

World Summit on the Information Society Report

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Introduction

In 2001 the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) made the decision to hold a two-part world summit to address the social and economic challenges of the emerging information society. This decision was endorsed by the UN general assembly and the first phase was held in Geneva in December, 2003. The second phase will be in Tunis in 2005.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) brought together governments (approximately 50 heads of state attended, and many more ministers and government representatives), members of the private sector and civil society groups to debate and come to an agreement on a Statement of Principles and Plan of Action to direct the information revolution. These two documents were debated in preparatory meetings prior to the summit and were unanimously adopted by all represented countries at WSIS, including Canada.

WSIS generated a tremendous amount of related activity including other conferences, workshops, meetings and displays. One multi-stakeholder program and information platform called Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) included 245 exhibitors from governments, private businesses and civil society organizations. In total, more than 280 events ran in association with WSIS.

The following report outlines the major issues and debates raised at WSIS based on the plenary discussions, roundtables, workshops and on printed information distributed by organizations represented there. Although some of the information from ICT4D is included, there is no claim to have covered all of the events and information provided there in this report. The focus is on the main WSIS event. The last section of the report specifically addresses the relevance of WSIS for the SSHRC funded project, Workforce Aging in the New Economy (WANE).

Main themes and issues

Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan started WSIS with the question, “What will we do with the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs)?” Clearly, one of the answers to this question that dominated the WSIS discussions was to use ICTs as a tool to achieve the Millenium Development goals. These goals are summarized as follows:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health

- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development¹

Nevertheless, the use of ICTs for these goals is contingent on lessening the digital divide – a divide that exist within countries and internationally between developed and developing countries. Annan suggested four major divides: the technological divide, the content divide, the gender divide and the commercial divide. Based on the presentations and debates at WSIS I would suggest several other divides requiring attention. These are: the political divide, the demographic divide, the public/private divide, and the knowledge divide.

The following discussion will organize the main issues and debates raised at WSIS under these eight digital divides, followed by two short sections on the issue of privacy and security and the Millennium Development Goals.

1) The technical divide (infrastructure, human resources)

The technical divide falls between those areas with and without technological infrastructure, human resources (including the capacity for training IT workers) and financial resources. In the least developed countries basic electrical infrastructure often does not exist, nor is broadband Internet access within reach. Even in the developed countries a technical divide exists between more populated areas and rural or hinterland areas. The key factors contributing to the technical divide are finances, political stability, and human resources. A consistent theme in statements from developing countries was the need for “digital solidarity,” meaning the commitment of financing from developed countries to those countries requiring basic infrastructure to join the global information society. The idea behind digital solidarity is a global sense of responsibility and collaboration in developing the information society.

In general, there was reluctance from developed countries to commit funds for digital solidarity, however, in the concluding speech by the city representatives of Geneva and Lyons, they pledged to set up and make the initial contribution to the Digital Solidarity Fund with contributions also pledged by the president of Bangladesh.

Infrastructure is only one component of the technical divide, however. The second component is human resources and skills to build and manage the infrastructure. Many developing countries noted the problem of the brain drain of skilled ICT workers, leaving for jobs in developed countries where rewards and opportunities are very attractive in comparison with the sending country. Some solutions to this issue were discussed. For example, some African countries have been establishing strategic partnerships by recruiting their expatriates to return to Africa for short term training of African students. Some country representatives suggested the need for developed countries to share their expertise either through online schools or international mentoring. In addition, some noted that remittances from expatriates channel money into the economy of poorer sending countries.

¹ UNDP *Human Development Report*, 2003

As part of the capacity building argument, UNESCO organized a session on the role of science in the information society. Of primary importance to this discussion, was the notion of “open and equitable access” to scientific knowledge. The International Council for Science highlighted the tension between ensuring equitable access to scientific information and the increasing protectionism of intellectual property regimes. They argued that publicly funded research should be associated with better access to data and results, at lower costs than information funded by private resources. Publicly funded research is deemed an investment in the ‘public good.’

Some practical solutions to increasing access to the Internet in developing countries were presented. For example, private industry representatives (such as those from Nokia) strongly advocate the use of mobile telephones to reduce the cost of infrastructure in remote or unconnected areas.

- In Uganda mobile telecommunications were used to identify the best markets for farmers who had previously been exploited by middlemen.
- In the Czech Republic text messages on mobile phones were used to alert communities to floods or other hazards and notify them of construction and other disruptions.

Others advocated the use of public access points for Internet where poverty prevents individuals from getting household access. Some of the developing countries appealed for more outsourcing from the developed countries to provide employment, raise the standard of living and increase government funds for infrastructure. This idea was controversial and seen by some others as a temporary solution that may have negative consequences for workers in both countries.

In sum, governments of developing countries saw their role in reducing the technical divide as essentially a fundraising one, with the Digital Solidarity Fund a high priority in negotiations. Governments of developed countries, on the other hand, tended to see their role as a facilitator of innovation and ICT development, with consistently reported commitments to reducing their internal digital divides. Private industry promoted reduction of government regulations over ICTs in order to reduce costs for countries where poverty is the primary barrier to developing an ICT infrastructure. Civil Society, the third major stakeholder group at WSIS, argued for thoughtful, critical evaluation of increasing access to Internet, raising concerns about cultural diversity, content, access for especially disadvantaged groups, and other issues discussed more fully below.

2) Content divide (language, cultural diversity)

The content divide captures the notion of northern dominance of the Internet content, reflected in the predominance of English language information. What this means to developing countries varies quite dramatically. On the one end of the spectrum, there is some concern that local communities begin to contribute to the Internet information in their language and in ways relevant to their culture and values. On the other end are countries such as Zimbabwe and Cuba who vehemently object to providing access to their citizens to uncontrolled Internet content that is dominated by a few rich, powerful countries.

- “Yes, we seek equal access to information and the control of communication technologies whose genesis in fact lies in the quest for global hegemony and dominance on the part of rich and powerful nations of the North. The ICTs that we seek to control and manage collectively are spinoffs from the same industries that produced the awesome weapons that are now being used once again for the conquest, destruction and occupation of our nations . . . These last two years have shown us how information and ICTs are often deployed as preludes and accompaniments to aggressing the sovereignties of poor and small nations. I say this because my country Zimbabwe continues to be a victim of such aggression, with both the United Kingdom and United States using their ICT superiority to challenge our sovereignty through hostile and malicious broadcasts calculated to foment instability and destroy the state through divisions.” (WSIS presentation by His Excellency, President Robert Gabriel Mugabe)

The content divide was a key focus of several organizations at WSIS, such as the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UN Information and Communication Technology (ICT) task force. Two of UNESCO’s four key principals for the Information Society related to closing the content divide: freedom of expression, and cultural and linguistic diversity (the other two were: universal access to information and equal access to education).

These organizations promoted some practical ways to lessen the content divide. UNESCO has committed to helping projects to increase the number of languages on the Internet and to support the production of local content in multiple languages. Translation into multiple languages has two benefits for communities – it increases relevant content on the Internet in the local language, and it allows the global community access to that local content.

Along similar lines, the UN ICT Task Force established a Local Voices Task Force to act as a promoter and resource for organizations and communities developing local content. Some of the solutions this task force has promoted include mobile telephony with text and video capacities, supportive hardware such as keyboards in local languages, and text to voice software that automatically translates text into “local language audio” for communities with low literacy levels. As a resource, the Local Voices Task Force is cataloguing and reviewing work of organizations such as CIDA and others currently involved in local content initiatives.

Summarizing, the content divide separates the dominant primarily English language and northern cultural content from the sparsely represented multiple other languages and diverse cultures of the world. Promotion of cultural diversity and multiple languages requires related solutions to problems of illiteracy and the lack of a written version of some languages. Content diversity will be a key issue for countries resistant to northern cultural hegemony. It may not suffice for countries where totalitarian regimes insist on state control of access to information.

3) Gender divide (access, education and training)

The gender divide in the information society is well-documented, including the differences in this divide for developed and developing countries. In developing countries women and girls are much less likely to have access to computers and the Internet than men or boys, are also more likely to be illiterate, and less likely to be in higher-level management occupations. For these reasons, in developing countries the digital revolution stands to worsen women’s position unless efforts are made to empower women to participate in the information society. In developed

countries women are under-represented in ICT-related work, particularly at higher levels, and consequently lack input into development and resource allocation decisions.

WSIS has a multi-stakeholder Gender Caucus which promotes the acknowledgement of gender divides and the commitment to eliminate these in the statement of principles and plan of action adopted by WSIS.

- “We affirm that development of ICTs provides enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors, in the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. To this end, we should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICTs as a tool to that end.” (WSIS Statement of Principles, 12)
- “Work on removing the gender barriers to ICT education and training and promoting equal training opportunities in ICT-related fields for women and girls. Early intervention programmes in science and technology should target young girls with the aim of increasing the number of women in ICT careers. Promote the exchange of best practices on the integration of gender perspectives in ICT education.” (WSIS Plan of Action, C4.g.)
- “Governments, in collaboration with stakeholders, are encouraged to formulate conducive ICT policies that foster entrepreneurship, innovation and investment, and with particular reference to the promotion of participation by women.” (WSIS Plan of Action, C6.1.)

The keys for remedying the gender divide, according the Gender Caucus include ensuring women become equal partners in technological development (conceptualising, designing and implementing technology) and technology governance (policy and practice), initially through education and training. They argue for women’s equal input into the problems technology addresses and the way technology is integrated into society. Statistical agencies play a key role here by measuring and monitoring the impacts of technology on women. Disaggregated data by sex would be a start, with analysis of the extent to which all groups of people are benefiting from ICTs.

Gender issues have received attention through the establishment of a number of committees and task forces. To provide only a few examples, the UN’s International Telecommunications Union (ITU) established in 1998 a Task Force on Gender Issues to promote gender equality “in and through telecommunications.” The activities of this group focus primarily on training, both direct technical training of women in developing countries and training educators, regulators and policy makers about the importance of a gender perspective and how to integrate it into their work. In addition, ITU’s Working Group on Gender Issues (WGGI) aims to increase awareness of the developmental impact of ICTs on women, promote gender issues in ICT policy and programmes, and ensure that women and men equally benefit from ICTs. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) support development of a gender statistics database and promote a regional dialogue on gender and ICT. They argue that information will enable better planning and that regional discussions may be beneficial for collaboration and shared benefits. The International Women’s Tribune Centre is developing an interactive online toolkit to provide women with the knowledge to contribute to shaping media and IT policies. Again, one key tool in this toolkit will be gender disaggregated data on the use and impact of ICTs.

The UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality drew together for WSIS a series of fact-sheets on the work of many organizations aimed at gender equality related to ICTs. A

common theme of these fact sheets is that of creating an enabling environment for women to learn and use ICTs. An enabling environment is created through facilitative regulations, improving infrastructure and capacity building. Capacity building, or training of women to develop and use ICTs is problematic world-wide, and is particularly an issue for women in the Arab States, Africa and Latin America (UN 2000, *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*) where opportunities for ICT education are limited. Aside from cultural and social attitudes that limit women's opportunities in ICT, they are found to more often be financially dependent on men, have little control over economic resources, or live in societies where they are excluded from public participation such as community centres with ICT access. In addition, where resources are limited, education of boys and men is often seen as a priority.

Reports on issues particular to rural women in developing countries cite the disadvantages of illiteracy, lack of self-confidence and unfamiliarity with sophisticated technologies. Solutions are similar to those already mentioned, including providing an enabling environment with gender-sensitive ICT policy and support for the development of content and user-friendly approaches.

Focusing on trade, women managers and entrepreneurs would benefit by using the Internet to increase their market and trade potential. In addition, capacity building could be accomplished using existing women entrepreneurs associations as support centres for integrating ICTs into businesses.

While much of the focus for women was on gaining access to ICTs and training, women's under-representation in decision-making structures such as boards and senior management of IT businesses, and low participation in policy and regulatory organizations with local or international responsibility did not escape notice. The international organizations that set ICT standards (ITU, World Trade Organization, etc.) include few women. Furthermore, the lack of sex-disaggregated data means that policy-makers are ill informed when they do seek to address the needs and requirements of women.

4) Commercial divide (dev vs developing, legal issues, creativity)

Annan commented in his opening remarks that some countries do not get past barriers to trade because they have no e-commerce. It is clear that developed countries benefit greatly from government research and development funding, a highly educated labour force, and relatively stable political and economic environments. In countries without the infrastructure, know-how and finances for e-commerce, trade is limited by time and place. Efforts to develop e-commerce then rely on the importation of technology and skills, further disadvantaging these countries. It is this commercial divide that places countries in the position of negotiating loans and funding to move the economy and commerce to a more competitive position.

Private sector spokespersons repeated the need for the protection of intellectual property rights and for competition for e-commerce to grow, arguing that without protection and competition there will be little motivation for investing in new ICT development. Alternatively, developing countries were pushing for greater reliance on open-source software to enable modification of software to meet the needs of many diverse users. The latter solution was seen to be less costly,

more flexible and in line with the notions of sharing technologies for the general good. The interests of the private and public sectors appear to be in conflict in this matter.

5) Political divide (human rights, civic participation)

Closely associated with the cultural divide noted above, the political divide refers to differing political views on the right to information, the degree to which free flow of information is really “information colonization” by the north, the extent of acceptable government control and regulation, and the level of civic participation through technology that is welcomed by states. The issue of human rights was a contentious one, with some countries and civic organizations raising the problem of basic human rights violations and the potential to withhold financial aid for ICTs from countries violating the human rights of their people. In one response to allegations of this nature, the representative from Tunisia argued that supporting a greater, more diverse flow of information to that country would have a positive impact on the human rights issues referenced.

ICTs have to some extent been associated with democracy - democracy is linked to the free flow of information, expression of diverse views and political choices. Since not all states embrace democratic government, the association with democracy is problematic for some. For this reason, some governments argued for the need to monitor Internet content, filter out ‘harmful’ information and penalize those who do not comply with government restrictions on ICT use.

Environmental protection and other causes are championed through political activists networking with ICTs. The extent of this type of political networking and its effect on social and political change is largely unmeasured, nevertheless, it also raises concerns for some states.

WSIS was itself not without political opposition. A group of dissenters calling themselves WSIS? WE SEIZE! sent a number of emails to WSIS participants protesting the inclusion of states with human rights violations in WSIS, and the exclusion of various activist groups from WSIS.

6) Demographic divide (youth, older people, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, indigenous peoples?)

Age figured prominently in the WSIS discussions. Youth and the issues of the world’s young people dominated discussions of age, with a focus on education, training and the right to employment. For some countries, such as Azerbaijan, approximately 70 percent of the population is under the age of 35 years. In this situation, the youth are actively engaged in the development of the information society in their country. Nevertheless, spokespersons for youth argued that they are often treated as second-class citizens, with higher unemployment, lower pay and less job security than older workers.

At the other end of the age discussion was the issue of the aging population in many of the world's countries. The debate on this subject focused on the need to retain older workers in the labour force while providing them with ongoing learning experiences.

Approximately ten percent of the world's population has a disability of some kind (World Health Organization). The Global Forum on Disability in the Information Society met during WSIS with 150 participants to discuss ways to ensure an inclusive information society. In developed countries enabling technologies improve access to and use of ICTs. These technologies are costly and hence rare in developing countries.

The debate surrounding immigration centred predominantly on the brain drain. Noting the particular loss to developing countries of skilled workers, several suggestions were made to turn that negative situation into one in which gains could be made for the sending country through expatriates providing training and through remittances to the sending country.

7) Public/private divide (intellectual property rights, competition, facilitation, privacy)

The public/private divide arises from different interests associated with the key roles played by private business and government in the development of ICTs. On the one hand, private business has developed the scientific and technical side of ICTs, and has also contributed significantly to the development of Internet and other communications content. Given their contributions, the private sector is keen to maintain rights of ownership and self-governance over their intellectual property and the applications of their knowledge. On the other hand, many governments, including Canada, have invested largely in new technology development, infrastructure and Internet and other communications content and regulation. In addition, public concerns regarding these ICTs are directed to government, which is charged with ensuring the safety and security of their people. As a result, governments claim the responsibility for such involvements as regulating criminal activity associated with ICTs, legislating cultural protections, and providing access to research data to the public, among other things. In the view of the private sector, the role of government should be an enabling one – protecting competition, funding research and development, building a skilled workforce for private ICT-related businesses.

The role of civil society is generally to advocate with both government and business on behalf of social justice and development concerns. They advocate for various rights and issues that may conflict with, or support, government and/or business initiatives.

- For example, civil societies under the umbrella of the international Association for Progressive Communications (APC) are dedicated to “empowering and supporting groups and individuals working for peace, human rights, development and protection of the environment, through the strategic use of ICTs” (APC pamphlet).

8) Knowledge divide (literacy, education)

- “We recognize that education, knowledge, information and communication are at the core of human progress, endeavour and well-being.” (WSIS Statement of Principles, A.8)

- “Everyone should have the necessary skills to benefit fully from the Information Society. Therefore capacity building and ICT literacy are essential. . .” (WSIS Plan of Action, C4.11)

The Plan of Action delineates many key activities toward building the capacity to use ICTs. According to the OECD the greatest barrier to the use of ICTs for Millennium Development Goals is not the lack of infrastructure, but the lack of capacity - education and skills - to use technologies if and when they are available. Capacity building formed a central part of the WSIS discussions in the plenary sessions, round tables and side events such as those held by UNESCO at WSIS. UNESCO took the position that the “information society,” technically enhancing the flow of information, is inadequate for achieving MDGs. They argue that it is knowledge – the content and utilization of that information within social, political and cultural contexts - that should be the international focus if ICTs are to be successfully used to achieve MDGs. They see the key to a knowledge society as education and training.

The knowledge divide occurs at two levels. Illiteracy is a fundamental barrier to the effective use of ICTs and hits developing countries with high illiteracy rates the hardest. In addition, the specific education and training in ICT-related fields of study is often very limited in these countries. Where infrastructure exists, literacy programs can be aided with the use of ICTs that provide curricula, learning resources and translation services. Many initiatives of this nature were presented at the ICT for Development (ICT4D) platform.

A further knowledge divide highlighted at WSIS is that between older and younger workers. Investments in ongoing training and education of older workers varied widely among participating countries. The ILO distributed at WSIS their publication, *World Employment Report: Life at work in the Information Economy* (2001), which listed as a critical issue for ICT labour supply the need to promote lifelong learning and retraining of older workers in ICTs to cope with the aging workforce in many OECD countries. Whereas older workers require ongoing training and retraining to take responsibility in the information society, youth were seen as essential to its future direction. With education and training, they will have the tools to enter the ICT labour market in these relatively early stages of the information revolution and have the potential to carry research and development forward to bring developing countries into the information society and to make progress toward accomplishing the MDGs.

Youth representatives at WSIS spoke out strongly against age discrimination and the problems for young people related to youth unemployment and unpaid wages. That both older and young people require ICT education and training or re-training suggests the need to monitor lifelong learning as a key characteristic of the information society.

Privacy and Security for ICTs

The WSIS Statement of Principles and Plan of Action address this important issue:

- “Strengthening the trust framework, including information security and network security, authentication, privacy and consumer protection, is a prerequisite for the development of the Information Society and for building confidence among users of ICTs. . .” (WSIS Statement of Principles, B.5.35)

- “Further strengthen the trust and security framework with complementary and mutually reinforcing initiatives in the fields of security in the use of ICTs, with initiatives or guidelines with respect to rights to privacy, data and consumer protection.” (WSIS Plan of Action, C5.f)

Privacy and security concerns were expressed by many countries and groups as critical issues related to e-commerce and freedom of expression. The WSIS discussions indicated a tension between these two objectives. There appears to be a fine line between the need for governance and invasion of privacy. For privacy advocates surveillance is extremely problematic. This issue was raised by the Electronic Privacy Information Centre (EPIC) who argued for transparency, with free access to information, open source or free software, and common standards. Their idea was that openness and transparency prevents the monitoring of communications and other types of invasive surveillance. That some governments engage in this kind of activity was supported by anecdotal evidence of surveillance and monitoring of communications by government.

On the other side of this debate are those with concerns about false information in cyberspace destroying local culture. These states tended to demand sovereignty for each country and rejected political interference via ICTs (e.g. Korea took this position). Other related concerns were raised about safety and the Internet. For example, Columbia reported that Internet access is not restricted only to upstanding citizens, so terrorists and drug smugglers also have access to the Internet and ICTs. For this reason, Columbia and many other countries believed that some monitoring of the use of ICTs was necessary for the security of the country.

In a related vein, a new wave of concern is arising about securely preserving historically significant documents. As ICTs replace more traditional paper, film or other media, the concern is that the store of historical documents will be lost as new technologies replace old ones, leaving these “documents” without the accessing technology. Again, some argue that governments have a role to play in ensuring the preservation of the societal memory.

Millenium Development Goals

There is insufficient space to provide a detailed review of the discussion on the use of ICTs to achieve the MDGs. However, I will briefly indicate ways in which this is already occurring in some countries. First let me say that ICTs are broader than the Internet or other sophisticated communication technologies. They include radio, television and telephone as well as computers and satellite and wireless technologies. The following selected examples of ICT use for achieving MDGs come from the UN ICT Task Force²:

- Allow developing countries to ‘leapfrog’ stages of development without going through each developmental phase (e.g. from no telephone, to wireless without fixed line costs).
- Increase access to market information and lower transaction costs for poor farmers and traders.
- Increase efficiency, competitiveness and market access of developing country firms.
- Increase supply of trained teachers through ICT-enhanced and distance training of teachers.

² (December, 2003). ‘Tools for Development: Using Information and Communications Technology to Achieve the *Millennium Development Goals*.’ Working paper, UN ICT Task Force.

- Integrate ICT training into curriculum.
- Empower teachers at the local level through use of ICTs and networks that link teachers to their colleagues.
- Broaden availability of quality educational materials/resources through ICTs, local content distribution.
- Deliver educational and literacy programs specifically targeted to poor girls and women using appropriate technologies.
- Vocational and schooling programs targeted at girls outside traditional school environment (e.g. using community centres in villages, telecentres, etc.).
- Increase monitoring and information sharing on disease and famine.
- Enhance delivery of basic and in-service training for health workers.
- Increase access of rural care givers to specialist support and remote diagnosis.
- Use radio and TV broadcasting and telecentres to offer health information (e.g. measles) in local languages.
- Increase access to reproductive health information, including information on AIDS prevention, through locally-appropriate content in local languages.
- Increase access/awareness of sustainable development strategies in areas such as agriculture, sanitation and water management, mining, etc.
- Greater transparency and monitoring of environmental abuses/enforcement of environmental regulations.

Relevance for “Workforce Aging in the New Economy” (WANE)

WSIS had particular relevance for WANE in two main respects. First, the impact of ICTs on work, how work is organized, and skills needs for the information society have particular relevance to WANE’s research agenda. Secondly, the issue of capacity building for ICT development and use in developed countries repeatedly raised the issue of re-training of older workers, while increasing support for training underrepresented groups such as women, aboriginal peoples and those with disabilities. A third, perhaps less relevant issue for WANE included in the WSIS Statement of Principles was the commitment to design and produce ICT equipment and services that facilitate access for older people and other vulnerable groups (e.g. assistive technologies).

The impact of ICTs on work and how work is organized had broader and narrower dimensions. The notion of public/private partnerships was one broader organizational concept emphasized at WSIS that may have an indirect impact on older workers more likely to be in management positions. The partnership idea is evolving as one with government “enabling” (e.g., ensuring access, protecting rights, monitoring and ensuring a competitive environment, ensuring a skilled labour force, etc.) and private business doing the ICT development and production work. This relationship allows both parties to do what they do best, with collaboration rather than control.

With the potential for more direct impact on older workers are the following action plans for “e-employment:”

- “Promote new ways of organizing work and business with the aim of raising productivity, growth and well-being through investment in ICTs and human resources.” (WSIS Plan of Action, 19.b)

The second WSIS discussion relevant for WANE involved capacity building. The effective contribution of older workers to the information society was discussed as part of the larger question of ICT labour supply and demand. Although some organizations such as the ILO regard

the retention and re-training of older workers as critical to the supply of ICT labour, much of the WSIS discussion related to age and ICTs was about youth. The WSIS Statement of Principles included specific commitments to both youth and adult workers:

- “We recognize that young people are the future workforce and leading creators and earliest adopters of ICTs. They must therefore be empowered as learners, developers, contributors, entrepreneurs and decision-makers. We must focus especially on young people who have not yet been able to benefit fully from the opportunities provided by ICTs. . .” (A.11)
- “Continuous and adult education, re-training, life-long learning, distance-learning and other special services, such as telemedicine, can make an essential contribution to employability and help people benefit from the new opportunities offered by ICTs for traditional jobs, self-employment and new professions. . .”(B.4.31)

The UNECE argued that governments needed to develop national strategies that recognize the aging population.