Concept Note and Programme

UNDP Global Conference on New Ways of Governing

Oslo
28-29 October 2025

The current moment is marked by a deepening polycrisis, compounded by shrinking development financing, shifting geopolitical power dynamics, increasingly polarized conflicts, and the rapid, uneven advance of digital transformation. As countries confront these interlinked challenges, traditional governance approaches are being tested and questioned.

At the same time, crisis provides an opportunity for change (UNDP 2025, Development at Risk) and signs of positive change are emerging. Amid geopolitical tensions, UN member states have successfully agreed on joint commitments at the recent Fourth Conference on Financing for Development, including on effective, accountable, and inclusive governance. On the digital front, the impact of AI is increasingly considered a societal and political choice (UNDP 2025, A Matter of Choice) and there are promising efforts to build social media models that have a mandate to advance public, rather than corporate, interest.

Innovation in governance arrangements and approaches is needed to unlock, catalyze, and accelerate progress across multiple domains.

Governance support remains one of UNDP's largest areas of delivery and a core pillar of its mandate. UNDP's draft Strategic Plan (2026–2029) renews and reinforces its commitment to helping countries build more inclusive, accountable, and effective governance systems. To shape and inform this commitment, UNDP will convene a two-day global conference on New Ways of Governing, to be held in Oslo on 28–29 October 2025.

Objective

This hybrid conference will be a high-level and high-impact event that signals a bold and timely renewal of UNDP's governance offer reflected in its draft Strategic Plan (2026-2029).

The conference will:

- Critically assess how current governance systems and approaches must evolve to effectively serve the public good
- Explore what kind of governance support is needed in different contexts today, and co-develop strategic opportunities for joint and scalable action
- Inform implementation of UNDP's draft Strategic Plan 2026-2029, notably its focus area on Effective Governance
- Bring together diverse perspectives and catalyze strategic partnerships between actors in and outside of Norway

Participants

The conference will be hosted in Oslo and will bring together around 100 thought and practice leaders including representatives from Norwegian and Nordic partner organizations, governments, civil society, private sector, the philanthropic community, UNDP, other UN agencies and international organizations.

Focus

The conference will consider challenges to governance systems and approaches, and will explore two overarching questions:

1. In tackling the many challenges that the world is facing today, what promising governance approaches and innovations are emerging?

2. What is needed to scale and support transformation?

The event will focus on the following four thematic tracks which have emerged from cross-regional consultations conducted by UNDP's Global Policy Centre for Governance. Themes will be introduced by short opinion pieces developed by thought leaders, influencers and/or practitioners from across regions, and disseminated ahead of the conference:

- Track 1: At country level, how do we ensure that digitalization and AI technologies support democratic values, institutions, and processes, and that new technologies are democratized? With generative AI becoming increasingly integrated in services and functions, social media and communications platforms, how is this both supporting and complicating democratic governance systems at country level?

- Track 2: With the growing proliferation and politicization of data and expertise, is a commitment to evidence-based policymaking still viable or do we need new approaches to knowledge and decision-making, or the evidence-based policymaking process in itself? What are the politics of data and interpretation, who generates data, whose voices are represented, and how can disaggregated data democratize policy processes?

- Track 3: How can democratic innovations strengthen inclusive, accountable and effective governance? How can institutions of representative democracy, such as parliament, open up for more dynamic interaction with people? What collaborative capacities for inclusive dialogue and policy implementation are needed to revitalize democratic practice?

- Track 4: What are proven and what are new governance approaches to mobilise and manage public finances effectively, inclusively and accountably? What are neglected aspects of the financial system such as the transnational and sub-national level and how can they be leveraged to deliver on the SDGs?

Discussions across the four tracks will be guided by political economy considerations, e.g. formal and informal rules and power, incentives, and constraints of key stakeholders.

Programme

Day 1: 28 October

08:30 - 09:00	Registration
09:00 -10:15	High-level Opening
10:15 - 10:30	Coffee Break
10:30 - 12:00	High-level Panel Discussion
12:00 - 13:30	Lunch
13:30 - 15:30	**What Promising Approaches and Innovations are emerging?** This session will address key current dynamics and patterns within the context of each thematic track and will explore what a desirable future would look like, e.g. when the SDGs expire. The discussion will identify approaches and innovations towards more effective, accountable and inclusive governance. • Group 1: Governing digital and AI at country level • Group 2: Evidence-based policymaking • Group 3: Democratic Innovation • Group 4: Governance and public finance for the SDGs
15:30 - 16:30	Highlights and insights from parallel sessions

Day 2: 29 October

09:00 – 09:30	Reflections and Key Takeaways from Day 1
10:00 – 10:15	Coffee Break
10.15 – 12.30	**What Does It Take to Support and Scale Transformation?** This session will explore pathways toward reform and change that benefit people and planet at scale, and what is needed to support these pathways and associated priority actions. • Group 1: Governing digital and AI at country level • Group 2: Evidence-based policymaking • Group 3: Democratic Innovation • Group 4: Governance and public finance for the SDGs
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:00	**Connecting the Dots** Returning to plenary, this session will draw together the main takeaways from the parallel sessions highlighting cross-cutting lessons and priority actions.
15:00 - 16:30	**Shaping the Way Forward** This session will provide the space for participants to propose concrete actions and meet in small groups to start co-designing and planning next steps. Group formation will be informed by the course of Day 1 and 2 discussions.
16:30 - 17:00	Closing