



Name: Microsoft

Website: [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)

Focal Point: Ben Wallis, Director, Technology Policy, [bewallisATmicrosoft.com](mailto:bewallisATmicrosoft.com)

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At Microsoft, we firmly believe [digital technologies can be a positive force in the world and accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals](#). We believe that the development and use of technology needs to be trustworthy, safe and secure, responsible and inclusive so that it empowers and protects everyone, leaving no one behind. Microsoft is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this public consultation on a proposed Pact for the Future to be adopted at the UN's September 2024 Summit of the Future.

### **Chapeau**

**Human rights** are under threat from climate change, conflict, and inequality. At the same time, we have entered a new era of artificial intelligence (AI) with the potential to improve lives and help us address the world's most pressing challenges. We are optimistic that this new technology can empower people, inspire creativity, and solve problems. However, to fully achieve these benefits, AI must be developed and deployed responsibly to respect human rights.

Microsoft's [Global Human Rights Statement](#) outlines our commitment to respecting and advancing human rights. We advocate for the Pact for the Future to underscore the importance of international human rights laws, principles, and norms, which set out duties and responsibilities to guide the actions of governments, companies, and others. It should also make a commitment to multistakeholder dialogue and collaboration about how to put these laws, principles and norms into practice in digital technologies. This will enable us to forge consensus on how digital technologies can and should be used in a society that protects and advances human rights.

**Privacy** is a fundamental human right, which is more important than ever with the growth in the volume of data in our world and its importance in our lives. To safeguard this right, there needs to be strong data privacy laws that place accountability where it belongs - on the organizations that collect, store, and process data and on malicious actors that undermine security of the online systems. Legal interoperability is an important consideration - clear, consistent rules across jurisdictions reduce compliance complexity, promote accountability for responsible data practices, and help ensure that everyone's privacy is protected regardless of location.

## **Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development**

In our [2023 SDG Report](#), Microsoft acknowledges that the world stands at a critical juncture, lagging behind in implementing the SDGs. However, our optimism lies in the transformative **potential of technology to positively impact the lives of people around the world.**

**Artificial Intelligence** allows for unparalleled potential to overcome many of the obstacles we face. When used responsibly, in appropriate partnerships, and in a manner that is consistent with fundamental rights and freedoms, AI enables us to tackle pressing challenges. The Pact for the Future should underscore the transformative power of AI and data-driven technologies for the greater good of humanity, and the importance of leveraging them to achieve the SDGs.

The [Microsoft AI for Good Lab](#) is fueled by a passionate commitment to leverage AI's transformative power for the greater good of humanity. This means identifying and prioritizing the most significant challenges first. We focus on areas where AI can make a tangible difference such as healthcare, education, and inequality.

**Environmental sustainability** is equally paramount. Climate change is defining our era, requiring swift, collective action and technical innovation. [Microsoft is committed to meeting our own climate goals](#) - to become carbon negative, water positive and zero waste by 2030. Equally we want to enable others to do the same by promoting rapid policy action, supporting the development of sustainability markets, and accelerating-progress through AI-enabled solutions, as outlined in our [AI & Sustainability Playbook](#).

The Pact should also highlight the need to uplevel **digital infrastructure** across the world so that all countries can benefit from the promise of digital transformation. Microsoft's [Digital Development Program](#) is one contribution. It is a comprehensive platform to support low- and middle-income countries that receive international development assistance. Participating countries can benefit from pro bono digital advisory, affordable cloud solutions, skilling, and capacity-building tools to help governments modernize their infrastructure and provide critical services.

Digital public infrastructure (DPI) will be central to the digital transformation strategies of many governments around the world, especially in the Global South. DPI is commonly defined as solutions that are cross-cutting, part of an underlying stack critical to any government's digital transformation. A country's DPI may include implementation of multiple proprietary and/or open-source solutions.

We recognize that every country needs to provision essential services online and observe that such services are being successfully and efficiently implemented on public cloud infrastructures around the world. The inherent resilience, security and efficiency provided by the hyperscale cloud is fundamental to successful and trusted digital citizen services.

## **Chapter II. International peace and security**

Microsoft has consistently advocated for governments to enforce and augment **norms governing the behavior of both states and non-state actors in cyberspace.** While some progress has been made, a

stronger and more comprehensive commitment from the global community is essential to stand more resolutely against cyberattacks on civilians and the critical infrastructure on which we all depend. Fundamentally, we must advance international norms on two critical fronts:

- **Endorsement and reinforcement of the key norms:** If the principles of the Geneva Conventions are to have continued vitality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the international community must reinforce a clear red line that nation-state efforts that seek to disrupt critical infrastructure providers online are squarely off limits. The Pact should therefore commit all states to not undermining the networks of critical infrastructure providers such as energy, water, food, medical care, etc. States should also commit that they will not permit any persons within their territory or jurisdiction to engage in cybercriminal operations that target critical infrastructure in accordance with existing UN norms.
- **Protection of cloud services:** Increasingly, nation-states are targeting cloud services to gain access to sensitive data, disrupt critical systems, or propagate disinformation and propaganda in cyber-enabled influence operations. Cloud services now play a pivotal role in every aspect of our societies, including delivery of water, food, energy, medical care, information, and other essentials. For these reasons, states should recognize cloud services as critical infrastructure, with protection against attack under international law.

Recognizing and committing to responsible behavior based on established norms and international law is an important first step. However, we must go beyond mere recognition. **Governments need to collaborate to strengthen accountability** for nation states that cross these red lines. There are numerous recent examples, [documented by Microsoft](#) and others, providing hard evidence of nation-state actions that violate such norms.

Encouragingly, the **Secretary General's New Agenda for Peace** highlights the need for a robust "accountability mechanism" to uphold expectations online. We believe these include:

- **Public attribution:** We need strong, public, multilateral, and unified attributions from governments that will hold states accountable and discourage them from repeating actions that willfully violate international commitments and obligations. While public attribution alone may not discourage all state violations of international expectations online, it is a critical foundation for any further efforts at deterrence. The Pact should therefore call on states to cooperate in sharing best practices in arriving at attribution determinations following cyber incidents. Such best practices could include a consistent and uniform process for arriving at attribution determinations; the inclusion of necessary context (such as harms caused and norms / laws violated); and leveraging nongovernmental expertise and support, such as the [CyberPeace Institute's harms methodology](#), to further substantiate the findings of attributions and provide additional context.
- **International Institutions:** The Pact should also encourage respective international institutions to uphold international expectations online, consistent with their mandates. This proactive stance aims to limit harm to civilians from state-sponsored attacks. Notable examples include [the International Criminal Court recognizing](#) its responsibility for investigating cyber-enabled war crimes and [the International Committee of the Red Cross beginning to reconcile](#) the requirements of international humanitarian law with the use cyber operations in armed conflict.

### **Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation**

For Microsoft, the starting point on digital cooperation is the need for **meaningful universal connectivity** because this is crucial for ensuring that digital transformation – and the economic growth and productivity gains that come with it – can benefit people across the world.

For connectivity to be meaningful, both **access to the Internet, and the devices used to access it**, need to be affordable. Through the [Airband Initiative](#), Microsoft has committed to [extend high-speed internet access to 250 million people \(including 100 million in Africa\)](#) living in underserved areas around the world by the end of 2025.

Empowering individuals also hinges on equipping people with the necessary **digital skills** to use connectivity, as a foundation for empowerment and digital transformation across the world. This should include skills and training necessary for pursuing in-demand jobs, including in the important field of cybersecurity as well as in relation to AI. To begin addressing this need, Microsoft launched [a new AI Skills Initiative](#) in June 2023 to help people and communities around the world learn how to harness the power of AI. An example of this is our [partnership with UNITAR](#) to deploy AI, cybersecurity and sustainability skills curricula to train women and youth across 24 countries in Africa.

While there are no silver bullets, transformational technology such as **AI** provides new and real ways to make progress toward the SDGs. This opportunity, combined with the slow pace of progress toward the goals, creates urgency to focus on developing digital infrastructure and enhancing digital skilling, so people in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have the technological abilities to better their lives, and to avoid the opening of new gaps and widening the existing ones.

Chapter III of the Pact should pave the way to a durable framework for **AI governance**. AI is a global technology developed and used across borders and that creates risks that transcend borders. To make AI governance work on an international level, we need a global framework that connects various national rules and ensures that an AI system certified as safe in one jurisdiction can also qualify as safe in another. An internationally interoperable approach to responsible AI is therefore critical to maximizing the benefits of AI globally.

The Pact could also reflect some key principles for AI governance:

- Risk-based: to enable resources to be focused on addressing systems that pose harms.
- Outcomes-focused: setting out *what* regulated actors must achieve rather than *how* they achieve it will help frameworks remain relevant and effective in the face of rapid developments in AI technology and responsible AI practice.
- Adaptable and aligned to international norms and standards: alignment to international norms and standards, including the important work of the [OECD](#), will be important so that organizations can collaborate across borders and the benefits of this technology can be spread as broadly as possible.
- Human control: AI should remain under control.

We have welcomed the Secretary-General's recent appointment of a High-Level Advisory Body on AI, and its recommendations will be a vital input to the Summit of the Future.

**Protecting democratic processes and institutions** is critical to ensuring resilience of our democratic societies and related digital infrastructure must be protected to maintain operations. Information integrity is another crucial component of trust in electoral processes. Microsoft actively contributes to potential solutions in this domain, including across content provenance and AI watermarking technologies. Our principles-based approach focuses on safeguarding voters, candidates and campaigns, and election authorities, as we enter a historic election period. These are set out in [Microsoft's Election Protection Commitments](#).

The Pact should also recognize the importance of **trusted cross-border data flows** and support the ongoing development of international legal frameworks to provide the regulatory harmonization to enable these flows. Organizations and individuals rely on data flows to deliver and access health, education, and other essential services, and data also supports growth and innovation by enabling trade and the exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, cross-border data flows bolster cybersecurity and provide resilience against destructive attacks. Microsoft's [report on early lessons from the war in Ukraine](#) highlights their role in maintaining security.

Finally, [Microsoft recognizes](#) that technology companies have a critical role to play in reducing harm from illegal and harmful online content while respecting human rights like privacy, freedom of expression, and security. The Pact could highlight the importance of this careful balancing approach and acknowledge that addressing the complex challenges of **digital safety** require a whole-of-society approach.

#### **Chapter IV. Youth and future generations**

In Chapter III above, we stressed the importance of **digital skills**. This extends to young people, as exemplified by Microsoft's impactful partnerships with UNICEF and others:

- the [Passport to Earning initiative](#) provides young people aged 15–24 years with free, world-class and job-relevant skills training and positions them for employment opportunities.
- the [Learning Passport Initiative](#) provides school children with access to digital educational experiences.

The Pact could also recognize **the pivotal role of AI** in bridging the global education gap. By ensuring every child has access to quality education, we unlock their full potential. AI has transformative potential for students, teachers, and school staff, making education more personalized, accessible and impactful. For example, it can help analyze vast swaths of data to see which pedagogical and practical approaches work best. Students with learning difficulties can benefit from AI supporting teachers in the creation of individualized learning tracks. These efforts will likely reduce school dropout rates and enable differentiated learning programs.

Beyond education, we must address **youth mental health, safety, and privacy online** to ensure that technology serves as a positive force for the next generation. These issues are complex and require a holistic and collaborative approach that involves not only the technology industry, but also parents, educators, civil society, governments, and most importantly, youth themselves. Further research and innovation are needed to advance understanding of the effects of technology on youth well-being, and to leverage AI and other technologies to enhance youth protection and empowerment.

## **Chapter V. Transforming global governance**

Addressing pressing global challenges necessitates collaborative efforts across multiple stakeholders. While International cooperation among governments remains vital, it must be combined with initiatives that bring in civil society and private sector. Their perspectives, ideas, and resources are vital for effective problem-solving.

In reflecting on transforming global governance, the Pact for the Future should therefore recognize **the vital role of multistakeholder approaches**. This recognition extends to the UN Internet Governance Forum, which plays a vital role in convening policy discussions. Moreover, it should extend to the process of developing the Pact itself through the first half of 2024. A strengthened multilateralism should take form of inclusive multilateralism that always looks to leverage the expertise, perspectives and resources of all relevant stakeholders.