Lebanese Internet Governance Forum 2022

Report of the fourth annual meeting

Held under the theme

"Internet Continuity for a better Lebanon"

On Wednesday and Thursday, December 14 and 15, 2022

Hybrid at OGERO and on Zoom

Content

A - Introduction

The Lebanese Internet Governance Forum (LIGF) is a national initiative that aims to open discussion among multiple stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities facing infrastructure development and Internet Governance in Lebanon. The Lebanese Multistakeholder Advisory Group (LMAG) comprises a group representing Internet stakeholders from the public sector, academia, civil society, the private sector and the technical community.

Under the theme "Internet Continuity for a Better Lebanon", the Advisory Committee, in consultation with the Internet Governance community in Lebanon, organized the annual forum, in its fourth edition, on December 14-15, 2022, at OGERO headquarters and virtually via the Zoom platform. Sixty-five onsite attendees participated in the forum, in addition to 100 participants via the Zoom platform, not to mention the interaction on social network sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

The meeting began with a direct message, from Geneva, by Ms. Anja Gengo, Associate Programme Officer at the United Nations Secretariat for IGF and NRIs Coordinator, in which she affirmed her support for the Lebanese Forum and summarized the recommendations of the global forum held in Addis Ababa.

The program of LIGF 2022 included four main sessions and three workshops. Specialists and officials from all public and private sectors, academics and civil society participated in the discussions on issues related to Internet Governance in Lebanon within the four frameworks set by the advisory group, namely: Internet fragmentation, New and emerging technologies, Information Security and Privacy, and the role of Technology in protecting Human Rights.

The program of the first day started with the first main session under the title: "Is Internet Fragmentation avoidable?" organized by: RIPE NCC, OGERO, and the Internet Society (ISOC), Followed by the first workshop, organized by OGERO, focused on the "High-Performance Computing for Lebanon".

The second main session, New and Emerging Technologies in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities", was organized by the Digital Transformation and Governance Network, the American University, St. Joseph University and Notre Dame University. The session was followed by the second workshop, "The Need for AI Education", organized by the Zaka Foundation.

The second day started with the third main session organized by SMEX under the title "Privacy Governed", then the fourth session focused on "The role of Technology in safeguarding Human Rights" and discussed the "Right to education" in the first part organized by UNESCO and

ESCWA. The second part dealt with "Violence against Women on the Internet", organized by Maharat Association. The forum concluded with a third workshop entitled "Cyber Safety and Security for Effective Digital Transformation", organized by the Digital Transformation and Governance Network and the Lebanese Information Technology Association.

At the end of each session, recommendations were presented on the topics discussed, which will be submitted to decision-makers in the concerned authorities in Lebanon to the Global Internet Forum and the Global Digital Compact.

For more information, visit: https://igflebanon.org/2022-events/

B - Sessions of the Lebanese IGF 2022

First: Main sessions

Session 1: Is Internet Fragmentation avoidable?

Coordinators: OGERO, RIPE NCC, and ISOC

Moderator:

Dr. Chafic Chaya, Regional Director for Public Policy and Government Affairs, RIPE NCC

Speakers:

Mr. Imad Kreidieh, Chairman – Director General, OGERO

Ms. Hanan Boujemi, Public Policy and Regulatory Affairs Manager, MENA and Turkey, Meta

Mr. Nabil Bou Khaled, Vice President, ISOC Lebanon

Mr. Tony Mikhael, Lawyer Media law & regulation

Discussions

Concerns about "Internet fragmentation" have become widely discussed in all global forums, and it was at the top of the priorities of the topics raised and discussed during the Global Internet Governance Forum held in Addis Ababa from November 28 to December 2, 2022.

Is the open, global Internet, as we know it today, at risk? Are we facing the risk of fragmentation of the Internet in Lebanon? To avoid Internet fragmentation, what possible actions are required from various stakeholders (governments, private sector, technical community, academia, civil society, and IGOs)? These are some of the questions discussed in the session: "is Internet fragmentation avoidable? The session discussed the possibility of avoiding Internet fragmentation in Lebanon and the ability of the national operator, the OGERO, to continue providing the service despite the financial and political challenges and how to continue the Internet service if sufficient support is unavailable.

Mr. Kreidieh confirmed that electricity is the main cause of Internet fragmentation, i.e. the interruption of Internet service for subscribers and their inability to communicate with the outside world. He reaffirmed that despite the economic and political challenges Lebanon is going through, the Internet has continued with a significant increase in the number of subscribers. And that OGERO provides internet and communications services on all Lebanese territory. Still, it has to secure power for its equipment and centrals through generators. Therefore, a large proportion of the expenses has been transferred to securing power through purchasing diesel fuel to ensure continuity of service and avoid fragmentation of the Internet.

Kreidieh also talked about a donation to rehabilitate several exchanges with solar energy to reduce energy costs. However, this initiative needs to be improved in the current situation, but through solar energy; it is possible to avoid the discontinuity of the Internet.

He concluded by saying, "Therefore, regarding OGERO, the fragmentation of the Internet is not due to technical problems, but rather has other causes, the most important of which is the permanent power outage ".

Mr. Nabil Bou Khaled talked about other reasons that led to the fragmentation of the Internet, including what is political, economic or technical. He gave, for example, attempts to block the "TIK TOK" application in some countries. As for Lebanon, Bou Khaled stressed that the interruption of Internet services is due to the lack of diesel fuel but open and accessible Internet and services available to all.

Ms. Hanan Boujemi of Meta spoke about the impact of Internet fragmentation on a commercial level, as it would be impossible to get people connected as one global village if the Internet was blocked. She explained how META defines Internet fragmentation and mentioned several types of Internet fragmentation. Internet fragmentation means that access to the Internet is blocked. Meta promotes the Internet's openness and makes it free to access through a global public policy of "Open and Free Internet ."

Mr. Tony Mikhael spoke about using the Internet to control and monitor individuals and restrict freedom of expression and opinion and the impact of Internet fragmentation on society. He also focused on considering Internet service as a fundamental right for individuals, such as the right to medical care and education, and therefore not a secondary or luxury need. He mentioned that some constitutions in some countries enshrined the right to access the Internet as a fundamental right. During the Corona pandemic, the need for the Internet emerged more than ever, especially at the level of students, distance learning, or remote working. As for the issue of freedom of expression, he mentioned that there are no significant obstacles related to this matter in Lebanon, except the practice followed by the public judicial prosecution to distinguish between media content published in traditional media and that published through digital media and the application of penal provisions that allow the detention of freedom of activists on the means of communication and subjecting them to an investigation by the security authorities because of a tweet or post that falls within the framework of expressing an opinion, in addition to prosecuting some of them at the military court in cases related to criticizing the security and military services in the digital space. He mentioned that the blocking of some websites by OGERO must be practiced within the framework of the legal texts stipulated in the Electronic Transactions Law, which stipulates that blocking any website is done through a judicial decision.

On this issue and regarding the role played by OGERO to avoid fragmentation of the Internet and the extent to which laws are applied, the Director General emphasized that the Internet in

Lebanon remained far from the arena of political struggles. For example, OGERO does not block any websites except by a judicial decision. Sometimes, after receiving a judicial decision, OGERO can advise on the importance and seriousness of the ban so that the court considers its recommendations in some cases.

Kreidieh explained that OGERO has contracts with the government and undertakes to develop and maintain the telecommunications sector, including the Internet. Still, OGERO is not the one who sets the laws. He stressed that since he assumed the position of Director General of the Authority, he has been calling for the implementation of Law No. 431 and confirmed that the Internet service must be provided to all and that the private sector should contribute to meeting the needs and requirements of society and support the public sector.

Speakers emphasized the importance of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, as its absence affects society. This is evident through the existence of chaos in the provision of services by private companies and the presence of unlicensed Internet service providers. This chaos has an impact on the fragmentation of the Internet. As for the Lebanese Government, the focus must be placed on the digital economy, as it is a global trend, and officials must prioritize avoiding fragmentation of the Internet and considering the right to access the Internet as a fundamental right of the Lebanese citizen.

In response to a question related to coordination between ISOC and the authorities to shed light on the problems of fragmentation and interruption of Internet services, Bou Khaled stated that the blocked pages were reviewed, and it was found that they had no significant impact and, therefore cannot be considered as fragmentation of the Internet. Bearing in mind that ISOC previously held meetings with officials to discuss proposals and essential projects related to the Internet, however, these projects still need to be completed due to the political situation, such as the change of government.

It was mentioned that in some places, those who enjoy the Internet in schools and educational institutes are the principals, not the students. In response, the Director General of OGERO emphasized that the focus should be on making the Internet available to students and not to principals' offices in schools and institutes. In this context, Bou Khaled said that some recent graduate students need to be equipped for the new digital labor market, which is considered a fragmentation of the Internet.

Mikhael, on the role of civil society in limiting the fragmentation of the Internet, said that civil society is sometimes called upon to participate in setting public policies and succeeded at one stage in stopping some texts and provisions that would restrict freedoms on the Internet.

Regarding the importance of storing Data in Lebanon, Kreidieh confirmed that OGERO had established a data centre that the public sector can benefit from and that Ogero is keen on data and is trying to build trust with the public and private sectors. Hence, there is no need to save data abroad, knowing that storing data in OGERO is less expensive than keeping it outside. He emphasized that OGERO deals with the most important companies in security to ensure data security and sovereignty.

The speakers unanimously agreed that there is no fear of Internet fragmentation from a technical point of view. Since 2019, the Internet and communications sector has been subjected to many crises, and despite that, it continues to provide services. The speakers emphasized the competence and ability of the Lebanese youth. Still, the salary crisis hinders the recruitment of competencies despite the need for experts, especially in cybersecurity, and it is necessary to find people to carry out these tasks.

The session also pointed out that a distinction must be made between the cost of the Internet on the fixed network and the Internet on the mobile network. Lebanon is one of the cheapest countries, costing less than $2 for 80GB. The price may be high for a segment of citizens due to successive economic crises and the decline in purchasing power. Still, despite this, the demand from citizens and companies for Internet service has increased. There is a conflict between the costs of securing the service and the purchasing power of the citizen, so currently, the telecommunications sector is struggling to survive. Regarding the implementation of the 5G project in Lebanon, and if it is not implemented, what are the repercussions? The speakers emphasized the importance of developing infrastructure first and setting priorities.

In the discussion about the Electronic Transactions Law issued on 10/10/2018 and its impact on technological development and legislative development, the speakers stated that, in fact, some of the established laws still need to be fully applied.

Session 2: New and Emerging Technologies in Lebanon, Challenges and Opportunities

Coordinators: Digital Transformation and Governance Network, Notre Dame University, St. Joseph University, American University of Beirut

Moderator: Mr. Camille Moukarzel, President at PCA Lebanon & ALMA

Speakers:

Dr. Mariette Awad, Professor E.C.E Department, AUB.

Dr. Fouad Mrad, Senior Program Manager, ESCWA.

Mr. Kousra Sakr, General Manager, Network Automation

Discussions

The session focused on the main challenges in infrastructure, education and economic growth facing the adoption of modern technologies in Lebanon. It also addressed the necessary policies to benefit from the technological revolution, mitigate the impact of the crisis, and make Lebanon a technology-friendly environment in light of the recently approved digital transformation strategy.

Prof. Mariette Awad said that emerging and new technologies are expected to be available within the next five to ten years, which may create significant social and economic impacts. In general, in light of emerging technologies and artificial intelligence, universities stress on the members of the education staff to update the curricula to introduce technology that helps upgrade, for example, an online certificate of artificial intelligence. A workforce with extensive experience characterizes the local markets but needs to be updated regarding new concepts.

She also stressed the need to prepare as a society through awareness and proper governance for adopting the ethics of Artificial Intelligence.

Mr. Kousra Sakr stressed how to stop the brain drain as university students, once they graduate with a valuable bag of specializations such as software, engineering, science, and others, leave the country, which empties the market of the educated workforce, especially in various technological fields.

It is noteworthy that in 2020, 2,400 startups were established in Dubai, while only 100 companies were established in Lebanon, which put this matter among the priorities of the government in Lebanon—noting the importance of developing a project to promote and integrate a productive Lebanese society within the agenda of the government, parliament and the private sector. Professor Sakr also indicated that universities should become major centres for Lebanese research, given their essential role in developing Lebanese industries.

As for Dr Fouad Murad, he spoke about the importance of the school curricula being based on developing new skills referring to ESCWA's recommendations. These can provide multiple job opportunities due to artificial intelligence engines to obtain a more connected education. He also raised the issue of the culture of teamwork and its positive impact on Lebanon's position within the fourth industrial revolution by launching innovation in the private and public sectors. Dr Murad pointed out that we live in an age of technology and artificial intelligence, so we must take advantage of the widely available information and invest it well. He stressed that artificial intelligence in Lebanon should be in the interest of human-centred technology, not the other way around. The Lebanese government should be a partner, follow the innovations of the private sector, and implement the strategy accordingly.

Session 3: Privacy Governed

Coordinator: SMEX Association

Moderator:

Ms. Marianne Rahmeh, Policy Lead- SMEX

Speakers:

Mr. Antoine Assaf, IT expert, Board member at ISOC

Ms. Linda Kassem, attorney and Senior Policy & Legal advisor

Ms. Layal Sakr, Lawyer & Executive Director at "SEEDS" Organization for Legal Initiatives.

Mr. Ammar Abboud, Political Scientist, Election Expert & founding member of the "Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections" (LADE).

Discussions

Despite the legal framework in Lebanon that clearly refers to the protection of personal data, many breaches of privacy and personal data and exposures have been reported in recent years without anyone being held accountable, for example vehicle registration data and voters personal information leaked to political parties.

The Coronavirus crisis imposed online teaching, remote work, and the push towards digital transformation, and accordingly, many institutions that were difficult to imagine turning towards digitization - have turned into digital.

Despite the law on electronic transactions and personal data, privacy in Lebanon is more of a reactive measure than a proactive governance. In addition, many foreign companies and private companies operating inside and outside Lebanon deal with Lebanese citizens, and these companies rely on data in some way. Therefore, it is required to develop a special law that takes care of citizens' privacy and their data.

Dr Kassem first pointed out the need for a legal framework that protects privacy and data and mentioned that the current law for electronic transactions and personal data (81/2018), despite all the criticisms, remains the basis for everything related to electronic transactions and personal data. This Law 81 talked about all data processing of a personal nature and included internationally recognized principles. Chapter V spoke about the conditions for data collection and special provisions. However, among the flaws in the law are the exceptions; for example, those who want to collect personal data only need a permit in cases of external and internal security, crimes and health. Among the solutions proposed is the activation of the Supreme Authority for Data Protection, as it is one of the limited means of protection found in the law.

And when she answered a question about the possibility of prosecution against companies that provide solicited ads that do not include the approval of the exit of Article 32, individuals can claim against these companies; however, foreign companies such as Facebook cannot be sued in Lebanon.

Ms. Sakr reiterated the need to define "consent" for data collection and processing and for the law to say explicitly that it should be free, transparent and informed, noting that the restriction on the right to privacy should be necessary, proportionate and temporary. Moreover, while Law 81 allowed public authorities to obtain data without any protection, she said it did not specify a mechanism for withdrawing consent if it did not suit the person concerned.

With regard to websites, a page on social media becomes public by virtue of the means of publishing, which implies that data become unprotected and available to the public, and when it becomes permissible, it becomes unprotected. For example, not every page on social media is a public page that is subject to criminal laws and the penal code.

One of the areas for improvement in implementing Law 81 is that until now, after four years, there is no independent body to monitor these matters and protect data. For example, in a precedent case, the data of 4 million Lebanese was requested, but a judge did not allow that. In another precedent, during the demonstrations, the Minister of Health asked for access to the data of the injured demonstrators.

Mr. Assaf emphasized, based on his experience in the field of information technology, that the right to privacy should be safeguarded from the infrastructure. He pointed out that Law 81 coincided with the Corona epidemic, which caused chaos in the years 2020 and 2021 in all countries. He also referred to the platforms established by the Lebanese state as solutions for people to register exit, entry and vaccination, leading to the launch of a platform for passports, voters, and support for needy families. However, he stressed the importance of these platforms being safe and protected since their inception and not after their launch. As for companies, he emphasized that they should make an effort to ensure minimum safety standards. Security breaches occur for two reasons: intentional and unintentional violations caused by negligence, which we suffer from in Lebanon. He also agreed with what the speakers said, namely the need for a legal and enforcement mechanism for data protection, such as an independent data protection body, instead of going to a judge and court.

Mr. Assaf also referred to examples from the world; he mentioned the issuance of some data protection laws in the United States and Japan, which are similar to GDPR. He attributed this to the fact that the means of communication are one of the first reasons for issuing such laws. Technology companies collect and use people's data for commercial reasons as they create

Profiles for people are forbidden in European law unless the company obtains the consent of the person concerned. If companies operating from Lebanon want to target European markets, he stressed that European law also applies to electronic data. Therefore those who wish to work within the framework of this law should ensure the security of the devices that store data, and a privacy policy should be developed.

Concerning the situation in Lebanon, he insisted that the law in Lebanon deals with the destruction of personal data after its use, such as passports and others, and to establish a data protection authority to resort to it when any of the data protection rules are breached. However, there are sometimes exceptions, such as the legal right to use the data; for example, if I have a university student's data and I want to give him a scholarship, I provide the information so as not to deprive him of the scholarship.

Ms. Rahma explained how SMEX worked on following up on the platforms that spread in Lebanon during the pandemic period and beyond, to reach a stage where privacy policies are published, and communicated with those responsible for the platforms to improve their security and protect users' data. For example, the platform for arrivals from abroad was insecure, and privacy and data protection were not by design but rather a response .

Mr. Abboud addressed the issue of leaking voter data in the recent Lebanese elections and how political parties communicated with the voters. For example, if a candidate wins due to the use of the people's data, his candidacy is dropped, or he is prevented from running for several rounds. Therefore, he recommended an independent election body for elections and data protection, protecting voters from misleading information on social media and conducting a digital forensic audit to follow up on breaches such as leaking voter data.

He agreed with colleagues on the importance of "consent" and that it should be time-limited and transparent so that it can be monitored, and people should be aware of their rights. He also pointed out that under the current law, monitoring entities cannot file complaints when they notice any violation, calling for the legal change to allow associations to file a complaint on behalf of citizens if they know that a defect has occurred. However, in some cases, disclosure of information may be necessary, such as preventing tampering and adding the votes of deceased persons.

Session 4: The role of Technology in Safeguarding Human Rights

I- The Right to Education

Coordinators: UNESCO and ESCWA

Moderator: Dr. Sally Hammoud, university professor of media and technology

Speakers:

Mr. Imad Ashkar, Director General of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Dr. Fawzi Baroud, Vice President of Information Technology at Notre Dame University

Mr. Elie Saab, Education Technology Syndicate

Discussions:

The discussion touched on the ability of educational technology to make education more accessible, affordable, and effective for all. Some supporting examples were presented, especially for those living in remote or disadvantaged areas. There was an emphasis on the importance of every student having equal access to the educational technology and resources they need to succeed. From here, we must work to bridge the digital divide and provide equal access to technology and the Internet.

The ease with which educational technology can play a role for educators in creating and delivering engaging lessons and providing customized learning experiences for students is explored. The use of educational technology to help track student progress is essential, as is adequate support for teachers, enabling them to tailor their lessons according to the needs of each student.

Discussions also covered providing the appropriate and necessary ground for education. The talk was about the importance of proper training and support for both students and teachers on the one hand and investing in the required infrastructure and technology on the other hand. Teachers must be trained to incorporate multimedia and interactive elements into their lessons, which helps to engage and motivate students. By using education technology, we can help improve access to education for all while maintaining and improving the quality of education.

The discussion also touched on the importance of applying Open Educational Resources (OER) in all educational institutions. OER helps teachers access the work of other teachers and benefit from knowledge transfer. OER is also an environmentally friendly solution for people who cannot afford to purchase educational materials. From here, governments should review the curricula for all levels of education to provide more training for the teaching staff members and other staff working in the field of education as part of government policies. Governments need to regulate OER among the various stakeholders.

II: Online Violence against Women

Coordinator: Maharat Foundation

Moderator: Ms. Halima Tabiaa, journalist

Speakers:

Ms. Abir Chebaro, Gender Expert

Ms. Judy Asmar, journalist, Writer and Content Creator

Ms. Nada Anid, Founder and Director-Madanyat

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Discussions

The session shed light on the current situation of women activists and their participation and involvement in the past and present political discourse.

The need to be legal frameworks that help provide safe spaces for women to express themselves online. The lack of safety and electronic protection for women in online spaces is still a negative factor. The bullying hinders their presence and interaction on social media platforms, as they are exposed to threats and harassment. More investment in raising technological capabilities to secure more protection: Women political candidates and activists indicate the need for more resources and skills to help them manage their accounts on social media, protect their privacy and enable them to confront hate speech and violence online.

Gender imbalance: The session shed light on the gender gaps on the Internet in terms of comments and interaction, especially in dealing with male and female candidates for elections, as the discourse directed at female candidates includes discrimination and gender-based violence that reflects a patriarchal society.

Digital Media and Gender Violence: The session discussed the impact of violence on political activists, the psychological pressures they are subjected to, and its negative impact on their active participation in political discourse due to the stereotypical violence they are exposed to, especially from electronic armies.

Future planning towards better participation: Madanyat revealed some future steps in monitoring violence against women and girls in cooperation with the Maharat Foundation by periodically tracking the discourse of violence and hatred against women in the political field. This observatory will accompany the upcoming municipal elections.

Second: workshops

WS 1: High-Performance Computing Facility in Lebanon

Organizer: Ogero

Speakers:

Dr. Imad Abu Rached, Director of Strategic Planning and Project Management at OGERO

Dr. Haitham Zaraket, HPC4L Scientific Director and Fiber Optics Lab Director

This session presented the framework of joint cooperation between the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Switzerland on the one hand and the Ministry of Telecommunications/OGERO and the National Council for Scientific Research with a handful of major universities in Lebanon on the other hand (Lebanese University, the American University of Beirut, St Joseph University, Beirut Arab University, the Lebanese American University and the Holy Spirit University-Kaslik), where CERN has donated a high-performance computing facility. Cooperation on this project began in 2015 and was completed in 2022, and in the first quarter of 2023, students will start using this Super Computer.

This project is fully supported by the Lebanese government, which issued a decree to complete the necessary measures to put it into practice. OGERO committed itself to this project, so it secured the appropriate location in Bir Hassan, created the space required for the information centre and equipped it according to the international specifications specified for the installation and operation of equipment, as well as prepared another site for expansion when

needed, and it secured a high-speed internet connection with Geneva and the power and operations of this system in cooperation with the Interested stakeholders from governmental, private and international entities with the aim of developing national research capabilities. Currently, OGERO is responsible for hosting and installing the equipment and securing the Internet connection, while the universities are responsible for managing the system and supporting users.

In terms of importance of this national project, this high-capacity computer is extremely important for the development of scientific research in universities and industrial companies and research centres. It leads to strengthening the cyber infrastructure in Lebanon and to building the research capabilities of Lebanese university students by expanding data analysis and computing capabilities, as Lebanon has become Part of the global advanced technology group. This project is an introduction to the development of innovation in Lebanon through university students. It will allow Lebanon to advance technologically and in scientific research, create new opportunities for students and exchange scientific information with CERN and universities worldwide. The personnel involved in this project have undergone training inside and outside Lebanon in Geneva.

The most beneficial users of the HPC system are academic institutions, scientific researchers and engineers who face particular challenges when using technology, as these will be able to run different types of simulations at very high speeds, which increases the chances of scientific discoveries at a faster rate and thus brings Lebanon closer to other developed countries in terms of the technology gap. Students will also be given unique opportunities to gain practical and technical experience by operating and using this supercomputer.

Areas of use for this supercomputer range from particle physics data analysis and detector simulation to urban energy simulation. It can also be used in bioinformatics, healthcare (epidemiology,..) and social sciences. Several sectors benefit from this project, the most important of which is oil and gas, medical and engineering, and general sciences.

WS2: The need for AI Education

Organizer: Zaka

Speaker:

Mr. Christophe Zogby, Founder and CEO of Zaka and Beirut AI, Lecturer at USEK University

This session presented the definition of artificial intelligence and its types, in addition to explaining some of its applications, such as modern agriculture and its use by applications such as Twitter and Amazon. The workshop also summarized the industrial revolution that led to current automation models.

The speaker touched on the challenges faced by artificial intelligence, how to overcome them, and the reflection of this intelligence on the labor market as a result of the creation of new types of jobs, which means the need to develop the necessary policies to facilitate the adoption of artificial intelligence by empowering the labor force through study and training.

WS3: Cyber safety and security for effective digital transformation

Organizers: Digital Transformation and Governance Network and LITA

Speakers:

Dr. Khalil Khairallah, Health Sector Coordinator at DTGN and Secretary of the LITA

Dr. Mona Al-Ashkar Jabbour, Prof. of Law, Head of LITA & Head of Policies, Legislations and Human Rights DTGN

Mr. Jean-Marie Al-Basha, Head of IT & IoT at C.B. Electronics. Cybersecurity consultant and teacher of programming, IoT and networking.

Mr. Fayez Saqr, Head of, the Cyber Intelligence at Potech Consulting.

Dr. Odin Salloum, Prof. of Law at the LU, Head of the Legal Department at the Legal Informatics Research Center.

The session began by defining the meaning of cybersecurity, the types of electronic attacks and their targets, and the classification of threats to network security, especially the interruption of the Internet, which causes significant material and productivity losses and lost opportunities.

The elements of Internet continuity are primarily material and must be secured, but they require other aspects, such as building trust and keeping up with advanced legislation and policies.

Effectively, Lebanese Law No. 81 needs to catch up with advanced legislation, especially European legislation, as it did not focus on securing the Internet infrastructure clearly and did not secure or practically facilitate data protection.

In an explanation of the reality of the Internet in Lebanon, the service deteriorated after the end of 2019 due to multiple crises. A questionnaire was conducted for a large sample of users, as a result of which it was found that most people who use the Internet for their work resort to multiple sources; if one source fails, they rely on another. The Internet service is unstable and may be interrupted often and for months at times, and among the important reasons is the power outage or the lack of maintenance due to the increase in its costs, which leads to breakdowns. The speakers suggested applying Law 431, as it has yet to be implemented, and creating the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority to control the chaos in the sector and protect people before the private sector enters the investment. Municipalities might have an essential role in attracting investments in this sector.

From a legal point of view, more effective means of proof must be adopted in terms of the risks on the Internet and to protect. And because the person responsible for the damage may not be known, the jurists turned to the service providers and made them accountable for the illegal content.

The French legislator must be followed in determining the nature of the apparent illegality, determining the methods of notification, and proving the notification by the aggrieved party.

The last intervention emphasized proactive protection, and the technical teams, especially with Corona, have to adopt a new methodology to protect the company, its personnel and its customers by searching for the threat outside, as well as safeguarding its published files and addresses, detecting sites that impersonate the company's name, and taking measures against it. Awareness has a vital role to play so that we do not fall into any trap.

A reliable infrastructure remains a condition for the use of the Internet, as well as the adoption of modern technologies, and the development and implementation of accompanying legislation, a need for its security and continuity for a better Lebanon.

C - Outputs and recommendations

On Internet sustainability:

- The absence of planning and future vision for the telecommunications sector and the Internet and the lack of consensus or cooperation between politicians and decision-makers in Lebanon lead to the fragmentation of the Internet.
- The risks of fragmentation have increased due to the challenges the national operator faces, whether financial, political or related to energy sources, which lead to the interruption of Internet services and communications.
- These challenges will not only face individuals and societies to connect to the Internet but will also disrupt the economy, trade, and supply chains, isolating Lebanon from the outside world.
- The Telecommunications Law No. 431 of 2002 must be implemented, and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) should be activated.
- A National Internet Exchange Point (National IXP) should be established, and the plan for transitioning to renewable energy in the telecommunications and Internet sectors should be launched.
- The global economy relies on the internet and digital technologies, making regulatory measures and policies more critical than ever. But if these policies are fragmented and not coordinated with stakeholders, the consequences for the Lebanese people and economy could be dire.

- Focusing on the digital economy as it is a global trend. Lebanese officials must give priority and work to avoid fragmentation of the Internet and consider the right to access the Internet as a fundamental human right for the Lebanese citizen.
- Working on the modernization of traditional educational curricula, which is one of the causes of Internet fragmentation, and benefiting from the advantages of the knowledge and technology revolutions and integrating them into the curricula to positively affect building capacities and skills and influence the Internet use and its tools.

On New and Emerging Technologies in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities

- Curricula must be updated to include technology at the heart of teaching.
- Stop brain drain, especially among university students.
- The need for Lebanese universities to become major centres for research, given their essential role in developing Lebanese industries.
- Developing a project to promote and integrate a productive digital Lebanese society on the agenda of the government, parliament and the private sector.
- Prepare as a society to adopt AI ethics through awareness and proper governance,.
- The Lebanese government should collaborate with, follow the private sector's innovations, and implement the appropriate strategy.
- The curricula can explore new skills recommended by IGOs, such as the newly ESCWA-developed skills listing.

On Governance of Privacy

- There should be a legal framework that protects privacy and data.
- The Higher Authority for Data Protection should be activated, as it is one of the limited means of protection found in the law.
- The law should include a precise definition of "consent" for data collection and processing. This consent should be free, transparent, informed, and limited to the time and data to be collected.
- Not every page on social media is public, subject to criminal laws and the Penal Code.
- The right to privacy should be safeguarded starting from the infrastructure.
- Companies should make an effort to ensure minimum safety standards.
- The law in Lebanon should pay attention to destroying personal data after using them, such as passports and others.
- A data protection authority should be established to have recourse in case of a breach of any data protection rules.
- Voters should be protected from misleading information on social media.
- There should be a digital forensic audit to follow up on breaches, such as the leaking of voter data.

- The legal change should include allowing civil society associations to file a complaint on behalf of citizens if they know that a defect has occurred.
- Determining the cases in which information can be disclosed, such as election times, but specifying the reasons, the data that can be published, and the period, and finding a safe way to protect it and protect the privacy of individuals.

On violence against women on the Internet

- Electronic platforms have a role in enhancing the digital presence of women to become political activists.
- Digital platforms must become more inclusive.
- Reconsidering the legal framework for digital media to better manage and protect women on social media platforms.
- Develop and implement mechanisms to combat disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech, especially when it comes to political speeches.
- Training female political activists on digital security.
- Hold offenders accountable for any breach of Community Guidelines, helping free expression to flourish online.