

The Celebration of the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) 2024, Accra, Ghana

Concept Note

Theme: "Mainstreaming Access to Information and Participation in the Public Sector"

Organizer: UNESCO, Ministry of Information of the Republic of Ghana

Date: 1-2 October 2024

Venue: Alisa Hotel, Accra, Ghana

Theme and scope

From 1 to 2 October 2024, the Government of Ghana and UNESCO will host the International Day of Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) in Accra, Ghana, on the theme "Mainstreaming Access to Information and Participation in the Public Sector".

While significant progress has been made in expanding public access to information since the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, much remains to be done. Close to one third of the UN Member States still lack access to information legislation.

The IDUAI 2024 Global Conference will focus on the importance of mainstreaming Access to Information laws across the government to protect fundamental freedoms. This is key to upholding the principle that access to information should be provided by all public bodies. The availability of public information should be comprehensive and free of charge. It should encompass proactive openness guaranteed by law. This is a shared responsibility, not just of a dedicated body, but of all government agencies.

Objectives and structure

The IDUAI 2024 Global Conference will provide an opportunity for government representatives and civil society actors to showcase how access to information policies is implemented across various government entities. Discussions will also highlight the role of non-governmental actors in ensuring policy coherence for Access to Information implementation across public sectors and public-private partnerships. Good practices from the African region will be highlighted, focusing on the benefits of access to information in fostering peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

The IDUAI 2024 Global Conference's main objectives are to:

- Inspire governments and civil society to share best practices for mainstreaming access to information into the organizational systems and cultures of public authorities.
- Assess and discuss the situation of access to information as per SDG 16.10.2, identifying areas of the public sector where access to information mechanisms are to be strengthened.
- Establish and strengthen ties between different actors, such as government institutions, NGOs, and international bodies, to work together to promote and protect the right to information.
- Emphasise that mainstreaming of access to information across government institutions is a key mechanism for strengthening transparency and public participation.

The IDUAI 2024 Global Conference will feature a high-level inter-ministerial panel on how to improve mainstream access to information across government sectors. During this discussion, ministers will be invited to highlight the importance of an enabling environment for access to information, focusing on legal, technological, and sustainable development aspects of access to information.

Additional panels held throughout the IDUAI 2024 Global Conference will focus on advancing access to information in critical sectors such as environment, health, ICTs, etc. They will also discuss the role of the standard-setting instruments from the African Union, the Council of Europe, and other intergovernmental organisations, highlighting various mainstreaming aspects of access to information.

Output:

- The IDUAI 2024 Global Conference will conclude by the adoption of an “**Accra Statement**” by participants. The draft title of the Accra Statement is “Harnessing the Power of Data for Positive Change: A Commitment to Access to Information”. The draft statement is being drafted by scholars from the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, in consultation with major international and regional organizations working in the field of ATI.
- The launch of a **publication commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Model Law on Access to Information in Africa**. The publication is drafted by the Fesmedia Africa representatives together with the office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa.

Background:

Different branches of government produce, receive, and hold public sector information and data. This significant role puts them at the heart of access to information. Disclosure and dissemination of such information are catalysts for good governance practices and prerequisites to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹

The right to information is increasingly perceived as a defining aspect of rule of law in any society. The right to information should apply to all government institutions, municipal institutions, and public-private partnerships. Public documents must be accessible to anyone, regardless of their citizenship and irrespective of why access is requested. Achieving these goals is not the sole responsibility of a dedicated Access to Information oversight body, but also of government ministries, agencies, and public bodies.

The right to access public information is essential for transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in policymaking.² Access to relevant information allows citizens and other stakeholders to better understand governmental policies, assess efficient public services, and promote principles of equality, inclusion, and openness.

¹ Bounabat, Bouchaib, 2022. Development and Promotion of the Right to Information in National Frameworks, see <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/development-and-promotion-right-information-national-frameworks>

² ARTICLE 19, 2023. *Using Access to Information to combat corruption: short Guide on enforcement of Articles 10 and 13 on the UNCAC by Governments and Civil Society*, see <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386738>

With constitutional, statutory, and policy guarantees for public access to information, civil society organizations (CSOs) can disseminate information on legislation, public expenditures, policy implementations, achievements, and drawbacks concerning the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights.

In recent decades, public administrations have recognized that public service delivery requires the active contribution of multiple actors in society. To this end, proactive information disclosure and dissemination can enhance citizens' and CSOs' capabilities to assess governments' performance in such spheres as health, education, welfare, etc.

Therefore, access information has gained recognition worldwide key for transparency, accountability, participatory democracy, and good governance. According to 2024 UNESCO data, as a UN custodian agency for monitoring SDG indicator 16.10.2, 140 United Nations Member States have adopted constitutional, statutory, and/or policy guarantees for public access to information. Access to information legal frameworks and implementation, based on international standards, enables citizens to make informed decisions about their daily lives, environment and future. Access to information plays a role in enhancing public health and safety and, therefore, general well-being.

As outlined in the [Oxford Statement](#), adopted by participants at the Global Conference of IDUAI 2023, the internet is the key enabler of access to information and provides ample opportunities to mainstream proactive disclosure across all government entities. The participants will also discuss the best practices of digital platforms enabling proactive disclosure.

Finally, while the provision of information online and in digital formats is crucial, it is equally important to ensure that this access is not restricted to electronic formats, considering the stark reality of digital divides both within and among countries. The 2024 IDUAI Global Conference will discuss progress made since the adoption of the UNESCO Oxford Statement in 2023. The 2024 edition of the conference will discuss the steps taken regarding internet shutdowns and slowdowns.

According to UNESCO research, data and content produced by governmental bodies are part of national discourse, reflecting components for understanding the reality of everyday life and representing society. Their open access will have a real strengthening effect on the formation of

the identities of individuals, communities, and countries.³ Access to information frameworks and their implementation can significantly boost the national data economy, creating more revenue-generating jobs and strongly contributing to economic development goals.

Therefore, one of the sessions of the IDUAI 2024 Global Conference will center its discussions on the critical role of data in shaping society's understanding of the world. The aim is to enable individuals, organizations, and governments to make informed choices.

At the end of the conference, participants will be invited to adopt an outcome statement, with the working title "Harnessing the Power of Data for Positive Change: A Commitment to Access to Information."

Conference participants will also share good practices in terms of specific legal provisions ensuring that access to public information involves all populations, in particular those who might incur an increased risk of marginalization or discrimination in certain contexts, based on factors such as gender, marital status, age, race, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, education etc. For instance, it is important to ensure access to public information to women in rural areas, where a large percentage do not necessarily have mobile phones or access to the Internet or are impeded from accessing public information due to sociocultural norms. Information must also be produced and disseminated in appropriate formats to meet the needs of the constituencies, for example, to ensure its accessibility for people living with disabilities.

³ Bounabat, Bouchaib, 2022. Development and Promotion of the Right to Information in National Frameworks, see <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/development-and-promotion-right-information-national-frameworks>