CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT

1. GENERAL COMMENTS

The Global Digital Compact should represent important steps towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

As the Global Digital Compact will be implemented ultimately by private sector, civil society, technical community and governments, a **multistakeholder and contributors group** should be involved throughout the entire process and in its drafting, beyond the consultation phase.

Consistency with existing initiatives, principles and regulations is key to ensure the effectiveness of a global regulatory framework. It also requires an **inclusive**, **dynamic and agile adoption process** to adapt to the fast-paced evolution of emerging technologies and related key issues.

As shown in a recent report of the McKinsey Global Institute "Securing Europe's competitiveness: Addressing its technology gap", Europe needs to raise its investment in tech R&D if it wants to compete with other global leaders in transversal technologies, ranging from future of connectivity to next-generation computing or applied Al. On the other hand, **next-generation innovators** have the ability to solve global issues in various areas according to the predictions of the Technology Pioneers recognized by the World Economic Forum.

Just as mobile technology has been a game changer during the last 15 years, **blockchain will democratize and streamline access to credit**. There is a clear correlation between GDP per capita and cell phone penetration. In the developing countries, the biggest driver of this growth is mobile money. People who have never had a bank account or a secure way to save, transfer, borrow and invest money now have it all at hand.

With the rise of **digital labour marketplaces**, "gig-work" and "job on demand" will offer earning opportunities in countries where jobs are scarce for low-skilled populations. The best opportunities will be given to the best talent wherever they live, thereby truly unleashing the potential of a billion knowledge workers. A data-first approach in the way we do business and close agreements will enable massive efficiency gains and free up vast amount of wasted human potential that could be redirected to more meaningful objectives.

Smart contracts have the potential to revolutionize e-commerce and the exchange of goods, forever changing the way we trade and consume, with application evolving towards open marketplace for literally everything, where anyone can share the value they create.

Ed-tech will profoundly transform our education models. The web is already interfacing children with the best experts, progressing the quality of education and reducing inequalities in a cost-effective way. In the future, technological progress will help every child to develop skills meeting their deepest aspirations to build a better world. Al will serve as world-class education counsellor, understanding every child's own interests and suggesting tailored learning journeys and insights for their parents and teachers.

Quantum networks and quantum encryption will ensure secure communications leverage the power of physics to enable unhackable security. Ultimately, distributed quantum computing will enable the quantum internet, which power of calculation will exponentially accelerate cycles of innovation when it comes to discover new medicines or new sustainable materials. As one of the most pressing issue is to enhance trust in digital technologies, this will help combat all forms of cybercrime and illegal cyber activities online, which are one of the root cause of distrust in digital technologies and Internet fragmentation.

Furthermore, digital transformation is crucial to **fight climate change and ensure the energy transition**. Countless evidence-based studies show that countries developing and scaling more technologies are also the most developed and sustainable in the world.

While **3D-printed homes** are going mainstream, how we build future cities will exponentially accelerate our sustainability efforts. The construction industry, that accounts for almost 40% of global CO2 emissions, is adopting new sustainable materials and **battery energy storage systems** tailored for construction sites that reduce carbon emissions by 80%.

Beyond **solar farms'** projects and **off-grid renewable energy**, future **flexible energy grid** will be able to balance in real time energy supply and demand, allowing individual renewable energy producers to reinject energy in the network, optimizing their earnings and energy consumption. Electric vehicles will respond to real-time grid requirements, when it needs the most.

In the area of CO2 capture, new data sources as remote sensing data streams from high-resolution cameras and lasers (i.e., LiDAR), satellites, smartphone sensors or positioning systems combined with cloud data processing, artificial intelligence and data fusion will empower accurate measurement and monitoring of plant health and **carbon sequestration potential for natural ecosystems**.

The examples of potentially disruptive and lifechanging future technologies could go on and on, as far as innovation is critical to the future well-being of society and to driving economic growth. Nevertheless, the main issues facing the world in the areas of connectivity, internet fragmentation, data protection, human rights online, disinformation, artificial intelligence and digital commons require **international dialogue and cooperation** to achieve an open, free and secure digital future for all.

This contribution build on public position of other stakeholders in an attempt to synthesize and find common positions on the principles and commitments expected from the Global Digital Compact.

2. CONNECT ALL PEOPLE TO THE INTERNET, INCLUDING ALL SCHOOLS

Core principles

Achieving universal connectivity is crucial for an inclusive digital economy and to accelerate progress towards the **17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), including SDGs on education, resilient infrastructure, inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovation. As it impacts various aspects of life, including work, learning and accessing basic services, digital transformation enables countless economic opportunities for all people across the world, helping to eradicate extreme poverty, improving health and well-being as well as inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

To harness the economic opportunities, governments, international organizations, and the private sector should build on physical resources and infrastructures, focusing on digital skills, technology and competitiveness.

Whether it is about infrastructure and devices, applications and services, or skills, policymaking should be based on promoting the value of the entire communications and digital services ecosystem and fostering competition and innovation through non-discriminatory, technology-neutral, and supportive of innovative business models. Innovative and sustainable business models can address the challenge of providing broadband connectivity to underserved areas. Emerging markets possess vibrant economies and entrepreneurial energy, making them ideal for future innovation with the right policy frameworks, focusing on competitiveness.

The **Declaration on the Future of the Internet** highlights key principles, such as inclusive and reliable access, digital literacy and skill development, and fostering cultural diversity and social inclusion. These principles aim to close the digital divide and enable individuals to safely participate in the digital economy.

Bridging the digital divide with a focus on equity and ensuring access to the digital sphere for all, particularly women, young persons and those with disabilities, in both rural and urban areas should result in affordable, inclusive, secure, and stable access via trusted networks to the open Internet.

The **digital transformation of education** can provide unique opportunities for inclusive and equitable quality education, but global digital divides, including the gender digital divide, must be overcome. Connecting every school to the internet and extending services to households and individuals can provide additional avenues for education and **lifelong learning**. Digital skills are essential for internet access and should be acquired by all individuals, starting from elementary school and continuing throughout their lives. Preventing and **countering online threats**, such as violence and harassment, as well as promoting **cybersecurity awareness**, are crucial aspects of the digital skills of the future.

Key commitments

The Global Digital Compact should reaffirm member states' commitment to bridging coverage and usage gaps, recognizing stakeholders' efforts and promoting flexible, forward-looking policy and regulatory approaches grounded in evidence and data.

Considering the complexities of delivering global connectivity, the Global Digital Compact should promote evidence-based, transparent, adaptable and non-discriminatory policymaking and regulation that foster the deployment of secure and trusted digital networks, facilitate and maximise the impact of public and private investment, foster innovation across the digital value chain, and promote digital literacy and skills development.

Ensuring access to excellent connectivity for everyone relies on a combination of private investments and public funding instruments. Investments in digital infrastructure, particularly in rural and outermost regions, are crucial, with significant support for 5G and fiber networks. **Both private investments and public funding should be guided by accurate information**, including coverage and usage data, satellite images, and census data to make informed decisions on network deployment.

To ensure competitive and regulatory environment that fosters trust in electronic communication services and reduces the digital divide, industry leaders, stakeholders, and policymakers must engage in dialogue and establish the right **incentives for digital infrastructure investment**.

Emphasis should also be placed on **efficient, transparent and fair spectrum allocation and licensing** for broadband-capable networks. Unlicensed, shared, and secondary uses must be encouraged while incentivizing operators to use the spectrum efficiently. For remote and rural areas, policies should aim to reduce deployment costs by easing licensing processes, providing access to sufficient spectrum, and supporting alternative technology approaches. **Non-discriminatory regulatory frameworks for low-cost licensed spectrum** access should focus on lower frequency bands for better coverage, and promote greater access to unlicensed spectrum in unserved or underserved areas.

The Global Digital Compact should promote access to affordable, stable, open, accessible, safe, secure, and high-speed internet for higher education, including connecting schools. It should commit to promoting **digital skills and lifelong learning** and supporting digital connectivity, infrastructure, and tools in education and training institutions. **Learners and teachers** must be enabled to acquire and share digital skills and competences, with opportunities for up-skilling and re-skilling.

3. AVOID INTERNET FRAGMENTATION

Core principles

The open, interconnected, and interoperable Internet, initially designed as a shared resource, is increasingly at risk due to unintended consequences of technical, legislative, regulatory, and policy developments that threaten its unity and accessibility.

These **risks occur at the technical, legislative, regulatory, and policy levels**. Key threats include government-imposed internet shutdowns, cybercrime, low cybersecurity standards, and policies that control internet access or conduct public surveillance. Technical fragmentation at backbone layer, network/access layer, and application/content layer also threatens the global internet's interoperability.

This **fragmentations affects users**' access to information, privacy protections, and freedom to transact and communicate based on their location. It hinders **international trade**, particularly impacting **small businesses and emerging markets**.

Restrictions on the **free flow of information and ideas** have been imposed by governments. **Internet must be open, interconnected, stable, secure and interoperable.** Restrictions of and on the Internet threaten global and open cyberspace, as well as the rule of law, human rights and democracy. **Net neutrality** is another key issue that must be maintained and protected.

To address these concerns, a **multistakeholder**, **bottom-up**, **distributed** and **transparent governance model of Internet** must be preserved, and strengthen to address Internet-related issues and promote cooperation among organizations. This model should be guided by **information sharing**, **raising awareness**, **and collaboration**. Governments, businesses, technical communities, academia, and civil society must be involved in discussions and decision-making, ensuring diverse, equitable, and inclusive policymaking processes, and supporting the meaningful participation of under-represented groups. The strength of this governance model lies in its open and inclusive participation, legitimacy, credibility, and adaptability. It fosters **flexibility in adapting to changing technologies and issues**. **Transparency** is essential, with consensus-based decision-making processes reflecting multistakeholder input.

Key commitments

The Global Digital Compact should recognize the efforts of the Internet Governance Forum Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation to counter fragmentation measures and commit to maintain an **open, interconnected, stable and interoperable Internet**. It should reaffirm its support to the mandate of the IGF as the forum for cooperation and technical knowledge sharing among diverse stakeholders within the UN, that promotes the free exchange of ideas, fosters diverse thinking and community-building, and produces best practice materials and policy insights.

Cybersecurity standards should be enhanced as the lack of it can destroy trust of individuals, businesses, and governments in the open Internet. The Global Digital Compact should advocate for and support capacity-building activities related to these standards, to ensure an open, secure, and resilient internet that promotes social progress and economic growth.

To prevent shutdowns, **technical availability and integrity** should be preserved and any restrictions must have a legitimate purpose based on international law.

4. PROTECT DATA

Core principles

International data flows, data portability and access to safe, secure, and privacy-protective digital goods and services for everyone are crucial for the functioning of the global economy and to foster innovation and economic opportunities across all sectors.

Beyond basic social exchanges, free data flows facilitates **international cooperation** in essential areas such as scientific research, law enforcement, and global security, and help managing global crises like pandemics and climate change.

Moreover, a human-centric digital transformation also requires to support local data and technological ownership for a safe and secure digital environment. Trust is a central element while the lack of it creates uncertainty and discourages participation in the global economy. Trust requires Governments and legislators to ensure personal and other data are protected through robust cybersecurity infrastructure and a trustworthy legal framework for data protection. Policy and regulatory environments for data protection and access need to adhere to up-to-date best practices in privacy and security in data access, sharing, use and governance. Policies should also promote human rights, democratic values and privacy.

Equally, efforts are needed to define principles and **safeguards for government access to personal data** held by the private sector, while transparency policies should prohibit excessive costs, burdens and risks on providers that comply with legal obligations.

Key commitments

The Global Digital Compact should adhere to **high data protection standards** and focus on protecting data while ensuring fairness, competitiveness, and data-driven innovation. A balance must be found between data protection, trade secret protection, **innovation and investment in the data economy**. **Enhanced global cooperation** on data governance and interoperability across policy and regulatory systems is needed to overcome differences and identify opportunities.

Special attention should be given to policies that prevent data-extractive models and personal data export to inadequately protected jurisdictions.

With regard to government access to personal data, OECD countries have adopted an agreement for privacy and human rights protection when accessing personal data for national security and law enforcement purposes.

5. APPLY HUMAN RIGHTS ONLINE

Core principles

Human rights and fundamental freedoms **apply both online and offline**. Internationally recognized human rights standards, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the Global Network Initiative Principles, should guide a responsible approach of online activities. Human rights should be also considered in the design and life-cycle of emerging technologies.

General internet monitoring should be prohibited and investigation to tackle illegal content should be targeted and proportionate with respect to individual rights.

Beyond freedom of expression, safer marketplaces and access to information to ensure the Internet's role in fostering development goals, special attention should be given to **technical tools for law enforcement to investigate crimes** of child sexual abuse and exploitation, gender-based violence reinforced by built-in bias in algorithms, or illegal content, such as copyright infringements and terrorist content.

Key commitments

The Global Digital Compact should commit to human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensure equal protection of rights online and offline.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms due diligence should be addressed as one of the the root causes of Internet fragmentation and is a shared responsibility of intergovernmental organizations, governments, private sector, technical community, and civil society.

The Global Digital Compact should promote a **human rights-based approach throughout the cycle of digital technologies**, including emerging technologies.

Building resilient and democratic societies relies on anti-corruption, media and information literacy, election integrity, and capacity-building efforts in digital security training for civil society, journalists, and human rights defenders.

6. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DISCRIMINATION AND MISLEADING CONTENT

Core principles

Safeguarding global security in countering foreign information manipulation to undermine democratic electoral infrastructure and political processes or interfering during conflicts or crises is crucial. Therefore, **media freedom and journalists' safety should be protected**.

Stakeholders should address challenges presented by online **disinformation** and citizens should be empowered to make **informed choices online**, with access to diverse, transparent, reliable information.

Key commitments

While transparency and accountability to avoid the misuse of technologies are crucial, the Global Digital Compact should **recognize pre-existing tools and initiatives to ensure consistency** and effectiveness of any global regulatory framework related to discrimination and misleading content.

The Global Digital Compact should support an online environment free from information manipulation, online sexual and gender-based violence, hate speech, and harmful content. Combating discrimination, special attention should also be given to accessible persons with disabilities.

Platforms should be encouraged to keep on adopting and adapting accountable practices. Policies on content governance and their governance are to be designed in line with international human rights, democracy, and rule of law standards. In this respect, **principles and guidelines developed by the Global Network Initiative (GNI)** are becoming a global standard for human rights in the ICT sector.

7. REGULATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Core principles

Al has the potential to benefit the society and the economy in many ways and to address world challenges as climate change, energy transition and pandemics. It can be leveraged to make infrastructures and services more efficient, or for safety, cybersecurity, and sustainability.

Essential to economic development, AI could also intensify discrimination and digital divide. Therefore, transparent and robust algorithms need to prevent unfair biases and ensure that AI contributes positively to society. Policymakers need to develop proportionate, risk-based regulations that promote robust and trustworthy AI applications while enabling innovation and societal benefits.

The OECD Principles on AI define how governments and other stakeholders can shape a human-centric approach to trustworthy AI. They define terms and concept and promote AI that is innovative and trustworthy and that respects human rights and democratic value, based on 5 value-based principles and recommendations for policy makers.

Value-based principles

- 1. Inclusive growth, sustainable development and well-being
- 2. Human-centered values and fairness
- 3. Transparency and explainability
- 4. Robustness, security and safety
- 5. Accountability

Recommendations for policy makers

- 1. Invest in AI R&D
- 2. Foster a digital ecosystem for AI
- 3. Provide an enabling policy environment for AI
- 4. Build human capacity and prepare for labour market transition
- 5. International cooperation for trustworthy AI

The European Union follows a human-centric, pro-innovation and risk-based approach to AI, grounded in fundamental rights and values such as democracy and the rule of law. The legislative process on the proposed AI Act and Artificial Intelligence Liability Directive, is underway.

A multistakeholder approach is needed to collaborate on flexible guidelines and standards, to share knowledge and experience, to foster trust in AI systems and to develop responsible, accountable and safe AI, building on results and ethical considerations.

Key commitments

The Global Digital Compact should **recognize broadly endorsed principles for trustworthy AI** such as the OECD Principles. It should foster flexible and adaptative regulation as the technology evolve, based on a risk-based approach ranging from codes of conduct for low-risk AI systems to prohibition of AI applications that violate fundamental rights and of lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Investment in AI research and development and in necessary skills, ensuring a fair transition for workers, should be encouraged.

To support **global cooperation** for the implementation of the OECD Principles, the Global Digital Compact should foster a digital ecosystem and encourage coordination and collaboration for trustworthy Al. Stakeholders should share knowledge and help identify best practices, ensuring that standards and guidelines are set in a transparent way.

8. DIGITAL COMMONS AS A GLOBAL PUBLIC GOOD

Core principles

Increased open data and open-source initiatives, respecting common core principles and standards and aiming to leverage innovation and create a competitive market through shared knowledge and resources have the **potential to bring significant economic benefits**.

A balance should be struck between the necessity for more accessible data to encourage talents to contribute to digital commons and facilitate global cooperation, and **compliance with privacy protection and digital public rights** due to the risk of misuses and privacy breaches on the other hand.

Key commitments

The Global Digital Compact should promote increased open and aggregated data for the public interest, as well as open-source initiatives and **resilient digital infrastructures to enhance democratic digital societies**.

Grass-root projects in open source software and hardware are crucial for developing digital commons and should be supported.

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