

Guide to IGF 2021 Issues and Policy Questions¹

1. Introduction

1.1. About the IGF

The Internet Governance Forum is a global multistakeholder platform that facilitates the discussion of public policy issues pertaining to the Internet governance. The IGF was one of the most important outcomes of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) that mandated the United Nations Secretary- General to formally convene the Forum on 18 July 2006. In the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 16 December 2015, (70/125) 'Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society', the existing mandate of the IGF as set out in paragraphs 72 to 78 of the Tunis Agenda was extended for another 10 years.

Institutionally, the IGF is supported by the IGF Secretariat, administered by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), while the programme of the annual IGF meeting is developed by the Multistakeholder Advisory Group. So far, fifteen annual meetings of the IGF were hosted by various governments. The sixteen annual IGF meeting will be hosted by the Government of Poland in Katowice from 6 to 10 December 2021. The IGF 2022 will be hosted by the Government of Ethiopia and the IGF 2023 by the Government of Japan.

1.2. About this guide

This pre-meeting guide consists of a high-level description of the IGF 2021 issue areas with related sub-topics and policy questions identified by the MAG and is intended to make the programme more accessible to participants and as such, to help facilitate more inclusive, interactive and deeper discussions. The guide will be updated periodically to also include an overview of sessions organised at the IGF 2021, when available. Its purpose is to assist IGF participants identify issues of interest, and which tracks they wish to participate in or follow.

2. IGF 2021 issues and policy questions

2.1. An 'issue-driven approach'

The IGF 2021 Programme is issue-driven, with two main focus areas and four emerging and cross-cutting issue areas.

¹ This document can be used as the first version of the IGF2021 pre-meeting guide to programme content.

In response to input from the IGF community and from proposals relating to the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation calling for a more focused IGF, the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) has opted for using an issue-driven approach to design the IGF 2021 programme. The MAG launched a call for issues late in 2020 with a deadline of 31 January 2021. Over 230 responses produced a set of issues, which were then clustered and prioritised by the MAG. In doing so, the MAG aimed to achieve a dual goal:

- Contribute to ongoing IGF evolution and strengthening through an approach to the programme that would encourage focused discussion that delves more deeply into specific issue areas, thereby potentially leading to more focused outcomes.
- Maintain the IGF's open and bottom-up character as a space for dialogue and debate on a wide-range of issues considered relevant by people and institutions from all stakeholder groups around the world.

Finally, the MAG agreed on **two main focus areas** and **four emerging and cross-cutting issue areas**.

This issue-driven approach is somewhat different from previous years, where broad themes formed the basis of IGF programme content. The goal for IGF 2021 is, in general, to work with **fewer issues treated in greater depth**.

'Greater impact can be achieved by dealing with fewer policy issues in greater depth, making sure that relevant stakeholders participate in discussing these issues, and that the outcomes of the discussions are communicated effectively and strategically.'² The issue-driven approach is expected to facilitate the creation of more focused and structured IGF outputs, including the key messages.

At the same time, the flexibility and openness of the IGF programme are retained through the emerging and cross-cutting issues, as session proposals fitting within these areas are expected to cover a wider set of topics.

2.2. IGF 2021 issues

The IGF 2021 programme content will be based on two baskets: a *main focus area* basket with two focus areas, and an *emerging and cross cutting issue* basket with four issue areas.

IGF 2021 Main focus areas

- [Economic and social inclusion and human rights](#)
- [Universal access and meaningful connectivity](#)

² From MAG WG-Strategy proposals: https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/filedepot_download/10447/2458

IGF 2021 Emerging and cross-cutting issue areas

- [Emerging regulation: market structure, content, data and consumer/users rights regulation](#)
- [Environmental sustainability and climate change](#)
- [Inclusive Internet governance ecosystems and digital cooperation](#)
- [Trust, security, stability](#)

Organisers of the High-level Leaders and Parliamentary Tracks will be invited to connect with these baskets. National and regional IGF initiatives (NRIs), Best Practice Forums (BPFs), Dynamic Coalitions (DCs) and Policy Networks (PNs) will also be invited to consider addressing the issues within these baskets.

IGF 2021 issue focus and the COVID-19 pandemic. As we share the call for session proposals for IGF 2021, the world is still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the many challenges that accompany it. The theme of IGF 2020, Internet for human resilience and solidarity, is as relevant now as it was a year ago.

IGF 2021's main focus areas – *Economic and social inclusion and human rights* and *Universal access and meaningful connectivity* – relate directly to this context and the MAG welcomes proposals that explore these linkages.

2.2.1. MAIN FOCUS AREAS

Economic and social inclusion and human rights

Description

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on existing and growing inequalities around the world. People and institutions from all sectors and stakeholder groups need to work together to design and implement enabling environments to foster inclusive, resilient and sustainable societies and economies. In doing so, meaningful access and inclusivity need to be achieved at all levels, from access to infrastructure, to online education, digital literacy and skills, to equal opportunities regardless of gender, race, disability, as well as adequate protection of workers' rights and access to digital health information and services.

Human rights need to be at the centre of inclusive digital societies and economies, and technologies and policies alike need to be designed, used and implemented in a human rights-centred manner. The protection of both civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights in the digital space should remain a priority for all actors. Adequate regulatory frameworks need to be put in place to provide rules and boundaries for the private sector. Governments need to be accountable for respecting and promoting these rights and for ensuring that others, including companies, also do so. Global companies that operate across borders need to be accountable for their practices and uphold international human rights standards, and users need to be more aware of how to demand respect for their rights. This holistic awareness and integration of human rights can only be achieved through collaboration, learning and capacity development, and open and constructive dialogue among all stakeholder groups.

The IGF can facilitate informed discussion on the values that we want technology and the Internet to serve and how Internet-related policy and capacity development efforts can contribute to more inclusive, just and peaceful societies.

Policy questions

1. **Social inequality and the pandemic:** What can be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic context about the relationship between digital inequality and social and economic inequality? Similarly, what lessons can be drawn with respect to the pandemic and Internet-related human rights? What does this suggest about policy approaches for digitalisation and digital inclusion?
2. **Economic and social inclusion and sustainable development:** What is the relationship between digital policy and development and the established international frameworks for social and economic inclusion set out in the Sustainable Development Goals and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in treaties such as the International

Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Conventions on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, on the Rights of the Child, and on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities? How do policy makers and other stakeholders effectively connect these global instruments and interpretations to national contexts?

3. **Digital policy and human rights frameworks:** What is the relationship between digital policy and development and the established international frameworks for civil and political rights as set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and further interpretation of these in the online context provided by various resolutions of the Human Rights Council? How do policy makers and other stakeholders effectively connect these global instruments and interpretations to national contexts? What is the role of different local, national, regional and international stakeholders in achieving digital inclusion that meets the requirements of users in all communities?
4. **Inclusion, rights and stakeholder roles and responsibilities:** What are/should be the responsibilities of governments, businesses, the technical community, civil society, the academic and research sector and community-based actors with regard to digital inclusion and respect for human rights, and what is needed for them to fulfil these in an efficient and effective manner?
5. **Promoting equitable development and preventing harm:** How can we make use of digital technologies to promote more equitable and peaceful societies that are inclusive, resilient and sustainable? How can we make sure that digital technologies are not developed and used for harmful purposes? What values and norms should guide the development and use of technologies to enable this?

Related issues

- ³Economic and social equality and inclusion, access, education, children, gender, persons with disabilities, human-centred design, digital rights, privacy and data rights, freedom of expression, surveillance, responsible use of data, platform governance, accountability, transparency, regulation, ethics and values, future of work

³ These can be used as “tags” in the session descriptions.

Universal access and meaningful connectivity

Description

Ensuring that all people everywhere have meaningful and sustainable access to the Internet is a priority, as the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated. The concept of universal access has evolved over time, from referring to the availability of a payphone within walking distance in the 1990s, to the widespread availability of either fixed or wireless broadband Internet connectivity from the mid-2000s. However, evidence increasingly indicates that access to connectivity is not sufficient on its own. People and institutions from all sectors and stakeholder groups should reflect on connectivity in a holistic way that takes into account how people are able to make use of connectivity once they do have access. This requires considering links between digital equity and social and economic inequalities, and adopting an user-centric approach that combines access (in terms of availability of affordable connectivity and devices), adoption and ability to use (digital skills and readiness), uses driven by content and applications (e.g. education, economic development, health, agriculture) and equity/diversity (e.g. gender, race, language, disability, geographic location, ownership and control).

There is a need for creative and accountable approaches to policy, regulation, enabling financing solutions, infrastructures/content platforms, partnerships and business models that can help achieve meaningful access. Examples include public and private partnerships; local access provision, through, for instance, community networks; use of universal service/access funds in financing access; infrastructure sharing; decentralised approaches to infrastructure development; and use of emerging technologies and sustainable energy solutions. Other factors that can contribute to advancing ubiquitous and affordable Internet access range from developing the capacity of regulators and service and content providers, to incentivising the development and use of local language content and locally relevant content.

Last, but not least, we should also examine why many of the policy solutions which are already known and proven to be effective are not being widely implemented.

Policy questions

1. **Defining universal and meaningful access:** What are the key elements that constitute universal and meaningful Internet access? How can it be measured? How is the concept evolving in time and what does this evolution mean for policy?
2. **Barriers to universal and meaningful access:** What are the main challenges that people face in obtaining and making full use of Internet access? To what extent are these the result of social, economic and cultural factors, and to what extent do they result from aspects of the digital environment? How can we use the responses to these questions to better understand the intersection between digital policies and other policy areas? Can

this understanding help us to develop and implement more realistic Internet-related policy goals?

3. **Leveraging infrastructure and technology innovation and development:** How can the significant expansion of mobile infrastructure around the world, as well as other existing and emerging technologies such as satellite, fibre, and wireless networks, be used to expand affordable access?
4. **Business models and investment:** The IGF has frequently addressed the principles, approaches, business models, incentives and coordinated actions by various stakeholders (governments, local authorities, regulators, fixed and mobile broadband Internet service providers, telecom companies, local communities, etc.) to spur investments in connectivity solutions and enable more affordable Internet access in developing countries. What can the IGF do to capture and communicate the emerging consensus resulting from these discussions? What are the barriers to this emerging consensus being implemented and how can they be overcome?
5. **Practical locally-driven policy solutions:** What lessons can be drawn (and how) from successful policy solutions to universal access and meaningful connectivity around the world, while taking into account local specificities and needs? In particular, what are the relevant practices implemented by local actors (local government, civil society, local providers and entrepreneurs) to advance universal and meaningful access?
6. **Challenges and solutions in regulating spectrum:** What are the relevant regulatory issues that require attention when it comes to enabling broader access to spectrum in order to stimulate dissemination of affordable and quality access at the community level?

Related issues

- Universal access, meaningful connectivity, infrastructures, community-based networks, connect the unconnected, affordable and easy access, connectivity in rural areas and for marginalised communities and individuals, alternative business models, capacity development, democratising Internet access, closing the gender gap, content diversity, local language content, locally relevant content, Internet for all, bridge digital divide, enabling policy environments, Internet accessibility, investment in infrastructure, deployment of infrastructure, next generation of communication standards, low-orbit communication satellites, spectrum

2.2.2. EMERGING AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE AREAS

Emerging regulation: market structure, content, data and consumer/users rights regulation

Description

Recent years have seen increased discussions on regulating many aspects of the Internet, be it in the form of national and international regulations by governments and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), or private sector-led self-regulation and co-regulation initiatives. At least four areas stand out within this trend. First, there are ongoing regulatory efforts to address anticompetitive practices and monopolistic behaviour by large tech companies, prevent excessive concentrated market structures, and ensure a more pluralistic and level-playing field between large and small market players. Second, various jurisdictions are discussing whether new regulations are needed to clarify the liability of Internet intermediaries with regard to the content they host, as well as their role and responsibilities in tackling issues such as online misinformation/disinformation and the spread of violent content and hate speech. Related to this is the issue of minimum standards that Internet platforms should embrace in their content moderation policies to ensure alignment with human rights frameworks (in particular with respect to freedom of expression), and the role of governments in influencing private sector policies in this area. Concerns about the transparency and coordination of content moderation decisions need to be at the center of the debate to prevent capture by powerful actors, and to ensure these decisions are transparent, and accountable. Third, discussions continue on multiple data governance related issues, including (a) how data governance frameworks could enable the responsible and trustworthy use of personal and non-personal data; (b) what transparency standards need to be put in place when it comes to personal data processing; and (c) how privacy rights and protections are interpreted and imposed, or not, within and beyond national borders. Additionally, the issue of cross-border data flows remains high on the international agenda, as countries have different approaches towards the extent and the conditions under which they enable data transfers or require data localisation. At the same time, there are calls for unified data governance frameworks that enable rights respecting data flows. Fourth, there is an increasing interest to enhance consumer protection regulations in order to foster a more balanced relationship between users and Internet companies, provide meaningful remedy for individuals whose rights have been violated, and avoid unfair and deceptive commercial practices, while also building consumer awareness around issues such as tracking and targeted advertising.

Policy questions

1. **Regulation, competition and innovation:** How could regulatory and self-regulatory frameworks help foster more competitive Internet-related markets, a larger diversity of business models, and more innovation? How to enable equitable access to data, marketplaces or infrastructures for fostering competition and innovation on the Internet?

2. **Content moderation and human rights compliance:** How to ensure that government regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation approaches to content moderation are compliant with human rights frameworks, are transparent and accountable, and enable a safe, united and inclusive Internet?
3. **Data governance and trust, globally and locally:** What is needed to ensure that existing and future national and international data governance frameworks are effective in mandating the responsible and trustworthy use of data, with respect for privacy and other human rights?
4. **Data transfers, trade, cooperation and trust:** What is the role of local and international norms and principles in facilitating trustworthy international data transfers for trade and cooperation?
5. **Protecting consumer rights:** What regulatory approaches are/could be effective in upholding consumer rights, offering adequate remedies for rights violations, and eliminating unfair and deceptive practices from the part of Internet companies?

Related issues

- Antitrust, anticompetitive practices, monopolistic behaviour, competition, big tech, concentrated market structures, remedies, network effects, vertical integration, merger control, digital advertisement, platform economy, surveillance economy, innovation, data concentration, centralisation of infrastructure, decentralisation, data trusts, data commons, interoperability, intermediaries liability regimes, media policy, content policy, content moderation, data localisation, lawful access, misinformation/disinformation, violent content, hate speech, freedom of expression, upload filters, privacy, data governance, self-regulation, co-regulation, cross-border data transfer, data flows, extraterritorial rules, targeted advertising, algorithmic transparency, automated decision making, profiling, user tracking, meaningful consent, dark patterns, consumer awareness, consumer rights, quality of service, remedy for abuse

Environmental sustainability and climate change

Description

Mitigating climate change, addressing waste and pollution, and ensuring environmental sustainability are among the world's most pressing issues. The Internet and other digital technologies can pose challenges to the environment (for instance through energy consumption for data production, storage, usage and transfer, and through the production of devices and disposal of e-waste), but they can also be leveraged to advance environmental sustainability. Policies and actions are therefore needed to 'green' the Internet, reduce the environmental impact of new technologies (including artificial intelligence and big data) and facilitate their use to address environmental challenges. Examples include improving the circular economy for digital devices (e.g. enabling reuse and recycling), extending the lifespan of software and devices, reducing the energy use associated with the Internet, and promoting technologies that help reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption. Also important is to develop and put in practice adequate governance frameworks that enable the sharing and re-use of environmental data. At the same time, more focus needs to be placed on promoting environmental education and building awareness on environmental sustainability within Internet governance and digital policy spaces.

Policy questions

1. **Increasing awareness and proactiveness among policymakers and developers:** How do we ensure that technology developers, digital corporations, policy makers and policy processes consistently consider the impact of the Internet and digitalisation on sustainability and climate change?
2. **Measuring impact:** How can we improve the assessment, measurement and monitoring of the environmental impact of digitalisation and the Internet?
3. **Reducing impact:** How can we achieve a net zero impact on climate change of the further expansions of the Internet and its infrastructure? How can Internet standards, governance and policy choices, and standards for device design, development and manufacture, contribute to reducing the carbon footprint of the Internet (e.g. through the adoption of green computing, energy efficient servers and machines/processes, and by policy contributions)? How can we further use digital technologies to better predict and manage the impacts of climate change?
4. **Environmental education:** How can policymakers leverage the Internet and Internet governance processes for expanding and strengthening environmental education? Should computer science curricula, Internet governance capacity development and digital literacy programmes include awareness of environmental sustainability?

Related issues

- Climate change, greening the Internet, smart cities, sustainable cities, sustainable smart cities, environmental education, environmental sustainability, green technologies, future of work, digital waste, sustainable exploitation of natural resources for digital technologies, digital capacities for natural disasters response, energy efficiency, environmental data governance, indigenous communities environmental/climate resilience, AI and environment

Inclusive Internet governance ecosystems and digital cooperation

Description

The Internet's contribution to social, cultural and economic growth and opportunity is recognised, but with its increased role and importance to societies, individuals and economies – well illustrated during the global pandemic – come key questions of governance, accountability, misuse and access. When approaching the governance of the Internet, most institutions, including governments, tend to turn to models they understand or are familiar with, rather than thinking about what might work in the future. Coordinating and consolidating collaborative and inclusive Internet governance is increasingly challenging. Recent discussions about the roles and responsibilities of governments and international corporations have raised issues relating to digital sovereignty, data localisation, national security, economic growth, the governance structures of a borderless Internet, cross-border business transactions, and human rights. In consequence, the precise nature, scope, and modalities of digital sovereignty have become pressing topics in a wide range of contexts. Nevertheless, there has not been any organised and fully inclusive global debate about the reasons for and manifold consequences of digital sovereignty initiatives. The IGF could be well placed to foster such a dialogue.

There is also a need for further engagement on the evolution of the IGF itself as a widely distributed and inclusive platform for deliberating on inclusive Internet governance processes and ecosystems. What opportunities are provided by the current focus on digital cooperation resulting from the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for digital cooperation? How to strengthen the capacities of policymakers, business and citizens to stay abreast of the rapid technological developments and adequately engage in Internet governance discussions to respond to the challenges these developments present? What is the future of multistakeholder Internet governance and who will shape it?

Another question to address touches on how the technical governance of the protocols and procedures that underpin an interconnected Internet relate to the ongoing Internet public policy discourses.

Policy questions

1. **Digital sovereignty:** What is meant by digital sovereignty? What implications does it have for the global nature of the Internet, for Internet governance itself, and the effectiveness of the multistakeholder approach? From an opposite angle, what are the implications of the Internet and digitalisation for national sovereignty?
2. **Assessing Internet governance approaches and mechanisms and fostering inclusiveness:** What are the main strengths and weaknesses of existing Internet governance approaches and mechanisms? What can be done, and by whom, to foster more inclusive Internet governance at the national, regional and international levels?

3. **Governance and cooperation for an evolving Internet:** How does Internet governance need to change in order to meet the changing nature and role of the Internet? What tools, mechanisms, and capacity building instruments are needed for stakeholders to effectively cooperate, and engage in Internet governance?
4. **Technical Internet governance:** How can the technical governance of the Internet (e.g. the development of standards and protocols, and the management of critical resources) take into account the needs and views of all stakeholders?
5. **Advancing global digital cooperation:** What opportunities are provided by the current focus on digital cooperation resulting from the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for digital cooperation? What role should the IGF play (and how) in advancing global digital cooperation?

Related issues

- Digital cooperation, digital sovereignty, multistakeholder cooperation, Internet infrastructure, capacity development, national and regional Internet governance cooperation, Internet Governance Forum, technical Internet governance, inclusive Internet governance

Trust, security and stability

Description

The borderless nature of the Internet, the digital economy, the increased cyber-physical interdependency through the Internet of things, and the increased use of the Internet in processes such as elections and in the response to global crises such as the pandemic paint a complex policy, legal and operational picture for cybersecurity and stability. Almost all sectors utilise ICTs and rely on the Internet for anything from the simplest to the most strategic tasks. Global supply chains are increasingly interconnected, and the ICT systems supporting them comprise numerous internal and external devices and applications. Managing these issues, mitigating cybersecurity concerns and addressing risks requires cooperation between the public and the private sectors, the technical community, the academic and research sector, and civil society. Collaboration is needed to build awareness of vulnerabilities and increase resilience. An Internet that is trusted by its users requires combatting online gender-based violence, child safety online, cyberbullying, and misinformation, among other challenges.

Discussions on trust, security and stability of the Internet should cover norms, voluntary standards, guidelines, best practices and capacity building to manage cybersecurity-related risks and foster collaboration between countries, institutions and stakeholder groups.

Policy questions

1. **Cybersecurity practices and mechanisms:** What are the good cybersecurity practices and international mechanisms that already exist? Where do those mechanisms fall short and what can be done to strengthen the security and to reinforce the trust?
2. **Ensuring a safe digital space:** How should governments, Internet businesses and other stakeholders protect citizens, including vulnerable citizens, against online exploitation and abuse?
3. **International standards:** How should international standards address the different requirements and preferences of governments and citizens in different countries?
4. **Roles and responsibilities in protecting against cyber-attacks:** Which stakeholders hold responsibility for protecting national governments, businesses and citizens against cyber-attacks?
5. **International rules and state accountability:** How should international rules be strengthened to protect national sovereignty and citizens against attack by malicious state and non-state actors? What can be done to better hold nation-states accountable for cyber-attacks?
6. **Private sector accountability:** What can be done at the national and international level to tackle private sector companies that aid and abet nation state attackers?

Related issues

- Cybersecurity, cyber terrorism, cyber criminals, national strategy, global strategy, cyber mercenaries, COVID-19 security, privatisation of attacks, nation-states, global organisations, accountability mechanisms, cybersecurity and critical infrastructure