

Taking Stock of IGF 2023 and Suggesting Improvements for IGF 2024

IGF 2023 preparatory process (timeline, call for issues and session proposals, session selection, MAG meetings, capacity development etc.)

- Thanks to a timely announcement of the host country and MAG composition, sufficient time was allocated to the preparatory process for IGF 2023, which commenced in good time early in the year.
- While internal planning and decision-making were at times laborious and slow, communication towards the community regarding themes, event format, as well as session types, deadlines and decisions was timely.
- The planning process in the submission phase of the sessions was efficient, allowing submitters to have a clear view of the requirements and timeline to submit proposals.
- Following the session proposal submission and selection phase, however, IGF participants and session organisers, potential high-level speakers and non-MAG member contributors to the main sessions received little to no communication on opportunities for engagement or insight into the planning process which brought uncertainty and confusion on the opportunities to consider for i.e. the nomination of high-level speakers.
- The professionalism and support of the staff working at the IGF Secretariat was greatly appreciated both during as well as in the run-up to IGF 2023.

IGF 2023 overall programme: thematic focus, structure and flow

- The overarching theme of IGF 2023 (The Internet We Want – Empowering All People), was pertinent for the context of the Forum and tied well with the main piece of input that the IGF Leadership Panel brought to the discussion. However, while the overarching title was broad enough to include dialogue on major global Internet governance issues, it remained partly unused by the community. This resulted in a sense of disconnect between the workpiece of the Leadership Panel and the focus of the broader IGF community.
- Concentrating the IGF programme into a few concrete thematic tracks worked very well in past years (especially in 2019 and 2020). While the same approach was to some extent retained in 2022, the 18th edition of the IGF deviated from this approach, with over 300 sessions being nested under 8 thematic tracks. Going back to a multi-themed IGF brings confusion to the attendees, especially newcomers, who come across a very information-heavy programme across numerous thematic tracks. In response to this, it is advised that the programme reflects a more punchy and condensed selection of thematic tracks that cover the variety of topics reflected in the IGF discussions.
- Going forward, careful attention must be paid to avoid adding further themes and topics to the annual IGF in order not to overcrowd the programme and maintain a focused and manageable agenda. For the future, we recommend no more than three tracks with clear, concise, and easily understandable themes. This will also help communication and outreach ahead of the event.

- Aligning workshops and main sessions under the thematic tracks continues to work well and is helpful to the MAG in choosing workshops, defining thematic tracks and organising main sessions. However, attention must be paid that the number and focus of sub-themes remain manageable. Having too many thematic tracks results in only a handful of sessions per thematic track, which leaves attendees with the impression that discussions remained superficial and did not allow for in-depth exploration of a topic.
- Efforts should be strengthened to align other sessions that are part of the IGF programme (Open Forums, Town Halls, DCs, BPFs, NRI collaborative sessions, etc.) as well as pre-events under the thematic tracks, from the start of the submission and evaluation process.

IGF 2023 Hybrid format design and experience

- We commend the work of the IGF Secretariat and the MAG on enabling an inclusive session participation for both speakers and attendees through the hybrid format. Their devoted time and efforts to advise on the particularities of organising such an event were immensely appreciated.
- The host country's efforts and investment in providing technical equipment and staff to support the engagement of both onsite and online participants were also greatly valued.
- While the 3D venue and virtual booth was a very much appreciated idea, many participants were not aware of it and booth organizers received little advice and support in setting this up in a way that would add value to participants. Should the idea of a virtual booth be retained for future IGFs, the planning process should also include the appropriate public-facing communication of the virtual booth features. The planning process also needs to start a lot earlier, with the close and active involvement of booth organisers who are participating for the first time in the event.

IGF 2023 logistics (website, mobile app, schedule, registration, access and use of online platform, bilateral meeting system, security etc.)

- While the IGF 2023 website contained comprehensive information on the event, finding the relevant information required extensive browsing.
- An important element that caused some uncertainty to a majority of the participants' planning process, was the significant delay until the interactive programme was live and operational, which was not until a week before the IGF. In addition, the differentiation of the nomenclature of rooms as well as sessions, between the Excel (static) version of the programme and the interactive (online) programme caused confusion and duplicated work in the planning process, to ensure that the high-level invitees, speakers and attendees have the necessary information for their personal schedules. Lastly, with regard to the interactive version of the schedule, some sessions were not uploaded, while they were included in the excel version of the schedule. However, the IGF Secretariat was very responsive, efficient and supportive in ensuring that all the necessary changes were made, which was much appreciated.
- Registration for the individual sessions seemed laborious and confusing to many, at least in the initial stages of the event. Many did not realise that after registering to the overall event, individual registrations for individual sessions were also required by adding sessions to one's personal schedule. It was also confusing to many how to find the participation link, once the session was added to a participant's calendar.

- We encourage to retain the approach of not giving moderator rights (camera and speaking rights) by default to attendees, as this enables a risk-free session, where attendees cannot unmute themselves by accident, or turn their camera on, which would cause disruptions to the session flow.
- The publication of the meeting link of each session ahead of time, earlier than 24-hours before the session, was especially appreciated. This allowed for some certainty in the planning process of sessions organisers, especially for those with more than two online speakers.
- However, it is important to note that in some cases the link provided to the session was not corresponding to the appropriate “streaming room”, with online participants having difficulties joining the session online.
- The ability to follow sessions live-streamed on the IGF’s YouTube channel helped in increasing access and flexibility for participants to follow discussions.
- It was very welcome that recordings of individual sessions were made available following the session. This practice should be maintained for upcoming IGFs as well, whether held in-person or remotely. In addition, it was greatly appreciated that the editing of the recordings of the sessions had a polished final result, allowing for their direct dissemination to wider audiences from the session organisers and participants.
- The IGF website worked well throughout the IGF annual meeting, with no major difficulties experienced as in previous years (especially in the first days of the event), due to server overload. However, some website problems persisted during the session submission phase.
- Communication activities between the IGF Secretariat, past and future host countries and the UN DESA Secretariat require better coordination, especially on social media, so that individual efforts can be reinforced, and a wider audience can be reached.

Intersessional activities and NRIs at IGF 2023

Best Practice Forums and Policy Networks at IGF 2023: please comment on process, content, and in particular on how these intersessional activities were included in the annual IGF programme.

- The intersessional work of the BPFs and Policy Networks are strong examples of how the IGF can gather, catalogue, and share valuable tangible outputs without being prescriptive.
- Efforts to archive the outputs of the intersessional work streams and BPF documents and publish them on the IGF website are appreciated. They should continue to be promoted in a manner that is accessible and searchable to the lay user who may not be familiar with the IGF and its structure (or indeed with the terminology of “BPFs” and “PNs”).
- Continued efforts should be made to better target communication and promotion efforts of these outputs.

Dynamic Coalitions at IGF 2023: please comment on process, content, and in particular on how these intersessional activities were included in the annual IGF programme.

N/A

National, Regional and Youth IGFs at IGF 2023: please comment on process, content, and in particular on how the NRIs were included in the annual IGF programme.

N/A

IGF 2023 programme: please comment on the content, speakers and quality of discussions

IGF 2023 Sessions

– *Workshops*

- Once the IGF 2023 themes were established, the workshop proposal and selection process were well organised.
- The extensive thematic approach of 8 thematic tracks at IGF 2023, caused some confusion in the categorisation of sessions – with some workshops corresponding to more than one thematic tracks. There was also overlap between selected workshops, especially among themes that were very similar. We strongly recommend selecting no more than three sub-themes for future IGFs.
- We commend the efforts of the IGF Secretariat and the MAG to foster balance and diversity in terms of speakers, as well as stakeholder group representation. We support that this will remain a continuous effort, where the IGF Secretariat and the MAG will strive for progress compared to the years before. It is particularly important to ensure stakeholder diversity among workshop speakers, incentivizing the participation of underrepresented stakeholder groups (especially government and business representatives).

– *Main Sessions*

- The Main Sessions play a useful role in the programme, providing a space for potentially different and broader discussions on a topic and bringing in more high-level speakers. In this way, they help extend the appeal beyond participants who regularly attend IGF meetings, and in particular among government and business constituencies who have historically had lower attendance levels. For this reason, it is imperative that enough time and careful attention is devoted to their planning.
- It worked well that the Main Sessions were coupled with the IGF 2023 thematic tracks. The overlap between these thematic tracks, however, was clearly apparent with some Main Sessions having similar focus and discussions, also repeating some of the speakers. Past practice of having fewer thematic tracks, each with a dedicated main session should be retained, as it works better for both programming and communication purposes.
- Two hours per session seemed to be the right amount of time to allow for a deeper dive into discussions and allow for audience input, while still maintaining the interest of participants throughout the session. In the past there were occasions where no other sessions were running in parallel with Main Sessions, thus allowing for wider participation as well as elevating the status of these sessions on the IGF program – this should continue to be an example to follow going forward.
- Providing synergies between the Main Sessions and the IGF intersessional work, as well as the work of NRIs gives an extra opportunity to raise the visibility and impact of their work. This opportunity should be further explored in upcoming IGFs.

IGF 2023 High-level leaders track

- The efforts of the host country, the IGF Secretariat and UN DESA to attract government officials, legislators as well as business, civil society and technical community representatives, especially for the high-level sessions was well received by the community. In addition, the alignment of the IGF programme with the G7 agenda was especially appreciated, as it elevated the relevance and timeliness of the discussions, attracting more high-level participation to the Forum.

- It was unfortunate that many high-level participants were unable to attend the IGF in person, due to the unpredictability of the planning process and lack of follow-up beyond a generic invitation shared with prospective high-level participants. In the future, efforts should be strengthened to encourage high-level participants to engage with other IGF sessions and events aside from the panel they speak on. In particular, we advise that invitations to high-level attendees are sent in advance, including a clear engagement proposal following their RSVPs. This will not only drive further interest but will also maximise the input of those high-level attendees to the discussion, giving them and their teams the appropriate time to prepare.

IGF 2023 Parliamentary track

- Continuing the tradition of the Parliamentary track started in 2019 was welcomed. Efforts should be made to better integrate this track with the other IGF activities and ensure the participation of parliamentarians in other IGF sessions and interaction with IGF participants from all stakeholder groups.

IGF 2023 Youth Track

N/A

How do you see the IGF 2023 programme content from a gender perspective?

- Many sessions on the IGF programme have reported to have addressed gender issues as part of their discussion. Most, session organisers have demonstrated efforts to strive for gender balance on their panels. Efforts must be sustained in this regard to ensure there are no sessions on the IGF agenda with a disproportionate underrepresentation of women.

IGF 2023 Village

- The IGF village is an integral part of the in-person IGF experience, providing opportunities for networking, information sharing and discovery. The efforts of the host country team to accommodate requests, set up and service the village were very much appreciated. Based on past experience, booths have a higher success rate when the village is part of the same building where sessions are taking place. This was partially the case at IGF 2023, where participants had to go through the exhibition area in order to reach the building where the sessions took place. This allowed for more visibility for booth exhibitors, and more attendees traffic at the exhibition area. However, the one-building approach should be, if possible, pursued at future IGFs, where the attendees can easily follow sessions and visit the booths all in one place.
- Looking ahead to 2024, organising the IGF in a hybrid fashion is strongly advised. If a virtual IGF village is planned to be part of the hybrid experience, it must be adequately advertised to allow for meaningful and interactive participation of attendees. The planning process for virtual booths needs to start early with the close and active involvement of booth organisers.

IGF 2023 communications, outreach and outputs

Overview of the IGF 2023 Outputs is available at <https://www.intgovforum.org/content/igf-2023-outputs>

- With regards to the reporting process of the sessions, we advise for a more timely and detailed communication to the session organisers, especially newcomers, of the process thus ensuring their timely action to the reporting requirements. In particular, the notice around the 2-hour requirement for submission of the short report should be more visible and clear to all session organisers, both on the back-end webpage of each session, as well as through dedicated communications/emails before the IGF starts. Ideally, an automated email notification should go out to session organisers on the day that their session takes place, reminding them of this requirement. In addition, seeing the delay in the submission of the short reports from the majority of the participants within the 2-hour timeframe (as seen through the communications from the IGF Secretariat to the session organisers), we suggest that the deadline is extended to the morning of the day after, for each session. This will allow enough time for the session organisers (especially those organising sessions taking place towards the end of the day), to submit their input in a timely manner.
- Showcasing the various IGF outputs promptly on the IGF website was very welcome and useful to demonstrate the value IGF discussions bring to the community. Capturing and promoting them successfully helps increase the reach of these conversations beyond the IGF session participants.
- Commendable efforts to attract journalists were made, especially on the side of the host country inviting national and local media. These efforts could be amplified through a systematic outreach and media strategy to identify relevant news outlets (especially on the international level) ahead of time and sharing information on topics expected to be covered at the IGF, as well as high-level participants in attendance.
- Better interaction between the IGF communications team and the communications team of participating organisations is also advised. This could be either through a key messages document, or toolkits that can be distributed to the communications teams in advance of the Forum, allowing them to act as multipliers of the IGF mission and messages.
- The IGF messages report has an important role in bridging consecutive IGF cycles, highlighting the various IGF outputs, and ensure consistency between them, therefore enhancing the impact and value-add of the IGF for future discussions. Efforts should be made to better inform participants on the process of drafting of the messages and how their session summaries contribute to the final IGF messages. Session participants should also be made aware of the possibility of commenting on the draft messages. Sharing such information with session participants helps improve the balance in participation, which in turn increases the legitimacy of messages.

Any other comments on the IGF 2023

N/A

What are your suggestions for improvements for IGF 2024?

IGF 2024 preparatory process (timeline, call for session proposals and session selection, MAG and Open Consultations meetings etc.)

- As the hybrid format has notable benefits for accessibility and participation, organisers should strongly consider retaining this format. Session organisers should be encouraged to include remote participants where that helps provide a geographic or policy perspective not necessarily possible because some relevant experts do not have the time and/or necessary funds to travel to an overseas meeting. Before COVID-19, remote participants were largely secondary in practice, even if organisers were encouraged to make time and use tools to provide space for questions from remote participants, IGF 2023 proved once more that it is possible to host successful sessions and fruitful discussions with many speakers spread across the globe. Benefitting from the experiences of the last three years, we should increasingly think in terms of hybrid events that will allow for a broader range of people to participate.
- To support the profile of the IGF and to recognise the considerable investment by host countries, a high-level leaders' event (or similar) should continue to be on the agenda.
- *Agenda*
 - A more focused set of topics and policy questions is strongly advised to support a more streamlined agenda, with session formats that allow for greater participation from non-panel members. The IGF should not have more than three tracks with clear, concise, and easily understandable themes that do not overlap. The agenda and themes should be informed by the agendas of major international events and policy discussions to enhance the relevance of IGF outputs.
- *Planning process*
 - There is an increasing need for a clear and easily understandable process, through which the community can contribute to the IGF agenda in a bottom-up fashion. A calendar and a visual representation of the process should be made public to outline the planning cycle for the IGF in a simple, yet comprehensive format, to illustrate the agenda and programme-setting process and to mark deadlines and engagement points for the community. This could also form the backbone of a communication and outreach strategy, creating a year-long calendar for outreach messages and social media content where relevant updates can be shared on the preparatory process and track narratives and input from the community can be invited at each milestone.
 - The 2023 interactive programme was greatly appreciated; however, we would propose that one time zone (preferably the hosting country time zone), is used across all calendars (in the excel and online formats as well as on the individual session pages), regardless of the geographical location of each user, which causes an automatic conversion. Such an approach will take away confusion in the planning process especially keeping in mind that session organisers are strongly encouraged to select speakers across regions. A prompt action to convert to the local time of the user could be suggested as an option to the interactive programme, for attendees who may plan to follow the event fully virtually, and thus wish to opt for such a conversion. It would be greatly appreciated if the different updates on the programme of the IGF appear more clearly, in order for each user to know when the calendar was last updated.
 - We would also advise that the IGF 2024 interactive schedule is published earlier, at least two-three weeks before the IGF starts, allowing participants, especially newcomers to get acquainted with the way it works, as well as having enough time to browse through it, and add sessions of interest to their personal programme. This will also facilitate any changes

that may need to be reflected in the programme, i.e. in the case of missing sessions or any replacements.

- The IGF planning process for intersessional work, working groups, main sessions and other MAG and community lead activities should be further strengthened by setting clear measures of success, standards of work, and a critical number of people committed to lead/support the activity across all stakeholder groups. This would require an analysis of required resources and responsibilities, including those of the Secretariat and any consultants, to ensure that any initiated work (traditionally part of the IGF or newly proposed) will be successful. There should also be clear mandates of authorisation for each intersessional work stream.
- *Communication*
 - There is an ever increasing need to raise wider awareness of existing IGF outputs and support their better dissemination.
 - Further discussion should be encouraged on what defines success for the IGF, what is meant by tangible outputs and what problem the outputs are intended to address. The IGF Secretariat should develop a work plan to identify, gather and better market existing outputs of the IGF. This would roughly follow the steps below:
 - Identify existing outputs and outcomes, both written products and success stories of collaboration / impact
 - Organise and cross-reference these by topic, and possibly with tags, so that these can be easily searched
 - Identify potential audiences
 - Targeted outreach and communication to better market the outputs
 - This work plan should be supported by a timeline, an analysis of required resources and responsibilities, and indicators and measures of success. The Secretariat should be equipped with resources to be able to execute this plan.
 - Members of the IGF Leadership Panel could be counted on to further disseminate the messages across their networks.
 - To improve the marketing of IGF outputs, the following should be considered:
 - Pare down intersessional work streams to allow for more concentrated effort and better support for selected work.
 - Task the IGF Secretariat (not a recurring MAG Working Group on Outreach and Communication) with outreach efforts and dissemination of existing outputs (policy material, reports, and case studies of successful cooperation/projects that are rooted in IGF meetings and discussions). Guest blogs or interviews about IGF success stories could also be considered.
 - Equip IGF participants with a communications / social media toolbox or guidance on how they can help disseminate messages. This would help increase outreach and enable participants to act as multipliers to official IGF communication.
 - Ensure close coordination on communication activities between the IGF Secretariat, the UN DESA communications team and the host country communications team to avoid duplication of efforts and mutually reinforce messages.
 - The legitimacy, accountability and balance of IGF outputs must be held to the highest standards:

- The balance of stakeholders needs to be maintained in every work stream of the IGF in order not to undermine their legitimacy and to implement the multistakeholder approach which is intrinsic to the IGF.
- Outputs of any intersessional work must ensure accurate reflection of all opinions.
- The MAG should consider ways to raise profile of the IGF and strengthen the participation of underrepresented groups and regions and enhance the credibility of IGF work streams by addressing their balance and ensuring representation of regions and stakeholders. Capacity-building programs aimed at underrepresented groups can help ensure meaningful participation.

IGF 2024 overall programme structure and flow

- Concentrating the IGF programme into a small number of thematic tracks in 2019 and 2020 was a very welcome idea and translated well into the final programme of the IGF. The 2021-2023 editions seemed to gradually move further away from this precedent. The idea of three (but not more) thematic tracks should be maintained going forward to help streamline the agenda.
- It is important to continue the practice of consulting the broader IGF community on issues to be discussed at the IGF, that will inform the MAG's decision on the topics for thematic tracks. Furthermore, when setting the IGF's agenda, the MAG should be informed of the priorities of other international policy discussions on Internet governance and broader digital matters. The IGF Leadership Panel should be counted on to advise on such matters.
- Aligning workshop proposals under thematic tracks works well. Efforts should be strengthened to align other sessions that are part of the official IGF programme (Open Forums, DCs, BPFs, NRI collaborative sessions, etc.) as well as pre-events, under the thematic tracks, from the start of the submission and evaluation process.
- To ensure that the preparatory phase and Day 0 event as well as the high-level portion of the IGF programme continue to fulfil their potential going forward, efforts should be made that these also support the tracks and themes of the annual event.
- An exchange between past and future host countries and MAG members on potential improvements and ideas for preparatory, Day 0 and high-level events and the overall IGF programme would be welcome.

IGF 2024 programme content (thematic approach, session types, speakers profiles)

- IGF communities and intersessional work should continue to be included and featured in Main Sessions on topics of interest and relevance to them, to contribute to a more cohesive and issue-focused agenda, as well as overall a more collegial atmosphere.
- Clear guidelines and timelines are useful both for session proposers and evaluators on the process of how session proposals finally make it onto the programme of the annual meeting (tracks, sub-themes, etc.). Clear guidelines are also needed on how other sessions (Open Forums, Dynamic Coalitions and National Regional Initiatives) fit into the thematic programme, as well as on their evaluation.
- A reinforced communication campaign would be helpful ahead of the workshop proposal process to ensure those new to the IGF are aware of the various possibilities to be actively involved in the upcoming IGF well in advance of the annual meeting. This should also include information on the possibility of proposing other types of activities for the IGF

programme that are not suitable for a workshop format (networking, publication launch, hackathon, etc.)

- Such a communication campaign should be supported by a rigorous timetable, guidelines and toolkits and build on the network of NRIs as well as that of MAG members to act as multipliers.

Community intersessional activities and National, Regional and Youth IGFs: how these could best connect with the IGF 2024 process?

- IGF resources are not as unlimited as the appetite for groups to come together to work on new issues. The MAG should discuss and consider a mechanism to anticipate how to deal with the increased interest in DCs, BPFs, PNs, NRIs as well as MAG working groups. These activities all compete for the same limited IGF staff support, and at times stakeholder representatives' support, all of which only stretch so thin.
- A turnover policy should be considered, activities that have reached their goals or have lost the support of the community should be sunset to allow resources for new ones. There is value in exploring new and innovative ideas, but this should be about quality over quantity – there needs to be a clear focus on the quality and strategic goals of such activities. In addition, efforts should be made to ensure that any new activity has not just the interest, but the active support and foreseeable engagement of a critical mass of people from the wider IGF community, and particular attention is paid to stakeholder, regional and gender balance.

IGF 2024 participants: who to invite and how to inter-connect participants?

- Efforts need to continue to attract government and business stakeholders to the IGF. Participation of high-level policymakers drives interest from their counterparts from other regions and stakeholder groups. Efforts should be made to continue the trend for the involvement of top-level actors.

Any other comments on the IGF 2024?

You are welcome to comment on possible improvements of the IGF as it pertains to the IGF mandate, United Nations Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and Our Common Agenda.

Enhancing business participation at IGF

- In order to incentivise further participation by the private sector, the following suggestions could be considered:
 - Creating a dedicated space for business-government interactions that foster actionable discussions between counterparts, and align with the broader Internet governance agenda and how businesses can support deploy global digital initiatives, such as the Internet We Want vision, the Global Digital Compact and the UN High-Level Advisory Body on AI.
 - Organising thematic, working-level roundtables facilitating dialogue between businesses and the broader IGF community would contribute to the multistakeholder model of discussions. Open discussions and moderated fireside chats featuring high-level representatives from business can enhance meaningful and impactful engagement on digital policy initiatives, priorities, and trends with

the broader IGF community. This would bring a more organised approach and a clear structure of business contributions to the IGF agenda, which often is unclear or overwhelming for participants and attendees to engage with.

IGF as a venue for multistakeholder input to global digital dialogues

- As the only open, multistakeholder process under the UN umbrella, where all stakeholders participate in a dialogue on an equal footing, we advise that the IGF is presented as an opportunity for multistakeholder input as the Global Digital Compact (GDC) is being developed and as follow up once the GDC is adopted. This will ensure that an effective multistakeholder model in global digital policy is maintained, building on existing work and not creating new structures that would add more layers to the already complex Internet governance system.