UNITED KINGDOM

CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT

28 April 2023

1. Introduction

The United Kingdom welcomes the UN's invitation to share views and priorities relating to the proposed multi-stakeholder Global Digital Compact (the Compact).

Digital transformation is powering our economies, and accelerating human and social progress. Harnessed sustainably and responsibly, and with respect for human rights, the opportunities digital transformation offers are vast. For example:

- Digital technologies have created new means through which individuals can exercise their human rights, and engage in political, economic, social and cultural life.
- The Internet has increased access to information and allowed people to make their voices heard.
- Innovations in artificial intelligence, and the potential of big-data insights, mean that governments can deliver more efficient public services, and more evidence-based policy interventions.
- Digital technologies are a crosscutting enabler and accelerator of development and for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the same time, the digital revolution brings with it a range of potential challenges for public policy and society. For example:

- The drivers of poverty reduction, prosperity and security are increasingly complex and interconnected, and influenced by rapid technological change.
- The cross-border nature of the digital economy challenges state-centric governance models.
- The introduction of new technologies can have unintended and unexpected economic, environmental, socio-political, and human rights impacts.

As we adapt to the digital age, all stakeholders – governments, business enterprises, the technical community, civil society, academia and individuals themselves – have a role to play in responding to those challenges. Seizing the opportunities of digital transformation, and making the associated benefits - for sustainable development, human rights, security, prosperity – available to all, must remain our shared goal.

The Compact offers an opportunity for the multi-stakeholder community to set an ambitious shared agenda and concrete actions to deliver it.

2. A Multi-stakeholder Approach to the Compact

The Compact provides a unique opportunity to develop a **shared** agenda that is shaped and delivered jointly. Securing the buy-in and support of stakeholders who are central to building our digital future - governments, companies, technologists, civil society, and technology users - will be essential.

The Compact should:

- Aim to set a shared agenda, around which all stakeholders can coalesce and contribute to delivering.
- Adopt an open, inclusive, transparent approach that enables meaningful participation from the stakeholder community throughout the development of the Compact, including opportunities to attend and provide inputs during intergovernmental negotiations. Creative modalities, such as the formation of a multi-stakeholder drafting group, should be considered. Hybrid participation should be enabled throughout, for all stakeholders.
- Continue to make effective use of opportunities to engage the multi-stakeholder community, in particular the Internet Governance Forum (including at the 2023 Forum in Japan) and its High Level Leadership Panel.

3. Setting an Aspirational and Action-Oriented Agenda

The Compact should be aspirational and forward-looking to ensure it is future-proofed against the rapid pace of technological change. A positive vision statement clearly outlining the digital future we want would provide important framing for any principles, or actions, agreed as part of the Compact.

The impact of the Compact will be measured by its ability to **accelerate** tangible action, whether in relation to increasing connectivity, or removing barriers to the enjoyment of human rights. In this regard, it is important that the Compact does not duplicate or establish new structures that would detract from the need for a concerted focus on implementation. We recommend that the Compact provides an action-oriented agenda, such as acting as a knowledge hub, through which stakeholders can share and learn.

The Compact should:

- Set an aspirational and forward-looking agenda. A vision statement should provide framing for principles or actions agreed as part of the Compact. The vision statement contained in Agenda 2030 could serve as a useful example of such an arrangement.
- Promote the sharing of good practices and developing an evidence base to guide stakeholders.
- Avoid creating new structures or duplicating processes and discussions already underway within the UN, which would add greater complexity to an already crowded landscape.

4. A Human-Rights Based Approach

Digital technologies, the advent of the Internet, and other information and communication technologies have had a transformative impact on the enjoyment of human rights. For example, their use can enable individuals to peacefully assemble through coordinated online action; to seek information anonymously online to form their opinions and explore their identity without fear; and to document and share evidence of human rights violations and abuses to ensure accountability. Their use can play a key role in the progressive realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights: expanding access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

At the same time, the use of these technologies, as well as the use of data, in the absence of proper safeguards, can have adverse human rights impacts, which must be protected against. We remain deeply concerned at the implementation gap that exists in relation to the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of human rights online.

We welcome the efforts of the UN Human Rights Council, UN General Assembly third committee, and UN Treaty Bodies, and Special Procedures in highlighting concerning trends where human rights are being routinely violated and abused online. This includes in particular:

- Legislation, policy frameworks, and regulation that are incompatible with or has a chilling effect on the right to freedom of expression.
- Arbitrary arrests and detention of individuals for their online expression, including the organisation of peaceful protests online.
- Actions that can contravene international human rights obligations, for example:
 - Blocking specific websites, social media platforms and messaging apps, where this does not accord with the requirements of Article 19(3) of the ICCPR.
 - o Slowing down the speed of the Internet connection ("throttling").
 - o Completely shutting down the Internet.
- Arbitrary or unlawful surveillance, including through the use of highly intrusive surveillance technologies, particularly against human rights defenders, civil society, political opposition, protesters, and journalists and media workers, with implications for freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and freedom of association
- Online harassment and abuse, which can have chilling effects on the right to freedom
 of expression and political participation of women and girls, members of marginalised
 or vulnerable groups, and individuals in public life.
- The use of automated decision making, which may have implications for the principle of non-discrimination, or access to an effective remedy.
- Implications for children's rights, and in particular their exposure to risks of child trafficking and child sexual exploitation and abuse, through the use of the Internet, as well as the use of disproportionate parental controls (e.g. unfettered access to children's private messages).

We also welcome the extensive interpretive guidance within the UN system setting out how Member States can effectively meet their human rights obligations, and how business enterprises can meet their human rights responsibilities, in the context of the digital age.

- Mainstream human rights throughout, embedding a human rights-based approach to the Compact as a whole, including individual policy areas.
- Champion the positive potential of new technologies, for the enjoyment of human rights, and to support engagement in democratic processes.
- Reaffirm that the same rights that individuals enjoy offline, must also be protected online.
- Stress the need for the practical implementation of the existing human rights framework in an online context.
- Highlight concerning trends in restrictions of human rights online, and the use of technologies to restrict human rights online and offline. Reiterate States' obligations under international human rights law to respect, protect, and promote human rights online, as offline.
- Highlight concerning trends in relation to adverse human rights impacts associated with business enterprises and their design, development and deployment of digital technologies, and reiterate their responsibilities to respect human rights throughout their operations, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Promote the sharing of best practice and existing guidance to implement human rights obligations and responsibilities, for example:

- Ensuring human rights compliant domestic legal frameworks, particularly in relation to legislation that unduly restricts, or has a chilling effect on, freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- Promoting Internet freedoms including measures to keep the Internet on, open and inclusive, and human rights compliant alternatives to dealing with issues such as security concerns and social unrest.
- The human rights compliant and responsible use of digital surveillance technology.
- Encouraging the incorporation of human rights considerations in the design, development and use of digital technologies.
- Encouraging voluntary pledges by business enterprises, of concrete action they will take to ensure respect for human rights.
- Give additional consideration to the protection of the rights of children, in line with their evolving capacities.
- Emphasise the need to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights when addressing digital public policy challenges such as the spread of disinformation online; access to terrorist content online; or wider user safety concerns such as incitement to violence, hatred, and discrimination, as well as bullying and harassment.

5. Mainstreaming Gender

Women and girls, in all their diversity, do not enjoy equal access to the benefits and opportunities of the digital age. A top barrier to women and girls' digital inclusion is their disproportionate risk to discrimination and violence that occurs through or is amplified by the use of technology. As digital by default approaches increase in all spheres of life - from social communication, education, to employment and doing business - women and girls excluded from the digital world are being left behind.

- Mainstream a gender-transformative, intersectional approach across all its
 components, recognising the different needs, priorities, opportunities and constraints
 faced by women and girls in all their diversity. It should ensure women and girls in all
 their diversity, including adolescent girls, who are part of the most digitally-connected
 generation in history, in the development of the Compact, are empowered to
 participate in the development of the Compact itself.
- Promote a gender-transformative approach to digital transformation, in which women and girls not only access the benefits associated with the use of technology, but can also participate in its design, management and application.
- Promote a gender-responsive approach in the design, development, deployment, and use of digital technologies, in particular to address gender biases reproduced or exacerbated by the way technologies are designed or applied.
- Promote efforts to address gender-specific barriers to digital inclusion, including the prevalence of misogynistic hate speech, online sexual and gender-based violence and harassment, gendered disinformation, socio-cultural barriers.
- Encourage Member States to develop gender-responsive national strategies on technology and innovation to contribute to the empowerment of all women and girls and protect, promote and respect their human rights.
- Promote efforts to address data gaps in national statistics databases, with regard to mobile and ICT access and usage by gender.
- Recognise the intersectional nature of gender-based harassment and abuse facilitated by technologies.
- Include a call to stakeholders to promote the use of digital technologies to facilitate and accelerate women and girls' access to educational opportunities at all levels.

- Include a focus on promoting digital literacy and digital skills development for women and girls, and access to lifelong learning opportunities to increase women's representation in the STEM sector.
- Stress the need to ensure gender is considered in the development of digital solutions in specific sectors, for example in digital financial services to enhance gender-equitable financial inclusion.
- Highlight the need to promote, protect, respect, and ensure all women's' and girls' full
 enjoyment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, both online and offline,
 and counter all violence or threats of violence faced while exercising this right.

6. Future of the Internet

Recognising the role of multi-stakeholder bodies and all stakeholders

The Internet we have today – a single, global network of networks governed and maintained through consensus driven, multi-stakeholder processes – has proven its resilience, maintaining interoperability, reliability and security even as the number of users has increased exponentially. The work of ICANN, the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) or at Standards Development Organisations, such as the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) – and collaboration between them - enables stakeholders to come together around technical, operational, and policy challenges and find consensus on workable solutions that support the evolution and improvement of the Internet.

The Compact should empower this multi-stakeholder community in its ongoing mission to uphold and improve an Internet that enables innovation and competition; supports democracy, open society values, and accessibility; is governed through inclusive and effective multi-stakeholder processes; maintains its vital security and resilience; and is technically scalable, interoperable, open and global. In doing so, the Compact should specifically recognise and respect the existing mandates of relevant organisations including the UN IGF, ICANN, the RIRs, IETF and the ITU.

The multi-stakeholder approach on Internet policy issues has considerably benefited society, economic prosperity, and human rights. This was demonstrable during the pandemic where businesses, civil society and the technical community worked together to expand connectivity in innovative ways: for example the use of community networks, and other connectivity innovations in hard to reach communities, such as the provision of affordable satellite links.

At a more technical level, stakeholders have worked together effectively on complex public policy issues such as the ICANN process for new registrations of generic top-level domains (gTLDs) and through the IANA Transition process¹, in which the historical role of the US in relation to the delegation of top level domains in the root of the Internet, was relinquished.

- Reaffirm a commitment to preserving a free, global, open, peaceful and secure Internet.
- Reaffirm and highlight the important role of the multi-stakeholder community in building, maintaining, and continuously improving the technical underpinnings of the Internet.

¹ https://www.internetsociety.org/iana-transition/

- Explicitly acknowledge the value of multi-stakeholder dialogue including with respect to the governance of the Internet.
- Recognise and respect the existing mandates of relevant organisations including the UN IGF, ICANN, the RIRs, and the IETF.
- Encourage greater participation in Internet governance discussions from underrepresented groups, including in particular small and medium enterprises, representatives from less tech advanced economies, the scientific community and local civil society organisations, rural geographies and women.

Working with the UN IGF

We welcome action already underway to strengthen the Internet Governance Forum and increase its effectiveness. The Internet Governance Forum – and its corresponding national, youth and regional initiatives (NRIs) – are a crucial platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue on emerging challenges in Internet policy.

The IGF was conceptualised (in 2005 during the WSIS process) as a platform to enable governments, the private sector and civil society to contribute to discussion on public policy related to Internet governance on an equal footing. This was intentional, to ensure an open format that would not lead to voting structures nor formal decisions being imposed on any stakeholder group. Instead, a discussion-only platform would ensure all arguments could be freely expressed and captured in a non-binding messages document. Groups could then choose whether to take forward, or further explore, the ideas presented.

The Compact should:

- Welcome the IGF's contributions (including from the Leadership Panel) to global digital cooperation.
- Reinforce the IGF's role as the multi-stakeholder platform for dialogue on Internet governance issues by committing governments to increase diverse participation at the annual Forum as well as its NRIs.

Avoid Fragmentation of Internet Governance

We share concerns about developments that may contribute to the fragmentation of the Internet, limiting or undermining the global, open, interoperable nature of the Internet based on common technical standards and protocols and governed collaboratively by the multistakeholder community.

This is a complex issue, and one on which there are different perspectives. We recognise the valuable work of the IGF's Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation (PNIF), in capturing these perspectives in a common framework as well as working towards principles and guidance to address and prevent fragmentation of various kinds. We encourage ongoing engagement with the PNIF during development of the Compact, and encourage stakeholders from across the community to contribute their experiences, perspectives and expertise to identify ways to prevent and address fragmentation.

The PNIF's framework exposes that the global, interoperable nature of the Internet can be undermined by fragmentation of its different dimensions, including user experience, the Internet's technical layer, and Internet governance and coordination. Technical, political and commercial developments can effect fragmentation of these dimensions in different and nuanced ways. Efforts should therefore be focused on preventing and addressing areas of fragmentation that pose the greatest risk to the global, interoperable Internet. These efforts

should take account that different types of fragmentation will require different responses, and should be addressed through the appropriate forum by relevant stakeholders.

The Compact should:

- Continue to engage with the work of the IGF's PNIF in relation to efforts to address internet fragmentation.
- Focus on the risk of fragmentation of Internet Governance and coordination, recognising that actions which result in multi-stakeholder processes being undermined, or where coordination breaks down, can have critical knock-on effects for the global reach and resilience of the Internet.
- Commit stakeholders to work together across the global multi-stakeholder community to avoid fragmentation of coordination across the many Internet governance forums, standards bodies and other initiatives that collectively enable the open global Internet.

7. Addressing Digital Divides

Digital technologies as a cross-cutting enabler for the SDGs

Digital technologies are a crosscutting enabler and accelerator of development and the SDGs. While SDG 9 includes a specific target on connectivity for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), digital development is a much broader agenda and underpins the SDGs in multiple areas. It includes both foundational elements (e.g. on affordable connectivity, basic digital skills, digital content and services, cybersecurity capacity, online safety, digital entrepreneurship – and their overall business environment) and the application of digital technologies to key sectors and use cases (e.g. education, health, financial services, renewable energy).

Amid escalating, interlinked climate, health and food security crises, we need to accelerate the revolution in science and technology (S&T), digitalisation and data to build global resilience. Enabling the exchange of ideas and exploring ways to accelerate the development, application, and scaling up of digital and other technologies to fast-track progress on the SDGs should be a key priority for the Compact.

Meaningful Connectivity

With 2.7 billion people globally still offline, it is essential that the Compact address this important topic. Digital divides persist between, and within countries and communities. Gendered digital divides continue to limit women and girls' ability to participate fully in economic, political, social and cultural life, and undermine their enjoyment of human rights. Digital divides between generations, rural and urban dwellers, indigenous communities, and other minority groups exacerbate existing inequalities and hamper their access to the opportunities of the digital age.

The Compact offers an opportunity to develop a common understanding of "meaningful connectivity", the barriers to achieving it, and the action that can be taken to overcome them. Action is required on two complementary fronts: promoting *access* to connectivity and digital technologies, and, where it is accessible, promoting *usage*.

In relation to access, evidence shows that the most challenging aspect is addressing "last mile" connectivity: communities that are underserved or excluded by the mainstream market. Evidence shows that remote or low-income communities are often beyond the market

frontier of large-scale operator models. Therefore, complementary models such as small-scale Internet service providers (ISPs) and wireless ones (WISPs), as well as 'community networks', are needed to extend the connectivity 'supply chain'.

Building an enabling environment for investment is key. Improvements in the transparency, predictability and clarity of the regulatory framework and licensing arrangements, as well as appropriate spectrum management, incentivise relevant private and local investment and enable innovative, inclusive technology and business models. The use of Universal Service Funds by governments should also improve in terms of targeting, effectiveness and support to last-mile solutions. Technical assistance and capacity building at the market and community level help to make last-mile models more effective, sustainable and replicable and expand inclusive connectivity.

To increase usage, the social and cultural context matters. The underlying nature of the barriers will vary across regions and communities. They include, for example, social norms that impede specific groups, including women and girls, from engaging in the digital world; availability and effectiveness of digital skills development; levels of awareness of the usefulness of the Internet; and the availability (or lack thereof) of accessible content and services, in relevant languages and specific to the local context. Empowering users to engage safely online is essential: cyber-hygiene initiatives and user safety practices can boost confidence and reduce the likelihood of individuals withdrawing from the digital environment.

Digital inclusion can only effectively be addressed with targeted, and longer-term engagement with the "unconnected". Governments, international organisations, business enterprises, and others should collaborate to address both the barriers in access to, and usage of, connectivity. Local, sustainable and replicable initiatives such as 'community networks' should be supported and championed where applicable.

- Reaffirm the role for all stakeholders in expanding meaningful connectivity, digital skills and access to locally-relevant digital content and services, addressing issues relating to both access and usage.
- Call on governments and relevant stakeholders to create an enabling policy and regulatory environment for investment in increasing sustainable access to affordable connectivity, including to support technology and business models for last-mile connectivity.
- Endorse the Internet Universality Indicators developed by UNESCO.
- Recognise and support the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) role in providing technical assistance and capacity building of key institutions like telecoms regulators, its work on digital inclusion, and its work to provide a platform for stakeholders to coordinate and aggregate their efforts towards promoting meaningful connectivity (for example, through initiatives such as Partners2Connect).
- Recognise the existence of country-specific and global challenges in promoting meaningful connectivity, and focus the strategic remit of the UN system on the latter, while maintaining awareness of local perspectives.
- Promote best practices, building on existing work, clarifying the relationship with key fora (such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)), and enhancing engagement with the industry and giving voice to local realities (for example in relation to community networks).

Digital Public Goods and Digital Public Infrastructure

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) enables the effective provision of essential society-wide functions and services in the public and private sectors. Countries are increasingly turning to DPI to improve efficiency, speed, flexibility, inclusion and transparency of public and private sector functions and services. However, there are also associated risks as DPI can increase the capability for unlawful and arbitrary surveillance, with implications for privacy, democratic accountability, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups.

If well designed and implemented, and complemented with support for the required enabling environment (i.e. regulatory, legal and policy environment, commitment to rule of law and human rights, and capability in digital skills), and approached as co-creation with civil society, private sector, public sector, academia and government, DPI is an important part of inclusive, responsible and sustainable digital transformation, This creates a robust foundation for more efficient and effective delivery of public and private sector services.

Governments grappling with the design and implementation of new forms of DPI for public service delivery are increasingly encountering similar challenges and potential solutions. There is an opportunity for increased efforts to share approaches between governments, and particularly to promote investment in, and sharing of, Digital Public Goods (DPGs). DPGs take an open and interoperable approach to DPI, using open-source software, open data, open models, open standards, and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable international laws and best practices.

A DPG approach to DPI is an important means through which we can accelerate digital development and burden-share - reducing duplication of effort, higher costs, whilst at the same time increasing interoperability.

The Compact should:

- Recognise the importance of inclusive and responsible DPI in supporting the achievement of the SDGs.
- Recognise the need for appropriate safeguards and an enabling environment, to mitigate the potential privacy and inclusion risks related to DPI.
- Encourage an open and interoperable approach to the development of DPI, including by promoting, where appropriate, Digital Public Goods. The Digital Public Goods Alliance may provide a useful reference point.

8. A Responsible Approach to Data

Protecting Data

Data is the powerhouse of the digital economy, as well as changing society for the better - creating jobs, and enabling us to tackle global challenges like climate change and the pandemic. The flow of data across borders is therefore crucial, creating a global environment where companies from all over the world can innovate and grow, and where data improves life for all.

At the same time, there is a pressing need to build individuals' trust that their personal data is being used and shared responsibly. Where data is not secured, or is otherwise mishandled, it can generate threats to individual privacy. Human rights must be safeguarded to realise the opportunities offered by data: we must consider the rights of individuals along with the benefits of the collective.

The UK is fully committed to championing the responsible use and sharing of data globally, ensuring strong protections for individual privacy and personal data and recognising that

nations will take different approaches to governing data. We are keen to work with international partners and multi-stakeholders to implement robust protections for personal data, whilst enabling and encouraging data flows.

The Compact should:

- Champion the responsible use and sharing of data globally, recognising the potential societal and economic benefits of enabling responsible data use and data flows, as well as the potential of open data.
- Recognise the potential for non-representative data sets to promote bias and contribute to inequalities; and call on all stakeholders to take all necessary steps to mitigate and minimise the risks by using high-quality data sets.
- Encourage governments to promote the interoperability of their respective regimes to enable data flows across borders and limit data divides.
- Reaffirm commitment from governments to ensuring policy and regulatory environments provide for a high level of protection for personal data and individual privacy, in line with human rights. This could include setting out high level principles guiding approaches to data protection at national and regional level, including commitments to:
 - Comply with obligations under international human rights law, in particular article 17 of the ICCPR.
 - Put in place effective protections for data protection legislation or regulation, reflecting internationally recognised principles such as guidance produced by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and the OECD Declaration on Government Access to Personal Data Held in the Private Sector.
 - Uphold best practices in relation to data protection requirements for business enterprises, in line with UN guiding principles on business and human rights.
- Promote best practices and encourage regulatory dialogue and cooperation between international Supervisory Authorities, as well as promote capacity building in contexts lacking existing, effective data protection regimes.
- Build on the work of the UN Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PETs) Lab, encouraging further investment and collaboration on the development of PETs to help tackle global challenges.
- Facilitate dialogue with industry and civil society on innovative models, such as trusted data intermediaries, to support global data-sharing initiatives for sustainable development, in areas like climate change or health.
- Refrain from attempting to define a detailed normative framework or seeking to establish new UN institutions for this agenda.

Data for Development

The availability and responsible use of fit-for-purpose data is a critical enabler to sustainable development. Access to high-quality data allows policy makers to improve the design, targeting, monitoring and provision of services. Development agencies can use data to deliver, monitor and evaluate effective programmes. The private sector uses data to inform investment and business decisions, powering economies. Individuals use data to hold governments to account.

It is therefore essential that we support equitable access to the benefits of a modern data ecosystem, increasing the availability and accessibility of high-quality data. This means strengthening the data ecosystem broadly defined as the actors, infrastructure, governance

and enablers - which come together to develop, validate, and use data². The National Statistical system has traditionally led in the collection, processing and dissemination of official data. The organisation and governance of this system provides a foundation which can be expanded with new partners and actors to leverage the opportunity of the "Data Dividend" of Digital Development and its application to accelerating progress in delivery of the SDGs. Stronger, more effective data systems drive diverse and far ranging economic, social, environmental and institutional benefits for individuals and communities.

The Compact should:

- Promote links between the Digital and Data for Development Agenda.
- Promote the development and sharing of best practices in building a modern data ecosystem, building on the role of National Statistical Systems, to enhance the collection, management and use of data for development
- Promote support for equitable data partnerships. Developing the capacity and partnerships needed to mobilise the potential value of data, will drive catalytic and transformational progress to accelerate sustainable development and democratic objectives.
- Promote the Data for Development principles, founded upon value, trust and equity, building upon the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and supporting a Fair Data Future.
- Promote a human-rights based approach to Data for Development promoting and protecting human rights, with particular attention to vulnerable groups and individuals, and protecting personal data in line with international best practice, to prevent the misuse of data and engender public trust in international data use and data-sharing.
- Champion the potential of data for the public good and encourage actors to make data available in open, accessible, interoperable formats, for use by verified researchers and developers.
- Pilot a data-sharing hub through the UN, through which good quality, interoperable datasets could be made available to verified researchers and academics, to drive progress towards the SDGs, in partnership with industry stakeholders.

9. Building an Inclusive Online World

User safety online

The Internet and social media platforms enable information to spread globally at a previously unimaginable pace, and scale. This has unarguably diversified and democratised public discourse – providing a platform to those whose voices were not previously heard through traditional media to have global reach.

The possibility for online anonymity – much like the pseudonym of the printed press - has also opened up new channels for expression and exploration of individuals' identities and views. Whether in authoritarian contexts, or within repressive communities and domestic environments, tools for online anonymity have enabled access to information and expression without fear of reprisals. Intermediary immunity from liability - the principle by which platforms hosting user generated content should not be held legally liable for content posted by third parties - has underpinned these freedoms.

However, we are concerned that the promise of an inclusive, diverse online environment is increasingly being undermined by the prevalence of abusive conduct, targeted harassment,

² World Bank Development report 2021: Data for Better Lives

and acts of violence perpetrated online. This trend has a chilling effect on individuals' expression online, and active participation in economic, social and cultural life. It disproportionately impacts women and girls, particularly those who belong to racial and ethnic minorities, religion or belief minorities, women in public life including journalists, politicians, and others. Other minorities, in particular those subject to intersecting or multiple forms of discrimination, are also disproportionately impacted. At its most severe, hate speech online, and such content and conduct, can constitute incitement to hostility, discrimination and violence.

These negative trends are a reflection of our offline world. As such, any effective response to these challenges must be informed by an interdisciplinary approach, and encourage a whole-of-society response, including efforts in the offline world to tackle root causes.

- Set an aspiration for what an inclusive, free, diverse, accessible online world would look like, and promote practical actions for all stakeholders to take in building it.
- Promote a whole-of-society, multidisciplinary approach to addressing user safety issues.
- Reinforce the net positive impact of the Internet and platforms in enabling the enjoyment of human rights online and offline, in particular the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
- Reinforce that States' responses including legislation, regulation, and policy action to issues such as mis and disinformation, as well as abusive conduct and online
 harassment, must be compliant with States' obligations under international human
 rights law, in particular freedom of expression. This could include highlighting
 concerns with responses that violate those obligations, including for example
 shutdowns or interferences in connectivity; government censorship; overbroad
 takedown/notice regimes; criminal law sanctions for mis/disinformation.
- Reiterate business enterprises responsibility to respect human rights
- Promote research to build an evidence base of the key trends globally, regionally, nationally, and locally, and of effective policy interventions that tackle them, whilst respecting human rights.
- Promote constructive dialogue between Member States, large platforms, civil society, including user groups and human rights groups, to share and develop best practices. Engaging and empowering youth participation in the co-creation and design of measures, is particularly important.
- Promote greater transparency standards by online platforms in relation to their content moderation practices, including access to disaggregated data on the prevalence and response to certain forms of content and conduct.
- Encourage investment in digital skills, critical thinking, and media literacy, at every age.
- Encourage a safety-by-design approach, which embeds safety into the conceptualization, development and implementation of digital technologies and related policies.
- Promote voluntary pledges from business enterprises to undertake a safety-bydesign and human-rights-by-design approach to their products and services, enable informed user choice, and provide users with the tools to curate their own online experience.
- Recognise the importance of online pseudonymity and anonymity, to enable freedom of expression.
- Promote efforts to give children and young people the tools they need to navigate the online world – including digital and media literacy skills, competencies for positive engagement on digital technologies.

- Promote whole-of-society approaches to tackling hate speech, abuse, and harassment online, and gender-based violence that occurs through or is amplified by the use of technology, addressing root causes and promoting gender equality. This could include promoting investment in programmes to tackle the root causes of online abuse, harassment, and intolerance, including equality and non-discrimination initiatives.
- Support inclusive and responsible access to digital content and services for people living with disabilities.

Mis and Disinformation

The UK recognises the challenge relating to the use of the Internet and platforms to spread mis and disinformation. This can have the effect of undermining the population's access to accurate information, which is particularly dangerous in times of crisis, public health emergencies, and in the context of elections or other moments of democratic importance.

We note that the spread of mis and disinformation can be accelerated by platform design, including through recommender systems that amplify polarising content, and where such content can be reshared frictionlessly with an audience beyond a user's immediate followers. We believe further transparency from platforms about their systems and processes, alongside preventative safety-by-design approaches, would help to mitigate these risks.

- Set an aspiration for what a vibrant information ecosystem would look like, and emphasise the role of all stakeholders in building it.
- Promote constructive dialogue between Member States, relevant platforms, civil society, including user groups and human rights groups, to share and develop best practices, reinforcing the need for responses to mis/disinformation to comply with international human rights law and ensuring in particular, the protection of freedom of expression.
- Reinforce commitments to a free, independent, diverse, pluralistic media landscape and opposing measures that interfere with media and journalists' ability to operate freely.
- Promote multi-stakeholder, multidisciplinary responses to mis/disinformation, which
 focus on building user skills and resilience to mis/disinformation rather than
 exclusively on restricting online content.
- Promote efforts to build the evidence base to drive industry and platform-specific best practice - improving understanding of the effectiveness of a range of platform counter disinformation interventions and products, from fact check labels to researcher datasharing regimes.
- Encourage platforms to proactively consider the risks of mis/disinformation in the design, development and implementation of their products and services (including the role of algorithms in amplifying mis/disinformation) and enhance transparency around their terms of service and content moderation policies.
- Encourage platforms to provide users with greater control over their online experiences and with clear and appropriate mechanisms for user redress, alongside appropriate protections for journalists and recognised news publishers.

10. Artificial Intelligence

Cutting-edge technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) have transformational potential. Already, AI is delivering tangible benefits: speeding up medical research and diagnostics, and generating productivity savings in the public and private sectors. AI's potential applications in fields like climate science can improve our understanding of future risks, and improve our response to the threat of climate change, and other shared challenges. As such, creating an enabling environment for innovation in the design, development, and deployment of these technologies is a societal imperative.

Innovation should, however, be responsible: it is essential that the right safeguards are in place for human rights, security, sustainability, and broader democratic values. This approach builds public trust, business confidence and will ultimately support the widespread adoption of these powerful technologies. With potential dual use applications, it is important that the specific use context is taken into consideration when managing potential risks.

In relation to AI, the UK's <u>AI Regulation White Paper</u> sets out our intention to work through existing regulators, who will refer to a set of five core principles³ to guide their industry oversight. These principles build on the <u>OECD's AI Principles</u>, which form the basis of many emerging international AI governance initiatives. The UK will consult on new processes to enable coordination between regulators, and implement six central functions to support the UK's AI regulation framework and provide an overarching view of how it operates and where improvements are needed. This includes a horizon scanning function and a central risk function which will enable the government to monitor and identify emerging risks and opportunities. This flexible, iterative approach ensures we can be responsive to the rapid pace of technological change.

- Champion the transformative potential of emerging technologies, such as AI, including for the achievement of the SDGs, and to drive sustainable growth.
- Set a positive, aspirational vision for the future, in which the use of AI systems improves our lives for the better, and where everyone can reap the benefits they have to offer.
- Reaffirm State obligations to protect, respect, and fulfil human rights, including in the context of the use of new technologies such as AI; and business enterprises' responsibilities to respect human rights throughout their business operations.
- Encourage capacity building and investment in relevant skills and training, with particular emphasis on promoting access to training and education for those currently under-represented in STEM, including women and girls, and minority groups, and those subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
- Champion a secure-by-design approach to new technologies and data sharing systems, to promote safety and predictability.

³safety, security and robustness: applications of AI should function in a secure, safe and robust way where risks are carefully managed

transparency and explainability: organisations developing and deploying AI should be able to communicate when and how it is used and explain a system's decision-making process in an appropriate level of detail that matches the risks posed by the use of AI

fairness: Al should be used in a way which complies with the UK's existing laws, for example the Equality Act 2010 or UK GDPR, and must not discriminate against individuals or create unfair commercial outcomes

accountability and governance: measures are needed to ensure there is appropriate oversight of the way AI is being used and clear accountability for the outcomes

contestability and redress: people need to have clear routes to dispute harmful outcomes or decisions generated by AI

- Emphasise the importance of an enabling environment for responsible innovation, including proportionate, and transparent policy and regulation.
- Consider existing principles, such as the OECD AI Principles, and the UK's AI principles (focused on safety, security and robustness; transparency and explainability; fairness; accountability and governance; contestability and redress) as a possible reference point in the Compact debate.
- Promote efforts to share best practices and knowledge, including in relation to practical assurance tools and techniques that can help measure, evaluate and communicate the trustworthiness of AI systems across the development and deployment life cycle. This will enable organisations to determine whether technologies are aligned with regulatory requirements, and protect human rights.
- Promote a proportionate, risk-based approach to AI governance, with a focus on managing risk in the specific contexts in which it is applied. Particular emphasis should be placed on addressing risks of bias and discriminatory impacts associated with the use of new technologies.
- Exclude issues relating to Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems currently under consideration within the UN Group of Governmental Experts – from the scope of the Compact.

11. Cyber Security

We recognise that cyber threats present serious policy challenges in all jurisdictions. We are clear however that existing UN processes lead efforts to address these and should continue to do so. These include the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of ICTs for Criminal Purposes, and the Open-Ended Working Group on Security of and in the use of ICTs, and in future the proposed Programme of Action to advance responsible state behaviour in the use of ICTs in the context of international security.

The Compact should:

 Avoid duplication within the UN system, excluding issues related to cyber security from the scope of the Compact.