening of the IGF have been issued and obstacles and gaps are well known. There is a need to focus on how to implement improvements and how to progress on the IGF strategic model. This could include fostering/establishing more effective mechanisms to transmit IGF outcomes to decisional bodies in which Internet-related standards, regulation, and policy are negotiated.

2. **Plan and implement initial IGF Global Digital Compact follow-up track**
   The GDC has invited the WSIS+20 review to "identify how these processes and fora [including the IGF] can support the contribution of all stakeholders to implementation of the Compact" (paragraph 68). To ensure the IGF community takes an active role in

this process, the MAG should establish a group (e.g. a sub-group of the MAG Working Group on Strategy and Strengthening the IGF) as a dedicated space for planning and coordination, while fostering the active participation of the broader IGF community. Examples of work items could include:

- Establish and maintain effective IGF institutional coordination with relevant UN institutional actors
- Develop specific proposals for sessions to include in the IGF annual event programme

3. **Work to further develop complementary relationships between the IGF and WSIS partner institutions**
Specifically, continue to evolve and improve the IGF's relationships with UNGIS[12], the WSIS Forum and the UN CSTD to ensure effective and complementary collaboration, leveraging the unique roles and approaches of each institution, and ensuring a coordinated and effective engagement with Global Digital Compact follow-up and review in 2027 (paragraph 74 of the GDC).

4. **Continue MAG discussion regarding NETmundial+10 alignment**
The NETmundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement invited the IGF to act as "depositary/caretaker" of the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines, an output of the NETmundial+10 event. The MAG initiated discussion in relation to this request in June 2024, and should continue this process to agree on an appropriate response.

5. **Review and refine intersessional work models**
Drawing on work done to review specific intersessional models (specifically, reports from previous years on the BPFs and Dynamic Coalitions), work to investigate and document, based on experiences to date, engagement with participants, and past studies, whether these structures are meeting expectations, are fit-for-purpose, and are coordinating effectively. This would also be an opportunity to identify any gaps that have not been addressed, and possible directions for evolution, coordination, and development.

For the IGF community to propose in the WSIS+20 Review:

6. **Lead a conversation on affirming the mandate of the IGF, specifically its broad interpretation and scope, in the IGF 2024 and WSIS+20-related venues**
Such a discussion could consider ways in which the current mandate adequately affirms that the IGF should proactively engage the range of challenges and opportunities presented by new and evolving technologies (and their related policy processes) that influence the development of Internet governance. This discussion may include a suggestion to change the name of the forum to better reflect its scope and mandate.

7. **Propose a greater institutional presence for the IGF Secretariat in the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS)**

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[12] https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/ungis/

Increase synergies between the IGF community and UNGIS, and ensure more structured and effective mechanisms for feedback on UNGIS developments to the IGF community. This could involve exploring how to evolve coordination within the WSIS ecosystem, including the IGF's interaction with the UNGIS framework. While UN DESA and the IGF Secretariat currently participate indirectly through UN DESA's observer role, consideration could be given to reinforcing this role in alignment with UNGIS's function as a coordination mechanism among its members. Furthermore, a closer interaction between UNGIS and the global multistakeholder community, e.g., through IGF LP and/or MAG, could be explored to strengthen alignment on WSIS-related efforts.

Annex 1: Mandate of the IGF

The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society provides the mandate and remit of the Internet Governance Forum, as the formal output of the second World Summit on the Information Society event (held in Tunis, 2005). Specific details regarding this mandate are laid out in Article 72 of the document:

72. We ask the UN Secretary-General, in an open and inclusive process, to convene, by the second quarter of 2006, a meeting of the new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue—called the *Internet Governance Forum* (IGF). The mandate of the Forum is 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, *Among other*, 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.

Annex 2: MAG Responsibilities

MAG responsibilities, from the [MAG Terms of Reference](#):

1. Develop the detailed programme and schedule of the annual IGF meetings, including the identification of themes, sub-themes and issues taking into account inputs of all relevant stakeholders;
2. Determine how best to plan and organize the annual IGF meeting;
3. Organize main sessions and where necessary participate in dedicated thematic working groups;
4. Select workshops and facilitate the organization of workshops;
5. Coordinate panels and provide support and guidance to panelists, moderators and speakers at the annual meeting;
6. Support IGF intersessional work;
7. Promote the work of the IGF amongst all stakeholders; foster multistakeholder participation and collaboration at the annual IGF meetings and intersessional work.

Annex 3: IGF Intersessional Activities

Active Policy Networks

1. Policy Network on Meaningful Access
2. Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation
3. Policy Network on Artificial Intelligence

Active Best Practice Forums

1. Best Practice Forum on Mainstreaming capacity building for cybersecurity, trust and safety online

Active Dynamic Coalitions

1. Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability (DCAD)
2. Dynamic Coalition on Blockchain Assurance and Standardization (DC-BAS)
3. Dynamic Coalition on Blockchain Technologies (DC-Blockchain)
4. Dynamic Coalition on Children's Rights in the Digital Environment (DC-Children)
5. Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity (DC3)
6. Dynamic Coalition on Core Internet Values (DC-CIV)
7. Dynamic Coalition on Data and Artificial Intelligence Governance (DC-DAIG)
8. Dynamic Coalition on Data and Trust (DC-DT)
9. Dynamic Coalition on Data Driven Health Technologies (DC-DDHT)
10. Dynamic Coalition on Digital Financial Inclusion (DC-DFI)
11. Dynamic Coalition on Digital Health (DC-DH)
12. Dynamic Coalition on the Digital Economy (DC-Digital Economy)
13. Dynamic Coalition on DNS Issues (DC-DNSI)
14. Dynamic Coalition on Environment (DCE)
15. Dynamic Coalition on Gaming for Purpose (DC-G4P)
16. Dynamic Coalition on Gender and Internet Governance (DC-Gender)
17. Dynamic Coalition on Innovative Approaches to Connecting the Unconnected (DC-Connecting the Unconnected)
18. Dynamic Coalition on the Internet of Things (DC-IoT)
19. Dynamic Coalition on the Interplanetary Internet (DC-Interplanetary)
20. Internet Rights and Principles Coalition (IRPC)
21. Internet Standards, Security and Safety Coalition (IS3C)
22. Dynamic Coalition on Internet Universality Indicators (DC-IUI)
23. Dynamic Coalition on Measuring Digital Inclusion (DC-Digital Inclusion)
24. Dynamic Coalition on Network Neutrality (DCNN)
25. Dynamic Coalition on Open Educational Resources (DC-OER)
26. Dynamic Coalition on Platform Responsibility (DCPR)
27. Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries (DC-PAL)
28. Dynamic Coalition on Schools of Internet Governance (DC-SIG)
29. Dynamic Coalition on Small Island Developing States in the Internet Economy (DC-SIDS)

List of References

[Tunis Agenda for Information Society](#)
[IGF Retreat Proceedings](#)
[Roadmap for Digital Cooperation](#)
[Our Common Agenda Report](#)
[Global Digital Compact](#)
[Netmundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement](#)
[Expert Group Meeting Report](#)
[WGIG Report](#)
[UNGIS](#)
[IWW](#)