



# The Summit of the Future

## A Briefing

13 December 2023

- 1) In September 2024, the United Nations (UN) will hold the Summit of the Future as the culmination of five years' work, looking at how it can fulfil its missions in the decades ahead
- 2) The Summit - and the Pact for the Future which will be the main output - are intended to complement the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals
- 3) They will both be important references for UN work in general, and launch specific projects
- 4) There are key aspects - notably around digital, information integrity, and recognising culture as a driver of development - where there is scope to secure text that supports library advocacy and engagement in wider policy planning

## Introduction

The Summit of the Future, scheduled for September 2024, is the culmination of five years of work to assess how the United Nations needs to change in order to fulfil its potential to deliver peace, security and sustainable development.

It is likely to lead to new tools and structures, as well as set down important markers for the post-2030 development agenda. In short, it is a major moment, and one that offers interesting possibilities for libraries. This briefing sets out more about the background of the Summit, what it will include, why it matters for libraries, what we are calling for, and how you can get involved.

## Background

Work began around the Summit of the Future in 2019, when the UN started to collect inputs ahead of its own 75th anniversary in 2020. The message was already clear that this was not supposed to be just about celebrating, but also identifying how to make the UN as effective and successful as possible in the next 25 years.

While the COVID pandemic certainly forced a change in plans, Member States nonetheless agreed on a Declaration in 2020 focused on highlighting priorities for the years ahead, and commissioning the Secretary General to develop a proposal for responding to these.

The following year, the Secretary General published Our Common Agenda, which aimed to set out key priorities and potential actions for the UN for the years ahead, bringing together a combination of new and already-launched initiatives.



Already at this stage, the messaging was clear that the goal was to look at the 'how' of the work of the UN, rather than the 'what'. Existing initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda would continue, but the hope was to accelerate progress, including by addressing enabling factors that did not feature so strongly in current texts. See our brief on Our Common Agenda for more.

## Themes Covered by Policy Briefs in 2023

- Future Generations
- Emergency Platform
- Youth Engagement
- Beyond Gross Domestic Product
- Global Digital Compact
- Information Integrity
- International Financial Architecture
- Outer Space
- A New Agenda for Peace
- Transforming Education
- United Nations 2.0

Full [list of Policy Briefs](#)

This work already identified the need for a Summit of the Future, bringing together different strands of work. In parallel, there are plans for a World Social Summit in 2025, as well as the Transforming Education Summit that took place in 2022. Throughout this, the focus on enabling the UN to respond to different future scenarios was clear, as was the emphasis on engaging youth, and better integrating the interests of future generations.

Ideas for this work have become more concrete over 2023. In the first half of the year, a series of Policy Briefs were prepared, providing more detail about the different initiatives foreseen in Our Common Agenda, and which could feature at the Summit of the

Future. The idea of developing a Pact for the Future as an outcome document also appeared. See our [overview](#) of the policy briefs and their implications for libraries.

In September 2023, we saw the [SDG Summit and Action Weekend](#). This allowed further opportunities to discuss initiatives related to the Summit and Pact, and clarified further the relationship between the Summit and the 2030 Agenda, with the Summit focused on 'how' to achieve the SDGs, rather than modifying the 'what'.

At time of writing, therefore, it is clear that the Summit of the Future - and the resulting document - the Pact for the Future - will represent not just a high-profile moment in itself, but will also be the focal point for a number of other initiatives relevant to libraries.

## The Pact for the Future

As highlighted, the key output of the Summit will be a new Pact for the Future. Two ambassadors – those of Germany and Namibia – have been given the responsibility for negotiating this with UN Member States, as well as running consultation processes with the wider stakeholder community.



In August, they presented a draft text of this document, based around a 'chapeau' (a high-level introductory paragraph), and then five thematic chapters. These are highlighted in the inset box. Under each of these, the co-facilitators have suggested possible paragraphs, in order to give an initial idea of content and seek views from other Member States. In addition, the plan is to annex a

### **The 5 Chapters of the Pact for the Future**

1. Sustainable Development and Financing for Development
2. International Peace and Security
3. Science, Technology and Innovation and Digital Cooperation
4. Youth and Future Generations
5. Transforming Global Governance

number of specific texts to the Pact, depending on whether they can be agreed in time. These include the **Global Digital Compact** (which looks at the structures and principles that should shape intergovernmental decision-making about the internet), a **Declaration on Future Generations** (asserting a commitment to integrate them into work today, and practical steps).

Overall, we are likely to see the Pact for the Future represent both a general reference point for UN work (including that of UN Agencies and Resident Coordinators at the national level), as well as triggering specific work packages.

## **Why it matters for libraries**

As highlighted just above, the Pact for the Future is likely to have a long-term effect both in terms of providing general orientation and launching specific initiatives which are relevant to libraries. Therefore, we have an interest in ensuring that it explicitly references libraries, or more realistically, reflects wider priorities for libraries. This then opens the way to further cooperation and advocacy from the global to the national and local levels.

Specific areas of interest include:

The draft **Code of Conduct on Information Integrity** is being led by the UN's Department of Global Communications. This is an important text in that it sets out that the provision of reliable, accurate and verifiable information should be a policy priority. While much of the rest of the piece then focuses on social media platforms, it also highlights the value of equipping people with the skills to



navigate the information landscape around them.

It does not appear that the plan is to seek intergovernmental agreement on the Code, but this is likely to shape future UN work around this area, and even lead to the development of capacity within the UN to work on relevant issues. Both of these steps could create opportunities to get libraries into the heart of policy-making. See our [analysis](#) for more.

Another key target is the **Global Digital Compact**. This is the response of the UN to the understanding, at least among many, that there is a need for governments to be more active in regulating the internet, and the belief that this is best done with a level of global coordination. Effectively, the Compact seems likely to place a superstructure over the existing different bodies, such as the Internet Governance Forum, World Summit on the Information Society process and beyond.

The Compact does at least set out some key principles to apply throughout decision-making around the internet, including the need to drive towards universal connectivity, while also making it meaningful, for example through building skills.

For libraries, especially as we look to consolidate our role as key infrastructures for digital inclusion, it is therefore worth following this work, and ensuring that it at least leaves a clear space for libraries to do what we need to. Ideally, however, it may bring more funders, creating possibilities. Again, see our [analysis](#) for more.

While the Summit on **Transforming Education** already took place in 2022, (see our [news story](#)), follow-up work around this continues, highlighting how education should be a factor of inclusion, and that it should strive to be of maximum relevance to students. The report that launched this work also makes a lot of the importance of the Knowledge Commons too, even going to far as to describe them as a type of library - an idea that aligns well with our work.

For libraries, we have an interest in ensuring a stronger recognition of the importance of adult and lifelong education in general, and in particular in promoting the building of information skills, and the key role of libraries as an education infrastructure. The suggestion that the Knowledge Commons is a library may even be helpful.



Other questions likely to be addressed in the context of the Pact for the Future already feature, for example, in the Policy Briefs mentioned earlier, including a drive to make better use of knowledge management in the United Nations, which speaks to stronger libraries in the UN, and government in general.

Moving away from specific themes, the Summit of the Future (and Pact for the Future) are inevitably being seen as a **first step towards the post-2030 Agenda**. At the same time, UN representatives underline that this is not the case, and that the focus must remain on delivering on current development goals.

Both arguments have merits, and there is not necessarily a trade-off – a more effective, inclusive, comprehensive approach to achieving sustainable development and other UN goals today (notably by better supporting and mobilising libraries) could also indicate elements of what comes next.

A good example of this would be around **culture**, which was arguably seriously neglected in the development agenda agreed in 2015. Arguably this has led to an under-appreciation of the role of culture in achieving wider goals, and an under-mobilisation of the cultural sector itself. Read more about the work of the [Culture2030Goal campaign](#) in this space.

In focusing on ‘how’ to achieve the SDGs and more, the Pact for the Future does offer an opportunity to put culture more meaningfully on the agenda as an enabler of progress more generally. Following statements by the SDG Summit, G20, BRICS and EU Ministers, and previously the UNESCO MONDIACULT Declaration highlighting why culture matters, and sometimes even calling for a goal, there may be momentum building.

## What are we calling for?

IFLA’s own main asks around the Summit of the Future in particular, are likely to centre on:

**Strengthening recognition of the importance of informed societies:** we need to move beyond simply connectivity and think about what meaningful internet access looks like. In parallel, we also need to complement action to regulate social media and digital platforms with a positive agenda that builds curiosity, encourage appreciation of quality information, and promote the knowledge commons. This is a precondition for wider progress.



**Progress towards a culture goal:** we need to correct the mistakes of 2015, and make clear the importance of cultural actors and factors in ensuring effective development policies. We need governments at all levels to act as if a culture goal already existed, and then not only pursue culture as an end in itself, but also ensure that it is integrated into wider policy-making.

**Highlighting the role of libraries in delivering on policy goals:**

libraries represent a general purpose infrastructure for inclusive sustainable development. They are already delivering progress through their day-to-day work, but more is possible, if they are properly supported and made part of planning. The Pact for the Future should support proper investment in such infrastructures, for the good of all.

## How to get involved

There have already been some rounds of consultation around key aspects of the Pact, notably the Global Digital Compact and work on Transforming Education. The UN itself provides a [page](#) with ideas on stakeholder involvement. However, there are plenty more things you can still do, in particular:

1. Respond to the [consultation](#) around the Pact for the Future by 31 December (see the section on Written Submissions). You can use our [answer guide](#) to help you with ideas!
2. Contact your national mission in New York, and let them know that libraries have lots to contribute to making a reality of the goals of the Summit of the Future. You can use our [template letter](#) to help if you wish.
3. Mobilise your ‘parent’ ministry – let them know that this is coming, and encourage them to engage. For example, culture ministries may well be allies in calling for a culture goal.
4. Take part – in person or remotely – in one of the five [Regional Sustainable Development Fora](#) scheduled for March and April 2024. These will include sessions on the Pact for the Future
5. Subscribe to our [sdgs@iflalists.org](mailto:sdgs@iflalists.org) mailing list in order to hear about further opportunities!