

# EURODIG'S SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF ITS RESPONSE TO THE ONLINE CONSULTATION ON THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT

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## **I. EuroDIG's active engagement in the GDC process and related UN initiatives**

Since it was first held in Strasbourg in 2008 as an annual multistakeholder the European regional Internet governance forum EuroDIG has developed a strong track record as a leading, globally influential regional Internet forum for promoting multistakeholder dialogue on key Internet policy issues, challenges and opportunities, and for fostering collaborative initiatives. As a multistakeholder regional forum established a mutually constructive relationship with the annual global Internet Governance Forum (IGF) convened under the auspices of the United Nations as part of the expanding global IGF ecosystem of governance. Further information about EuroDIG's aims, activities, agenda-setting and governance is accessible at <https://www.eurodig.org/>

Furthermore, EuroDIG will continue to play a prominent part in the implementation of recommendations and reforms for strengthening the global IGF and build on its successful track record since its creation by the World Summit on the Information Society (the WSIS) in 2005. EuroDIG accordingly strongly supports the renewal of the IGF's mandate by the UN General Assembly at the time of the WSIS+20 review in 2025 so that it can continue to serve the best interests of Internet stakeholders including governments, parliamentarians, the private sector, the technical community, civil society and individual users worldwide.

The EuroDIG stakeholder community recognises the critical importance of the UN Secretary-General's proposal for adopting a Global Digital Compact at the Summit of the Future in 2024 that will promote more inclusive and effective cooperation in support of an open, free and secure digital future for all, and strengthen the multistakeholder mechanisms for governance and constructive stakeholder interaction. Provision has accordingly been made for information sharing and discussion of the Secretary-General's initiatives during EuroDIG's recent annual meetings.

EuroDIG has engaged directly with the sequence of activities undertaken by the Secretary-General's initiative on digital cooperation, notably the recommendations of the report of his High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation entitled "The Age of Digital Interdependence" (June 2019) which were discussed at the EuroDIG annual event in

The Hague. EuroDIG has subsequently endeavoured to ensure that the European stakeholder community is kept fully informed of key developments at the UN level, including in June 2020 the Secretary-General's "Roadmap for Digital Cooperation" with its set of recommended actions.

EuroDIG has also undertaken stakeholder consultations on individual proposals such as the establishment of a multistakeholder high level board for the IGF (now known as the Leadership Panel) with its key remit on advocacy of outcomes and advisory role on IGF strategy.

Updates on these UN initiatives have been provided by EuroDIG's intersessional project on digital cooperation details of which are accessible on the EuroDIG website at [https://eurodigwiki.org/wiki/Digital\\_Cooperation](https://eurodigwiki.org/wiki/Digital_Cooperation)

## **II. EuroDIG's consultations on the Global Digital Compact**

The Secretary General's report "Our Common Agenda" suggested that the GDC with its shared principles for "an open, free and secure digital future for all" should cover a range of thematic areas and specific issues including digital connectivity, avoiding Internet fragmentation, providing people with options as to how their data is used, applying human rights online, and promoting a trustworthy Internet by introducing accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content. These issues have been addressed in various sessions during annual EuroDIG meetings in the last three years and their conclusions published for the benefit of the global community as "EuroDIG Messages".

Recognising that when it is adopted at the Summit of the Future in 2024, the Global Digital Compact will have a profound influence over the course of digital policy and economic and social transformation worldwide, EuroDIG undertook a comprehensive online consultation on its scope and potential outcomes which mirrored the survey questionnaire launched by the UN Office of the Envoy on Technology. As with previous EuroDIG consultations, a commenting platform was used for responses which provided a summary of the EuroDIG Messages from recent EuroDIG meetings which are relevant to the GDC thematic areas proposed in Our Common Agenda.

Stakeholders in the European region were invited to comment on core principles and commitments to action by specific stakeholders, with the aim of developing a substantive input into the GDC development process, consistent with European values of universal access, freedom of expression and democratic rights, supportive of innovation and digital transformation that creates new economic opportunities and enhance social welfare of all citizens.

### **III. EuroDIG's responses to the Tech Envoy's consultation on specific thematic areas**

#### **1. Connect all people to the Internet, including all schools**

##### i. Core Principles

- Access to all devices and to the Internet must be observed as a universal right.
- Accessibility must take into account all disabilities including the blind and deaf.
- A multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to raise awareness of relevant tools and platforms, to optimise the technical infrastructure for Internet access, and to enhance cybersecurity. This is important when connecting schools and all places where learning takes place, including lifelong learning centres, libraries and beyond.
- Ehealth and the medical Internet of things (IoT) requires high quality Internet connectivity.
- There are many existing challenges in establishing community networks, particularly on the regulatory, funding, and connectivity side. However, technical aspects go hand in hand with a strong network of community support: both the technology and the sense of community are crucial elements in ensuring the success of community networks.

##### ii. Commitments to action

- European policymakers need to devise digital policies that firstly improve European digital infrastructure and secondly build bridges through strategic partnerships with key players like the US and China.
- There is a need for increased investment in international connectivity through submarine cables and other technologies.
- Sectoral bundling of connectivity requirements can stimulate and increase potential investment e.g. ehealth with agriculture and education.
- The EU should take decisive steps in establishing a comprehensive digital connectivity strategy not only between the member states but also other regions, in particular those with high traffic growth in Africa and south America.
- Community networks provide Internet access for and by remote communities. When establishing community networks, it is crucial to build digital capacity both in terms of installation and maintenance of technical infrastructure and in terms of developing digital literacy programmes that ensure users' meaningful participation on the Internet.
- Secure connectivity is vital for the healthcare sector where digitalisation and the medical IoT has revolutionised how medical devices are manufactured and used.

#### **2. Avoid Internet fragmentation**

##### i. Core Principles

- The original model for Internet services based on multiple implementations, interoperability and open standards, has proved to be effective in countering the growth and dominance of "*walled gardens*" and closed platforms.

- Any regulatory initiatives aimed at exerting sovereignty in a particular field must ensure they do not harm human rights online, do not harm the open and global nature of the Internet, and are in line with democratic multi-stakeholder principles.

## ii. Commitments to action

- The single, global, multi-stakeholder governance framework should be maintained for the key technical resources of the Internet (including IP addresses and domain names).
- One of the ways to reduce the possibility of a “*splinternet*” is to avoid incompatible regulations for Internet infrastructure. Fragmentation at the transport layer (IP, DNS root) should be avoided.
- In regulating the Internet infrastructure, collateral damage should be avoided to the services and operators regarding economic costs and availability and avoid fragmentation of the global critical internet infrastructure.
- Sovereign states have the right to create rules over the usage of the Internet by their citizens according to their national values and legal frameworks, on issues such as moderation and removal of content, privacy and data protection, fair competition, national security and taxation.

## **3. Protect data**

### i. Core Principles

- It is important for a citizen to know how their data (including personal health data) is used, stored, and secured: what are the stages, who has access at each particular point.
- Privacy should be an important issue in everything we do, and its central parts should be privacy by design and security by design.
- Privacy is about trust, and companies need to demonstrate that they are trustworthy. Privacy enhanced technologies should be everyone’s right.

### ii. Commitments to action

- Citizens should have a choice to control how their data is used by different entities in a centralised or a decentralised manner.
- Entities collecting user data need to be proactive in ensuring transparency and accountability.
- For AI health applications there needs to be trust and accountability of algorithms and human oversight.
- The proper consent is required for users who share their data in return for a service. Education and information are key for users to understand what is at stake, and to take responsibility.
- In the healthcare sector, patients should be able to move with their personal medical data files and be able to access their older medical data files. Patients’ consent should be required for third party access to data.

## **4. Apply human rights online**

### i. Core Principles

- Digital identity solutions need to be measured not only by their usefulness and functionality but more importantly by how they respect and reflect fundamental

human rights and common responsibilities. An ethical policy approach is therefore important.

#### ii. Commitments to action

- Finding the right balance between the control of online content and upholding fundamental rights, and between privacy and transparency, will continue to be important considerations for policy makers and decision takers.
- An ethics-based approach should be adopted for brain wave applications and other transformative ehealth applications.
- Given that most cyber incidents occur across borders and that there is no common definition of crime and terrorism, co-operation between states and with the private sector on such matters is crucial.
- A careful impact assessment of new technologies and tools on human rights should be carried out to avoid violations of individual rights.

### **5. Accountability for discrimination and misleading content**

#### i. Core Principles

- Media literacy is crucial in fighting misinformation. It is very important to educate and empower people to spot misinformation and make informed decisions on whom to trust.
- Manipulation of media sources whether in the form of disinformation or misinformation can fuel violent conflict. Any response must comply with human rights and European values, such as democracy and the rule of law.

#### ii. Commitments to action

- Multi-stakeholder involvement (i.e. the involvement of those directly concerned and impacted by misinformation) is of utmost importance in fighting misinformation. This is crucial for example in relation to medical and health issues.
- There is also a need for the infrastructure to organise fact checking and research activities that would be available in all EU languages and would, therefore, benefit all EU countries.
- There is a need to invest in building media literacy skills in people of all ages.
- In order to regulate all platforms in a uniform manner, there is a need for a more comprehensive reflection on how to construct a “*regulatory backstop*” that creates more uniformity, more instruments with appropriate oversight mechanisms, and in cases of need, sanctions.
- The proliferation of harmful content such as disinformation during the recent crises has confirmed how it can polarize the public debate and even be a driver of a crisis. A range of actions to counter disinformation is therefore needed, including:
  - a complementary approach of soft-law arrangements such as voluntary codes of conduct and regulatory measures to deal with the strong position of platforms;
  - the provision of trustworthy content through the support of sustainable and independent journalism, independent public service media and trusted community institutions such as libraries;

- further strengthening of fact-checking initiatives and increased investment in digital and media literacy.

## **6. Regulation of artificial intelligence**

### **i. Core Principles**

- The potential **risks relating to AI need to be examined holistically**.
- **Humans should ultimately remain in command**, have oversight and be responsible for AI deployment and applications.
- Establishing **transparency of data sources and algorithms**.

### **ii. Commitments to action**

- In addition to reaching **agreement on certain global principles, values and possible rights** to guide AI development, such as prevention of discrimination, data protection and governance (including regular audits for data accuracy and relevance), building trust, protection of privacy, transparency, and human-centred AI, there is also a **need to allow regions and states to adapt these principles to their own situations through concrete instruments** targeted at policymakers and other actors.
- In this process, the **multi-stakeholder approach and cross-regional dialogue are key for ensuring harmonisation**. The current escalating geopolitical tensions, however, are challenging multi-stakeholderism and cross-regional dialogue. There is accordingly a need to take a fresh look at them.
- **Investment in educational programmes and raising awareness** is needed to help users understand AI technologies, their benefits as well as their risks, how algorithms work, the importance of consent relating to data use etc.
- Robotics, virtual reality and quantum computing should all be taken into account in developing **the medical IoT** so that the benefits of digitalisation for the health sector are maximised.
- Ongoing regional and global initiatives on **collaboration and information sharing should be supported**.

## **7. Digital commons as a global public good**

EuroDIG has a pan-European remit that extends to all countries in the European region including the Member States of the European Union. Discussions at EuroDIG meetings provide an inclusive multistakeholder platform for both the advocacy of European values in global discussions and for fostering the kind of multi-country collaborative projects and international partnerships envisaged in the UN Secretary-General's initiative on digital cooperation and the digital commons as a global public good.

Consistent with these objectives, EuroDIG meetings have provided the opportunity for the European Commission to create within the wider European geo-political environment greater awareness and discussion of EU digital policy initiatives. These include Europe's Digital Decade with its targets for digital transformation by 2030, the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act and the Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles which emphasises the importance of putting people and their rights at

the centre of digital transformation, participation in the digital public space - “the global commons” - and promoting the sustainability of the digital future. The Declaration is an example therefore of how an EU initiative can contribute as an existing reference point for European values and principles to the current consultations on the GDC.

The conceptual framing of a global “digital commons” has not yet been discussed in detail during recent EuroDIG meetings. However, the following point was raised by a stakeholder in EuroDIG’s most recent consultation on the GDC:

- As recognised by UNESCO in its *Futures of Education* report\*, knowledge itself should be a commons and therefore efforts to avoid enclosures that harm the public interest should be supported.

\* <https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/>

## **8. EuroDIG proposal for additional GDC thematic area: Green Digital Transformation**

The need to transition to a green digital economy by the 2030s has been discussed at several recent EuroDIG meetings. It was the subject of an intersessional project in 2020-21 on information and communications technology (ICT) sustainability and the crucial role of the Internet governance community in ensuring that environmental sustainability is at the heart of ICTs throughout their lifecycle.

We are at a critical junction given the urgency of this issue at a time when the policy and regulatory environment recognises the need for more commitments to action on digitisation and sustainability inline with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the follow up to COP27 on catalysing the green digital transformation.

The following proposals for core principles and commitments to action in the Global Digital Compact are largely drawn from the report of a workshop held at EuroDIG’s most recent annual meeting in Trieste on 21 June 2022. entitled *From commitments to action: Assessing the effectiveness of pan-European policies and regulations for the green digital transformation*. The full report of this session is accessible [here](#) .

### i. Core Principles

- **Digitalisation and environmental sustainability must be looked at together** and not as two distinct policy areas.
- Ecological standards should be incorporated in **ICT regulation and the design and production of digital devices and applications**.
- Regulatory frameworks should be **practical, effective and incentive-based**.

### ii. Commitments to action

- To reduce the environmental impact of the digital world, it is necessary to adopt measures to **optimise energy and material efficiency (circularity) of the digital sector**. For example, increasing the use of renewables, innovating for low energy consumption, keeping devices longer in use, facilitating re-use, improving reparability and recyclability, and adopting sustainable business models.

- Areas where **international coordination** is needed the most are measures to promote the **circular economy**, to share **environmental data**, to reduce environmentally **harmful consumption**, to promote **efficiency and enhance digital applications**, and to ensure **transparency regarding environmental costs**.
- Governments, regulators, industry sectors and the technical community should cooperate in:
  - promoting the environmental sustainability of the ICT sector;
  - measuring its impact on the environment;
  - ensuring transparency and corporate accountability;
  - increasing circular production and consumption;
  - discouraging illegitimate exports of e-waste;
  - promoting material efficiency by increasing the reuse and repairability of devices.
- Increased **cooperation, data sharing, and external auditing** are crucial to assess and monitor the environmental impact of the ICT sector, to avoid greenwashing and to promote transparency.
- **Standardisation of indicators** is imperative and common methodologies are also necessary **to measure and compare the net-environmental benefits of digital solutions**.

Drawing on its examination of this key issue which the EuroDIG multistakeholder community stands ready to assist the GDC co-facilitators in developing green digitalisation as an additional core thematic area of the Compact.

## **IV. Conclusions**

The proposed Global Digital Compact provides an important opportunity for European stakeholders to promote European core values and principles, including those embedded in the EU's digital objectives and targets, in a UN instrument that will set the course for digital cooperation in support of the open, free, unfragmented and sustainable Internet-based eco-system of global digital cooperation.

EuroDIG provides a pro-active channel for stakeholders across the continent of Europe to contribute to achieving these aims. A workshop to discuss the GDC process and related UN initiatives will be held during the next annual meeting of EuroDIG in Tampere, Finland, on 19 June 2023. This interactive workshop will aim to agree further consensus-based agreement and messages in support of the GDC process. The full programme for the annual meeting can be accessed at [https://eurodigwiki.org/wiki/Consolidated\\_programme\\_2023](https://eurodigwiki.org/wiki/Consolidated_programme_2023).

The EuroDIG multistakeholder community looks forward to being engaged in and contributing to all stages of the GDC process, including the finalisation of the scope and content of the Compact during 2023-34, its launch at the Summit of the Future in September 2024 and the subsequent implementation phase.

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