

CONFERENCE STATEMENT

The international conference on “Digitally Enabled Development for a Sustainable Future in Eastern Europe”, co-organized by the Republic Geodetic Authority (RGA), European Commission Joint Research Center (EC JRC), the World Bank (WB), United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO), United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN GGIM) and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), was convened in Vrdnik, Republic of Serbia, from 18-20 September 2019. The Conference was opened by the Honorable Minister Nenad Popović, Minister Responsible for Innovation and Technological Development, and hosted by the Republic Geodetic Authority, the conference included more than 200 participants from 20 countries, and international organizations.

With more than 40 speakers contributing, participants discussed the impacts of digital technologies from global, regional, national, and local perspectives; and provided examples demonstrating digital transformation and good practices in Eastern Europe, with a focus on sustainable data sharing and utilization. These examples were framed by progress on, and the linkages between, the emerging Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF), the INSPIRE Directive, and National Spatial Data Infrastructures (NSDIs) being developed and managed by countries.

As an overarching local to global development aspiration, the urgent demand to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through data, technology, innovation and digital transformation, was acknowledged. Some of these digital transformations include Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, smart cities, digital agriculture, and integrated land tenure. These rapid changes in technology bring new opportunities, but they also bring additional challenges, such as cybersecurity, education, and sustainable business models, requiring integrated approaches to meet these new SDG demands.

Due to the disruptive nature of digital transformation, many governments still lack a clear understanding of their future data and technology requirements, especially when needed to address the SDGs and national to global development. In this regard, participants agreed on the need to take the opportunity to leverage these new disruptive technologies to support better and smarter policy and decision-making – and the SDGs.

Part of the solution is aligning technological innovation and processes with the data and information that we are now able to leverage, doing so in an effective and timely manner, while recognizing that all countries in the region are at different stages of national geospatial development – including their NSDI development.

Another critical part is ensuring and sustaining national leadership and “champions” in geospatial information management, and the continual requirement to raise awareness of the importance of geospatial information as a key strategic asset that leads to valuable and quantifiable knowledge and decisions. National geospatial champions are crucial to drive change, communicate the value proposition, understand the challenges to be overcome, and to create and maintain momentum.

In summary, participants recognized the need to support new and innovative approaches to national geospatial information management; implementing integrated, evidence-based and data-driven decision-making solutions; and maximizing and leveraging national information systems tailored to each country’s national situation and circumstances.