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| **MINISTERS’ DEPUTIES** | CM Documents | **[CM(2024)139](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM(2024)139%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "[])** | 22 August 2024[[1]](#footnote-1) |

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| **1508th meeting, 25 September 2024**  5. Media    **5.1 Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI)**  b. Draft Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 review and the extension of the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF**)**  **Item to be considered by the GR-H at its meeting on 12 September 2024** |

**Declaration of the Committee of Ministers  
on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 review and the extension of the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on* *… meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies)*

1. The Council of Europe member States are committed to securing the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) for everyone within their jurisdictions, both online and offline.

2. An Internet governance, and more broadly a governance of the digital environment, that respects, protects and promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law principles, and promotes information integrity, is a priority for the Council of Europe. In addition to ensuring that the Internet remains open, global, free, interoperable, and accessible, the aim is to guarantee and create conditions for the effective, free and safe exercise ofhuman rights online and for fostering citizens’ participation in the democratic processes. The rights concerned include *inter alia* freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, children’s rights, the rights to education, respect for private and family life and effective protection against discrimination and hate speech.

3. Furthermore, in accordance with the conclusions of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005 and the lessons learnt from practice, the Council of Europe believes that the form of governance that is best suited to achieving these aims is a multistakeholder model that is inclusive and transparent. Such governance includes, in addition to States - governments, parliaments and other relevant state bodies - the private sector, civil society, international organisations, academia, and the technical community, in order to account for the diversity of knowledge and perspectives.

4. The rapidly evolving digital environment dominated by platforms and the advent of new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) opens huge opportunities in all sectors of life but also raises new and complex challenges for human rights, democracy and the rule of law which need timely and appropriate responses, only possible through collaborative efforts.

5. The Council of Europe recognises the key role played by the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in the evolving global digital governance and supports the annual IGF which has successfully provided, for twenty years, a global platform for stakeholders from communities around the world to discuss and exchange views and best practices relating to the Internet and digital public policy issues, including on the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms online. The Council of Europe is actively sharing its work and instruments with the IGF community in fields such as AI, cybercrime, data protection, environmental sustainability, online content moderation, regulation of media and platforms, empowerment of users through media and information literacy, safeguarding non-discrimination and equality online.

6. The Council of Europe also welcomes the emergence, since the WSIS, of regional, national and youth multistakeholder Internet governance forums (NRIs), as well as of the wide range of partnerships, co-operation initiatives and coalitions involving different stakeholder groups. The Council of Europe has supported and actively participated in the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG) since its inception in 2008. In 2016 the Council of Europe launched a [digital partnership with technology companies](https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/digital-partnership) and their associations which currently includes 27 members, to engage in policy dialogue to respect and protect human rights online.

7. In the context of its [Internet Governance Strategies 2012-2019](https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/internet-governance), the Council of Europe has provided member States and partners, as well as other stakeholders, with broad references for the implementation of its standards in the digital environment. The Council of Europe [Digital Agenda 2022-2025](https://rm.coe.int/coe-digital-agenda-2022-2025-pro-eng-web/1680aa3e1b) further aims at consolidating the existing digital regulation in Europe and beyond, responding to challenges raised by the new technologies, and accompanying member States in the digital transition.

8. The Council of Europe member States, together with likeminded States from other regions of the world, have established legally binding standards for artificial intelligence systems throughout their lifecycles, ensuring a human-centric approach and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law through the [Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law](http://rm.coe.int/1680afae3c).

9. The Committee of Ministers has also adopted and widely promoted several recommendations to member States, declarations and guidelines aimed at improving the Internet and the broader digital governance:

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2014)6](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2014)6%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on a Guide to human rights for Internet users (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 April 2014 at the 1197th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)) on a Guide to human rights for Internet users

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2015)6](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2015)6%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the free, transboundary flow of information on the Internet (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 1 April 2015, at the 1224th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)) on the free, transboundary flow of information on the Internet

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2016)1](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2016)1%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on protecting and promoting the right to freedom of expression and the right to private life with regard to network neutrality (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 January 2016, at the 1244th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)) on protecting and promoting the right to freedom of expression and the right to private life with regard to network neutrality

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2016)5](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2016)5%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Internet freedom (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 April 2016 at the 1253rd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies)) on Internet freedom

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2018)2](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2018)2%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 March 2018 at the 1309th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)) on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2020)1](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2020)1%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 8 April 2020 at the 1373rd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies)) on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2022)11](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2022)11%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on principles for media and communication governance (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 6 April 2022 at the 1431st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)) on principles for media and communication governance

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2022)13](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2022)13%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the impacts of digital technologies on freedom of expression (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 6 April 2022 at the 1431st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)) on the impacts of digital technologies on freedom of expression

- Recommendation [CM/Rec(2022)16](https://search.coe.int/cm/eng#%7B%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2022)16%22],%22CoELanguageId%22:[%22eng%22],%22CoECollection%22:[%22COE_DOC%22]%7D" \o "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on combating hate speech (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 May 2022 at the 132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers)) on combating hate speech

10. The Council of Europe also provided, in recent years, practical guidance on online content moderation, countering online mis- and disinformation in a human rights and rule of law compliant manner, as well as on combatting online hate speech and prioritisation of public interest content online. In addition, it has initiated wide range of co-operation initiatives to support its member States and other key stakeholders to implement these standards and guidelines. Lately, it has engaged in a reflection on the Metaverse, virtual realities in general and their human rights and rule of law implications and, more widely, their potential impact on the principles and values underlying our democratic societies.

11. The WSIS+20 review process will feed into the [2030 UN Sustainable Development Agenda](https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda). As new and emerging technologies deepen their imprint on societies, extending the [IGF mandate beyond 2025](https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/wsis20-and-igf20-review-by-the-un-general-assembly-2025) should harness the opportunity for continuity and progress toward the aim of a human-centred and multistakeholder approach to global digital transformation.

12. The open and inclusive collaboration and co-operation among all stakeholders involved in matters related to the Internet and digital issues are fundamental in ensuring that WSIS remains a dynamic and effective process, based on an agile and responsive approach to the expanding frontiers of emerging technologies and taking into account the interdependencies between sustainable development and human rights. By building on a strong commitment to the multi-stakeholder approach and discussing the opportunities, risks and evolving trends within the digital sphere, the WSIS action lines can be further developed and look beyond the 20-year milestone.

13. To ensure a fair and inclusive digital future, it is crucial to shape digital transformation and standard setting with the public interest at the forefront. Currently, digital infrastructure and major platforms are predominantly owned by private entities, and there are increasing concerns about unequal access and benefits for different groups of people. Disparities in digital literacy increase these divides, hindering equitable participation in the digital economy. Therefore, States should collaborate with all stakeholders to develop strong public policies, enforce corporate responsibility, encourage social investments, and drive technological innovations that prioritise accessibility, transparency, and fairness for all. This collaborative effort is essential to foster a digital environment that serves the common good and reduces existing inequalities. Discussions within both the WSIS Forum and the IGF are critical for achieving this goal and key to deepening multi-stakeholder Internet and digital governance and they should lead to actionable plans for strengthening this model.

14. To this end, the Committee of Ministers:

1. reaffirms the importance of strengthening the multistakeholder and inclusive model of Internet governance, preserving and further developing, as necessary, the technical infrastructure essential to the general availability and integrity of the Internet;
2. reaffirms the support for the multistakeholder approach to digital governance aimed at protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the digital environment;
3. recognises the contribution made by digital technologies to sustainable development, and the potential of AI-based technologies in this respect, while also recognising related human rights, democracy and the rule of law risks;
4. reaffirms that, under international law, it is the duty of States to ensure the effective protection of human rights in the online environment and that business enterprises operating online have a responsibility to respect human rights, as outlined in the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf); in this framework, recognises the need for States and the private sector to ensure online safety and information integrity while maintaining a fair and open platform environment and ensuring freedom of expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, in line with applicable standards;
5. considers that the United Nations General Assembly’s twenty-year review of implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (the WSIS+20 review) should reaffirm the importance of a multistakeholder approach in the field, as well as that it is crucial for States and regional and international organisations to actively follow its evolution and participate in related reflection and regulatory processes;
6. encourages its member States to promote the participation of all stakeholders in all processes related to Internet and digital governance at the national, regional and global levels, including the [WSIS+20 review process and the high-level political forum 2025](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/22/cl/c/S22-CL-C-0059!!MSW-E.docx), and strengthening the linkages between the WSIS action lines and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). This also includes encouraging the setting-up of dedicated national Internet and digital governance forums and considering ways to include the multistakeholder community in consultations relating to Internet and digital policy decision-making processes;
7. supports and calls for the extension by the United Nations General Assembly of the mandate of the IGF for ten years until 2035;
8. calls on the multistakeholder community to actively engage in the support, intersessional work, and preparation of the IGF and to provide financial contributions to ensure its long-term financial stability.f

1. This document has been classified restricted until examination by the Committee of Ministers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)