# Input from the Swiss Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) to the stocktaking consultation conducted by the IGF Secretariat

OFCOM Switzerland thanks for the opportunity to take part in this stocktaking exercise and would like to share the following inputs:

## *1. Taking Stock of the IGF 2020: programming, outputs, preparatory process, community intersessional activities and the event itself*

### *What worked well?*
- The IGF proved to be **resilient** in difficult times. The switch to an online conference generally worked very well and the virtual IGF was well organized.
- The IGF discussions proved to be **politically relevant:** The Forum was able to identify and discuss emerging topics such as the interlinkages between the **environment and digitalisation** (thanks to a separate thematic track) as well as **Covid-19.**
- The discussions at the IGF 2020 showed clear support for the **UNSG's "Roadmap on Digital Cooperation"** and the steps foreseen therein towards an **"IGF+".**
- The online conference allowed for **more diverse and inclusive participation** (in particular from the Global South, Youth, NRIs and Parliamentarians), among others also through the "We the internet" project. IGF 2020 marked a new participants' record with over 6000 participants.
- The discussions were **more structured** thanks to the four main tracks.
- The **"voluntary pledges"** were a good innovation (although there was unfortunately not that much feedback, see below).
- The **new conference website** was very useful and allowed for better overview over the 275 sessions.

### *What worked not so well?*
- Compared to the last three years, there was **less high-level political presence** (maybe due to the online format?). To our knowledge, the Swiss President was the only representative at head of state level (she contributed with a video statement).
- There was rather low active participation from **government representatives** as well as from **private sector representatives** (particularly on CEO-level).
- Although IGF 2020 produced a wealth of outcomes, in our opinion there was a **potential confusion on the messages:** There were high-level track and main track "messages", and in addition there were "key take-aways" and "session recommendations". Maybe fewer but clearer outcomes might be more valuable?
- There was a certain disconnect between main sessions and high-level sessions on the one hand and **intersessional work** (BPFs and DCs) on the other.
- The number of sessions (275) was very high, resulting in **some duplications**. This might come from the "owner" instead of an "issue"-driven model (see also our suggestions for 2021).
- The **coverage in the media** as well as on external mailing lists/distribution lists was unfortunately low. Also on **social media**, despite many good efforts, the impact remained small (e.g. all sessions were announced on Twitter, but without linking the institutions and speakers, thus there were only few retweets).
- Despite the good idea regarding pledges, the number of **concrete pledges** and/or implementation steps towards an IGF+ was rather low.
- Although we understand the stability and security reasons, the **Zoom format "webinar"** was less interactive than the "meeting" format, and it was a pity not to see who was actually participating in a given session.

## *2. What are your suggestions for improvements for IGF 2021?*

On a general note, we fully support the further development of the IGF into a stronger, more inclusive and efficient **"IGF+"** as proposed by the **UNSG's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation,** particularly the ideas outlined in Paragraph 93.

Moreover, in January 2021 the **MAG Working Group on IGF Strengthening and Strategy** (WG-strategy) developed concrete recommendations on strategic improvements to the IGF and operational measures in 2021. In our opinion, these recommendations are very valuable and should be followed and implemented. Also, the WG-Strategy's Response to the paper on "Options for the Future of Digital Cooperation" from September 2020 should be taken into account.

In addition, we would like to share the following, more specific inputs:

**Political Profile & Relevance**

- We see a need to **build stronger bridges** between the discussions and insights of experts at the IGF and the decisions being made in other fora by high-level decision-makers from all stakeholders groups. In this regard, we consider the **Multistakeholder High-Level Body (MHLB)**, as envisaged in Paragraph 93a of the UNSG's Roadmap, as a great opportunity to strengthen the political relevance of the IGF. The new MHLB must be an integral part of the IGF architecture. We look forward to the UNSG decision in this regard, taking into account the specific implementation approaches proposed by the MAG WG-Strategy included in the response to the paper on "Options for the Future of Digital Cooperation" referred above.

- The IGF should continue to effectively and timely **addressing emerging and urgent issues,** as done in 2020 with the topics **environment** (thanks to a separate thematic track) as well as Covid-19. In this regard, the **IGF 2021 in Katowice**, where the Climate Change Conference COP 24 in 2018 was held, would be an ideal occasion to further place the interrelation between digitalization and climate change at the top of the IGF policy agenda.

- The gathering and active participation of **high-level leaders** from all stakeholder groups throughout the meeting and in high-level formats should be maintained and further developed. Also, the innovation represented by the **parliamentarians track and meeting** (since 2019) should be continued and enhanced.

- We look forward to the **appointment of a Tech Envoy by the UNSG**, as outlined in Paragraph 74 of the UNSG's Roadmap. A good collaboration between this position and the IGF community could energize the implementation of many recommendations from the UNSG Roadmap, while helping to raising the profile of the IGF. The Tech Envoy should closely liaise with the IGF, particularly the MAG and the IGF Secretariat.

- The **personal participation of the UNSG** (as in 2018 and 2019 – and virtually in 2017 and 2020) as well as the **personal participation of the Host Country President of Head of Government** (as in 2017, 2018 and 2019) should be further enshrined as a permanent good practice, as it strengthens the profile and visibility of the IGF and its outcomes.

**Outcomes & Outputs**

- Building on the valuable work by the BPF, DCs and NRIs, the **relevance and impact of IGF intersessional policy networks and their output**s could be further enhanced by covering politically relevant topics and by connecting these policy networks with the decision-making

level. In addition, more effective articulation between intersessional modalities and work streams and the annual forum are desirable.

- In this regard, the **"pilot policy network on environment and digitalisation"** that is being launched these days by the IGF Secretariat and will be open for all interested stakeholders can be a useful format to test and develop the ideas outlined in Paragraph 93e of the UNSG's Roadmap to strengthen the IGF's intersessional work.

- Continue improving the **tangibility and usability of outcomes** of the IGF meeting by building on the experience of the "Geneva Messages" introduced in 2017 and the "IGF Messages" in the following years. The **Messages** should be concise and clear and should be put to effective use by all participants (e.g. by feeding them into any other relevant fora and processes), be included in all reporting activities performed by the MAG and the IGF-Secretariat, and be revisited in forthcoming IGF and NRI meetings.

- The **information sources** at the disposal of the participants during the IGF (such as digital policy summaries, instant "session reporting", "daily reports", etc.) should be further developed, in particular through partnerships with, inter alia, the Geneva Internet Platform, GIPO, IG Schools, etc.

## Format & Organization

- We support having a **more focused agenda of the IGF,** by further enhancing in-depth debates on selected thematic tracks (as introduced in 2018). Ideally, the IGF 2021 should address no more than three focused policy issues or questions.

- **Adopt a more consistent issue-driven approach to IGF programme development** (as outlined in detail by the WG-Strategy in its proposals for IGF 2021 process and design): The process of an **open call for issues** (as done since 2018) should be continued and used to define the main thematic tracks of the annual forum. Furthermore, the call and selection of **workshops** should be informed and shaped by such comprehensive issue-driven approach. The number of workshops should be reduced, avoiding duplication of content as much as possible.

- The **close co-operation between former, current and future host countries** in the organization of the IGF should be maintained and further deepened.

## Participation & Outreach

- We support closer links between the global IGF and its **regional, national and youth initiatives (NRIs)**, such as EuroDIG or our Swiss national IGF, as proposed in Paragraph 93d of the UNSG's Roadmap on digital cooperation.

- The inclusiveness of the IGF can be further improved by **including the voices and views of ordinary citizens** – particularly from the global South – **through citizens' dialogues**, which have been successfully tested in 2020 by Missions Publiques with their "We the Internet" project.

- **Strengthening the links and synergies between the IGF and existing observatories and helpdesks** active in offering quality information and capacity building in the field of digital governance, such as the Geneva Internet Platform, GIPO, and the various schools for Internet

Governance. As discussed in the MAG WG-Strategy, the IGF Secretariat could maintain a **dedicated website** linking to partners that provide such observatory and helpdesk functions.

- Efforts to benefit from **Geneva as an international hub for global governance and dialogue** on a broad range of issues relevant to Internet Governance and digitization should be continued, in order to continue taking advantage of the large international community present in Geneva (including international organizations and international NGOs, scientific and academic networks, etc.). They should be involved as much as possible in the preparatory work.


Biel/Bienne, 20 January 2021