



United Nations  
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pour l'éducation,  
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## The IGF's impact

### I. Introduction

The following note is a response to the "Call for Information" launched by the Chair of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Mr Jānis Kārklīņš, at the MAG meeting hosted by UNESCO in May 2014. In the Call for Information<sup>1</sup>, Mr Kārklīņš invites interested organizations to *"share information, on a voluntary basis, about concrete decisions or actions that have been taken as a result of engagement during the current mandate of the IGF"*, with a view to presenting a synthesized report of the information received at the IGF in Istanbul.

### II. Executive Summary

UNESCO considers the IGF to be one of WSIS' most important outcomes and strongly supports this Forum. Its multistakeholder character enables wide-ranging discussions to take place in a collaborative atmosphere, facilitating debates and agreement in other governance fora. The annual meeting of the IGF provides an invaluable opportunity for UNESCO to publicize its work and build partnerships around its core themes of freedom of expression, education for all, access to information and knowledge, cultural and linguistic diversity and the ethical dimension of inclusive Knowledge Societies. In 2011, for example, UNESCO held workshops in partnership with other stakeholders on local content creation and Internet infrastructure, the role of social networks in free flow of information, and security aspects of participation in the digital

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<sup>1</sup>See also the IGF website at: <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/125-igf-2014/preparatory-process/1621-call-for-information>

environment as well as on information ethics. In 2012, its workshops focused particularly on emerging challenges in the area of information ethics, Internet privacy and freedom of expression, digital preservation and multilingualism, and the implementation of internationalized domain names.

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is now a well-established part of the international ICT calendar. A substantial number of regional and national IGFs have also emerged to complement the global meeting.

The IGF has been an especially valuable forum to raise awareness and build discussion around the themes of research reports which have been commissioned or published by UNESCO. In recent years, these have included its collaborative study with ISOC and OECD of *The Relationship between Local Content, Internet Development and Access Prices*, its influential normative publication on *Freedom of Connection, Freedom of Expression*, and its *Global Survey on Freedom of Expression and Privacy*.

UNESCO presented the experience and outcomes of the WSIS follow-up event *Towards Knowledge Societies for Peace and Sustainable Development* at the 2013 IGF. It also showcased its work, and sought multistakeholder input, in **five areas of activity:**

- freedom of expression, privacy and the role of intermediaries in information and expression;
- capacity building, including media and information literacy;
- access to information and knowledge, including for persons with disabilities;
- (local) content creation, sharing, access and digital preservation; and
- the ethical dimensions of inclusive Knowledge Societies.

UNESCO will continue to support the work of the IGF, to promote multistakeholder participation in Internet governance, and to foster dialogue and understanding concerning human development and inclusive Knowledge Societies aspects of the Internet.

### **III. How did the IGF facilitate UNESCO's work ?**

#### **a. Offering a platform for information exchange**

While the WSIS events have been organized annually at a single location, in contrast the IGF rotates to a new region each year. This approach has been instrumental in enabling a more diverse cross-section of participants to access this event by reducing participation barriers such as cost and visa requirements

thereby levelling the playing field for those seeking to become involved in the global information and knowledge societies debate in all fields of UNESCO's competence. This has also facilitated greater intra-regional networking, exchange of best practices and supported localization. Hosting in various regions has also served to shift various discussions and attention towards region-specific concerns, for example in the field of information ethics, thereby supporting and directing problem solving activities as well as serving to highlight and disseminate regional experiences and best practices.

The IGF has also offered UNESCO a platform for exchange on international standards and best practices for promoting and protecting freedom of expression online. Since the foundation of IGF in Athens in 2006, UNESCO has actively participated and become deeply involved in the process:

- UNESCO has been present at IGF open consultation and MAG meetings, and has provided interventions in above mentioned five areas of activities, that have helped to shape the whole agenda of IGF and of international debate.
- UNESCO participated in sub-working groups on several main sessions and has contributed to mainstreaming UNESCO themes, such as freedom of expression, in the IGF agenda, also promoting a multi-stakeholder approach in the course of organization of main sessions. UNESCO has provided a platform for a strong FOE expert (particularly UN Special Rapporteur Frank La Rue) to the main session as a speaker almost every year. UNESCO has fostered civil society's participation in the main session as well.
- UNESCO has organized and co-organized around 50 workshops, including 20 workshops and open fora promoting online freedom and UNESCO-related work on Internet in the past eight IGFs, and many of them have been recognized as feeder workshops and presented at main sessions.

While UNESCO financed the participation of a number of its panelists, the broad and diverse stakeholder participation in the IGF allowed the Organization to draw on diverse opinions and inputs for its debates. The IGF's convening power represented therefore a very cost-effective means for UNESCO to consult a broad range of key Internet actor on diverse themes.

***b. Identifying emerging challenges and possible solutions to addressing them***

The IGF serves as a useful observatory for UNESCO to identify emerging challenges and appreciate exchange with diverse stakeholders to explore possible solutions.

UNESCO has observed a need to develop a comprehensive framework on Internet within its areas of competence and has therefore developed and consulted on its new draft “Internet Universality” concept, including the ROAM principles (Internet being human Rights based, Open, Accessible for all and governed by Multi-stakeholder participation).

UNESCO will launch another consultation on its ongoing comprehensive study on Internet<sup>2</sup> at the forthcoming IGF in Istanbul, soliciting inputs for addressing the key challenges and recommendations related to access to information and knowledge, freedom of expression, privacy and the ethical dimensions of the Internet. This again is evidence of the value of IGF in providing a sounding board and quality feedback to themes Member States want UNESCO to address.

The various discussions in different regions have also served to highlight emerging regional challenges and in turn served to provide a more inclusive and nuanced perspectives. For example IGF events organized in the Africa region highlighted the importance of multilingualism in ensuring universal access to information as well as its key role in social empowerment. This regional discussion also highlighted the double-edged challenge of ensuring access to connective devices and infrastructure as well as the challenges and adverse consequences of inadequate disposal of e-waste. Other challenges identified in the IGF include aspects related to protecting data from malicious user as well as the threat to data from technological obsolescence. Such practical impacts and their far reaching implication have served to heighten awareness of the role played by system designers, policy-makers and users and the ethical values embodied in the choices they make. Such discussions have served to build recognition for the role that information ethics can play in supporting sustainable practices and solutions.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/internetstudy>

### ***c. Raising awareness, building capacities, making decisions***

Participation in the IGF has raised the level of awareness of UNESCO's Member States on Internet related issues across all areas of its competence. IGF, including the regional and national versions have also greatly contributed to awareness raising and capacity building within UNESCO on Internet governance-related issues at these levels. UNESCO has encouraged its field offices around the world to get involved in these initiatives. UNESCO has, for example, supported its field office in Nairobi to organize a capacity building workshop for journalists and media professionals to enhance their reporting capacities on Internet governance related issues.

The exchanges facilitated between practitioners, policy-makers and academics both during the formal IGF sessions, through informal exchanges during the breaks, as well as post-event exchanges and cooperative initiatives are a testimony to the potential and role of the IGF in triggering a broad set of capacity building endeavors. The interest generated has moreover stimulated participation in regional and international activities, such as the WSIS C10 Action Line on the ethical dimensions of the information society as well as various initiatives of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP) in particular its Working Group on Information ethics.

The case studies and experiences collected through these encounters are in turn being captured in various texts such as a Policy Primer on Information Ethics and various training materials that are being developed by UNESCO in order to more systematically extend these capacity building processes.

UNESCO also produces news articles on its website, also disseminated through considerable distribution lists, about its work at IGF, thereby informing its Member States and other stakeholders about developments that are important to them.

UNESCO's involvement in the IGF has in turn also build awareness and internal capacities of its Member States, and thus also informed the Organization's internal priorities and strategies. The benchmarks of "promote Internet governance based on the principles of openness" and "promoting freedom of expression on the Internet" was, for example, firstly introduced at the internal biennial programme and budget (35 C/5) in 2010. UNESCO is encouraged by its Member States to actively participate in the WSIS and IGF processes and to integrate Internet related issues into its regular programme activities.

In November 2013, UNESCO's 195 Member States endorsed the [Final Statement](#) of the first WSIS+10 review event, hosted by UNESCO in February 2013. Developed by an open-ended, multi-stakeholder drafting group, the statement invites all stakeholders to "Acknowledge the importance of and renew their commitment to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)."

***d. Identifying and disseminating best practices, extending its reach beyond the IGF***

The expert panels and discussions on information ethics that have been organized at the IGF have focused on cases, projects and other experiences of participants involved in the complex task of building information and knowledge societies. The meetings have by their nature served to provide insights into challenges in the development of national legislations, analysing and discussing projects and strategies for enhancing access as well as exploring more effective responses to challenges. The format and timing of the events have ensured ample engagement and interaction between panellist and audience. Consequently the nature of these discussions and their structure have inherently supported the examination and sharing of best practices.

Building on its IGF discussions, UNESCO has been stimulated to initiate a series of farsighted research projects leading to the "UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom". Under this series, UNESCO has published two books: [Freedom of Connection, Freedom of Expression: The Changing Legal and Regulatory Ecology Shaping the Internet](#) (2011) and [Global Survey on Internet Privacy and Freedom of Expression](#) (launched at the IGF in 2012). Thanks to a voluntary contribution from the Government of Sweden, these publications have been translated and distributed in English, French and Arabic. UNESCO Field Offices, particularly those in the Arab region, have used them to sensitize local policy makers and trigger discussion on Internet freedoms. The series has continued with new research and publications on the safety of online journalists and emerging media actors (supported by the Government of Denmark) and on the role of Internet intermediaries in fostering freedom of expression, with support from the Internet Society and the Open Society Foundations. Both publications will be launched at the 2014 IGF in Istanbul.

***e. Forging partnerships for joint actions***

While no systematic studies or records of the post-event actions of participants

at the information ethics events organized at the IGF have been conducted, personal experiences and anecdotes strongly suggest that the IGF has contributed to the development of partnerships that support subsequent collaborative actions. For instance contacts made at the IGF have served to build and extend professional networks on professional online platforms (Linkedin etc), which in turn provide an important source of reference for future collaboration. Such contacts have been instrumental in enabling UNESCO to reach out to potential beneficiaries as well as gain expertise to inform its work thereby enhancing planning and decision-making and undertaking or initiating concrete actions.

UNESCO's role in promoting freedom of expression on the Internet has been made known to and achieved recognition from other stakeholders through the IGF, with constructive partnerships developed during this process. UNESCO has, for example, been speaking on freedom of expression on the Internet at each annual conference of the Freedom Online Coalition created in 2011. This in turn resulted in the FOC supporting the first WSIS+10 Review Event. UNESCO has also strengthened and built on partnerships where the IGF has been a site for engagement, engaging IGF stakeholders in many other international events on internet freedom, including UNESCO's annual celebration of World Press Freedom Day. Participation in the IGF has also helped consolidate sponsor relations with private companies such as Google, Verizon and VeriSign, which provided support e.g. for the UNESCO hosted 2013 WSIS+10 Event and or World Press Freedom Day 2013.

At the first French Internet Governance Forum, held in March 2014, UNESCO found shared interests with the think tank Renaissance Numérique. UNESCO subsequently participated in a working group meeting organized by Renaissance Numérique on fundamental rights and freedoms in the digital age, with the participation of Amnesty International, the Council of Europe, Quadrature du Net, and Reporters sans frontières, among others.

UNESCO was involved in creating this Dynamic Coalition (DC) at Athens IGF in 2006 which has about 25 partners and meets every year at the IGF:

<http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/dynamic-coalitions/75-foeonline>

UNESCO has also participated in several regional IGF meetings and build working relations from there.

UNESCO's involvement in IGF has greatly informed UNESCO's internal strategy renovation. The benchmarks of "promote Internet governance based on the principles of openness" and "promoting freedom of expression on Internet" was firstly introduced at its internal biennial strategy 35/C5 in 2010. UNESCO is encouraged by its Member States to actively participate in the WSIS and IGF process and integrate Internet related issues to its regular programs.

#### **IV. Which impact did the IGF have in UNESCO's field of competence?**

The IGF helped raise the Organization's early awareness about the Internet Governance's impact in all fields of its competence. The IGF provided UNESCO also with the regular opportunity to, for example, promote freedom of expression on the Internet. UNESCO in turn has been prominent within the IGF, thereby enhancing the credibility of the Forum as having utility for key stakeholders in this area.

In wider terms, an outcome in the field of Freedom of Expression is a very clear signal that there is no vacuum with regards to online freedom of expression, and further that normative work in this area has a key and valuable role to play. There is reason to believe that this presence and reinforced status quo has in turn constrained the introduction of new limits on free expression online – which otherwise might have been introduced by national and international actors whose approach is not always in line with international standards. UNESCO's involvement in Internet issues such as at the IGF informed resolution 52 of the 37<sup>th</sup> General Conference in 2013<sup>3</sup>, which recalls that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online.

#### **V. Conclusion**

The IGF has played an instrumental role for Internet Governance in the field of Freedom of expression, access to information and knowledge, local content development, multilingualism and the ethical dimension of information and knowledge societies. While UNESCO has contributed to the constantly ongoing process of the IGF's improvement, the IGF represents today a vital means for the Organization to fully implement its mandate of building inclusive Knowledge Societies.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002261/226162e.pdf>