



REPORTING DAILY FROM THE 12th INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM

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IGF Daily prepared by the Geneva Internet Platform with support from the IGF Secretariat, ICANN, the Internet Society, and DiploFoundation

HIGHLIGHTS FROM DAY 1

The 12th Internet Governance Forum opened officially yesterday with over 30 sessions. The future of global digital governance, access and development, and emerging technologies were among the main themes. We recap what was said.

Digital governance: Maximising opportunities, addressing the challenges

It is now a well-known fact that technology provides opportunities as well as challenges. Yesterday's discussions on digital governance centred on what many have been repeating: we need to maximise the opportunities offered by technology, while addressing the challenges that technology brings.

The question is, how do we do this? Some believe that we should focus on the development of the digital economy; others believe the priority should be on bridging the digital divide, and enhancing confidence and trust in the digital technologies.

This year's discussion shifted from the previous heavy focus on the Internet as a tool, to the new priority of discussing which values the Internet should promote. Here, views ranged from the idea that the Internet is just a mirror of society with no

influence on society, to arguments that the Internet not only changes society, but it does so in a profound way.

The 'mirror of society' position argues that we cannot deal with problems of society by regulating the Internet. We have to change society. The opposing view argues that we can impact society by regulating the Internet.

One shared view is that there are always norms and/or rules that govern the Internet. Norms are an informal determinant of behaviour. Rules are codified in national and international laws. Should these rules take the form of an international convention or treaty? On one hand, it is either not desirable or not possible to have an Internet convention.

On the other hand, those who see the need for an Internet treaty focused on the ways and means to make it a reality.

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Yesterday's high-level discussion tackled the future of global digital governance.

Credit: UN Photo/ Jean Marc Ferré



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The common view is that today, the world is not ready for a treaty. There is fatigue in global treaty-making, added to an unclear delineation of the problems that such a treaty should address. But as technology develops very fast, the situation is likely to change. Whether the need for a treaty will emerge in 10 years' time or later remained an open question by the end of the first day's discussions.

Quite a few references were made to a possible Digital Geneva Convention, which galvanises many discussions on the need for an Internet treaty. The discussion whether there is a need for an Internet treaty, which started on Day 0, is likely to continue during the IGF and beyond.

Artificial intelligence: Education is needed to tackle concerns

The fact that artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential of contributing to growth and development, is something that more and more countries understand as they adopt development plans focused on research and innovation.

But AI also raises concerns, and many of these revolve around social implications, especially in terms of the impact of technological developments on employment and jobs (i.e. with jobs being made obsolete as they are performed by automated systems).[Safety](#), security, and privacy are other

areas of concern, as well as the potential of AI algorithms to perpetuate human biases and discrimination when it comes to decision making.

There is also the risk of a new digital divide, as some developing countries may not be (yet) ready to seize the opportunities offered by AI. These concerns can only be properly addressed if all stakeholders are involved. For example, ethical considerations should be taken into account in both the development and use of AI systems, involves both the technical community and the private sector.

The public debate seems to be more focused on the challenges and risks involved than on the developmental potential of AI. The multiple facets of AI need to be better understood, which drives the need for more awareness raising, education, and capacity development. We need to avoid a future in which a 'fear of machines' dominates the public understanding of AI and leads to a form of 'moral panic'.

Data: Identifying uses and challenges

We often hear that 'data is the oil of the digital economy'. With more and more data being generated not only by individuals, but also by interactions between machines, there is an increasing potential to use data to identify solutions to some of humanity's most challenging problems.

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A LOOK AT THE PREFIX MONITOR

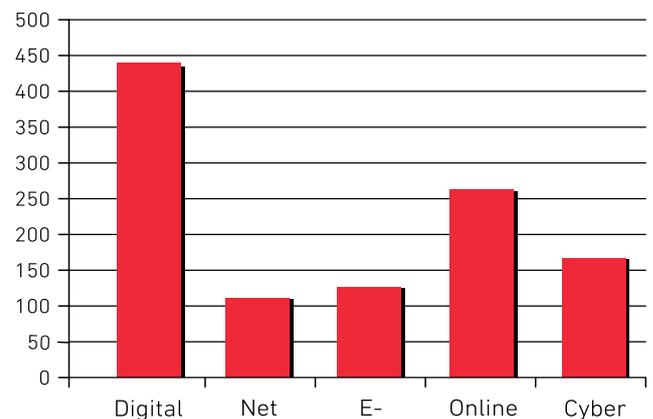


The use of prefixes in digital policy discussions is more than a study of the evolution of language. It tells us in which direction the discussions are going, and how certain issues are framed – and in some cases nuanced. DiploFoundation has been analysing the language of digital policy since WSIS 2005.

The prefix *digital* is by far the leader, based on the analysis of 33 transcripts from Day 1 of the IGF 2017. The popularity of *digital* is triggered by the growing use of the concept of the digitalisation of society. One interesting trend from Day 1 is the frequent use of *digital* governance instead of *Internet* governance.

While leading in overall use, *digital* has lost its predominance in economic issues to the prefix 'e-'. During the last few years, *digital* was used more than 'e-' as dominant prefix for economic issues, probably due to the influence of the introduction of the EU Digital Single Market in the Internet governance debate. The return to the use of 'e' (electronic) for economic and trade matters was supported by the use of the term e-commerce in the preparatory process for the WTO Ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires.

The relatively low frequency of the prefix *cyber* during Day 1 could be explained by the low number of sessions on cybersecurity. Its use is likely to increase today (Day 2) as one of the main sessions and several other workshops focus on cybersecurity.



DID YOU KNOW?

Since data is the oil of the new economy, *data* was very appropriately the most popular word during yesterday's discussions.

Our analysis of transcripts so far shows that the word *data* was used over 500 times, which reflects data's position at the core of modern society, from our digital footprint via e-mail and social media, through to big data analytics. It also confirms that issues related to data underlie many policy discussions. Learn more about the interplay between data and digital policy issues. [↗](#)

In addition to this summary, read our reports from most sessions, at dig.watch/igf2017



Data can be used, for example, for poverty reduction and environmental protection, as well as to achieve other sustainable development goals. In one illustration of such uses, free and open earth observation data can form the basis of projects focused on solving environmental problems. [↗](#)

What about the challenges? Data privacy and security could put the economy and citizens at risk, while possible biases in data can result in misleading analyses. Here too, experts called for education and capacity development for both individuals and institutions, to help capture the potential of data and to become more aware of its limitations and risks. [↗](#)

Organisations rely increasingly on the use of cloud computing services, most of which involve the storage and processing of data in remote cloud servers. The fact that such servers can be located in foreign countries might raise jurisdictional challenges for protecting the data (which laws apply, and how much control do the data owners have over data stored abroad?). [↗](#)

Access: The digital divide still a reality

While the future might be *digital* for many of us, this is not (yet) the case for everyone. Talking about shaping our digital future is premature in many cases, as the digital divide remains a reality, and billions of individuals still do not have access to the Internet.

Solutions focused on bridging this divide should have a holistic approach: building or enhancing infrastructures needs to be complemented with empowering individuals and communities to make meaningful use of the Internet. Children, refugees, indigenous people, people with disabilities, women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups (LGBT) are some of the groups and communities that can be empowered by the Internet, and efforts should be made in this direction. [↗](#)

Internet connectivity in small island developing states (SIDS) also continues to be a challenge, and the development of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs), as well as strengthened public-private partnerships for the deployment of networks offer some possible solutions. One important aspect to keep in mind, however, is that SIDS are often prone to natural disasters, which can disrupt the availability of telecommunications networks. [↗](#)

Intermediaries: Defining the extent of their responsibility

In recent months, intermediaries have increasingly come under pressure for the spread of fake news or misinformation, and violent extremism, across their platforms. Governments have been vociferous in their calls for action. In September, for example, the UK called on companies to take down extremist content within one or two hours. [↗](#) In response to the demand to take more immediate action, Internet companies have developed new tools and initiatives for dealing with these issues.

In this scenario, a key question relates to the extent of intermediaries' responsibility. Yesterday's discussions referred to the Council of Europe's draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the roles and responsibilities of Internet intermediaries. [↗](#) The draft includes recommendations about specific functions that private companies may perform in the digital world, as opposed to being restricted to general recommendations for intermediaries. [↗](#)

When it comes to content policy, companies still need to improve transparency in the way they deal with content. Artificial intelligence is being used extensively to flag inappropriate content, which is an additional tool to help individuals review such content.

THE IGF AS A PROCESS: NRI COLLABORATIVE SESSIONS AND DYNAMIC COALITIONS

The IGF is a year-long process. Dynamic Coalitions (DCs) and Best Practice Forums (BPFs) form part of what is known as the IGF's intersessional work, focusing on specific digital policy issues between meetings. National, regional, and youth IGF initiatives (NRIs) also feed into the IGF, bringing in local perspectives.

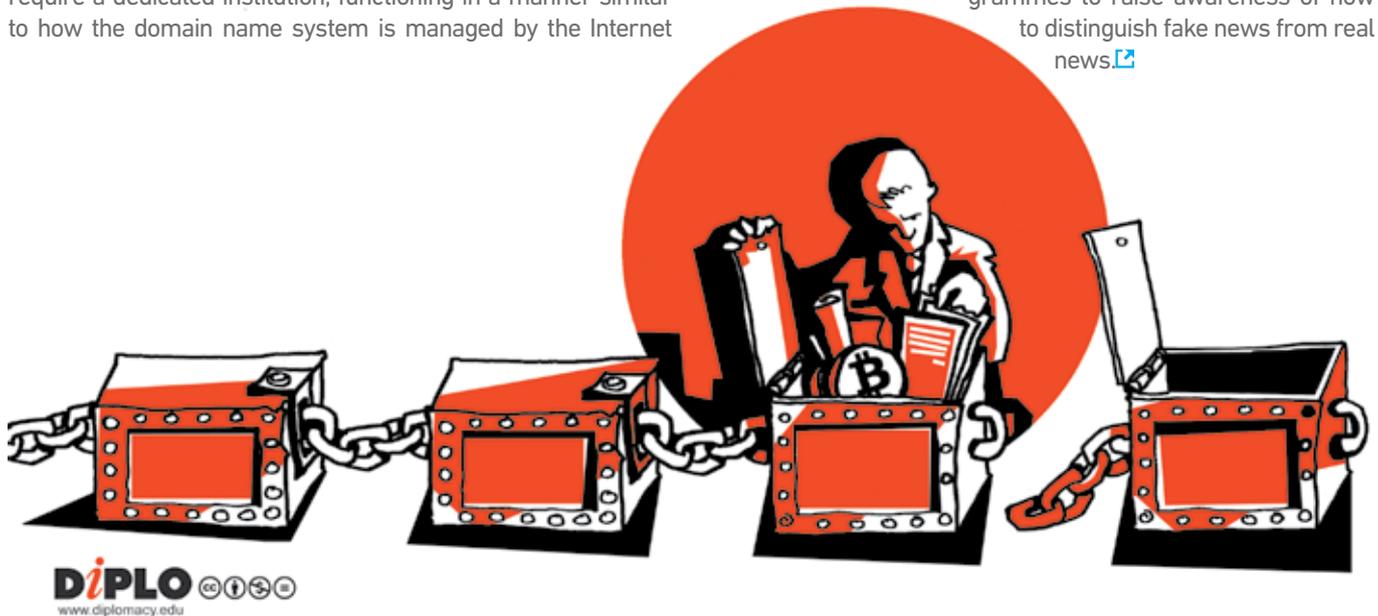
Yesterday, two DCs held their regular annual meetings. The DC on Core Internet Values emphasised that core Internet values are *technical* values, and do not deal with rights and principles. These values refer to the Internet as a global, interoperable, open, decentralised, user-centric, robust, reliable, and end-to-end phenomenon.[↗](#)

The DC on Blockchain Technology explored possible uses of blockchain technology beyond cryptocurrencies, and raised several questions: What can the blockchain community learn from Internet governance processes? Does blockchain governance require a dedicated institution, functioning in a manner similar to how the domain name system is managed by the Internet

Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)? And can the decentralised aspect of blockchain be maintained?[↗](#)

In the session organised collaboratively by NRI initiatives, European NRIs shared thoughts on how to secure the critical information infrastructure, and emphasised that cooperation between different sectors at national and international levels is essential.[↗](#)

The national IGFs from Brazil, Central Africa, and Portugal focused on the need to improve digital competences among individuals in order to empower them to take full advantage of the new digital technologies such as automation and AI.[↗](#) IGF initiatives from Colombia, Croatia, The Netherlands, Nigeria, the USA, and the UK discussed fake news, misinformation, and disinformation in the online space. Because these issues affect citizens and democratic processes, online users need literacy programmes to raise awareness of how to distinguish fake news from real news.[↗](#)



DON'T MISS TODAY

Impact of digitisation on politics, public trust, and democracy[↗](#)
10:00 – 13:00 | Main Hall (Room XVII - E)

The second high-level session of the week will explore the opportunities and challenges that digitisation brings to the digital political sphere, the public trust, and democracy. High-level participants such as Mr Hasanul Haq Inu, Minister of Information, Bangladesh, and Ms Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, European Commission, will share their views on whether education and awareness raising can be the key to empowering citizens to deal with the challenges related to the misuse of the public space.

Empowering global cooperation on cybersecurity for sustainable development and peace[↗](#)

15:00 – 18:00 | Main Hall (Room XVII - E)

Achieving global sustainable development can become a greater challenge if actors fail to work towards global cooperation on cybersecurity and preserving the stability of the Internet. How can we ensure cooperation for sustainable development and peace? Can this be done in a multistakeholder framework, or is an international code of conduct or a global treaty on cybersecurity more feasible? And what are the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders when it come to cybersecurity?