Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Zambia to the United Nations

Vienna, Friday, March 8, 2024

Subject: Written submission to the Global Digital Compact

Excellencies,

Dear Sir or Madam,

In response to the letter from the Zambian and Swedish Permanent Missions to the United Nations about the Global Digital Compact dated 23 February 2024[1], we publish here our written feedback to the Possible elements of the Global Digital Compact. This feedback was provided via official channels and accompanies our oral intervention on 1 March 2024[2].

Do you consider that key priorities for a Global Digital Compact are captured in the structural elements circulated? * Agree

Section 2: Principles. Please provide comments and recommendations, if any

We welcome Principle 3 as it is a vital precondition for the development of a digital future that respects the dignity of people and ensures positive potentials are realized on a collective and individual level. The international human rights framework has to be the basis upon which to create the Global Digital Compact.

Principle 1 or 4 should mention the concept of net neutrality, as it is a precondition of achieving open connectivity for all and connecting everyone on the planet in one unsegmented internet. Net neutrality is also the most effective and cost-efficient way to provide connectivity to people, since every form of technical limitation or application-specific pricing requires a level of control that's otherwise not necessary.

Principle 6 should include the promotion of concepts of Open Knowledge, Open Data, Open Educational Resources and other forms of free culture, that can copied easily without licensing cost. Thereby, the goals of a knowledge driven society that has available the resources to educate large parts of the population can be achieved.

Principle 7 should explicitly mention high risk AI technologies such as facial recognition or other forms of biometrics. Spreading these technologies enables unprecedented forms of government control and undermines the respect for and protection of human rights.

We welcome Principle 10 and the acknowledgement of the various stakeholders. The multi-stakeholder model has worked tremendously well in developing solutions to the complicated and

---

1 https://www.un.org/techenvoy/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/240223_Co-Facs_Invitation_Letter_Second_Round_Consultations_FINAL.pdf
2 https://epicenter.works/content/global-digital-compact-oral-intervention-in-second-informal-consultation

multi-layered problems of the digital world. This principle should be
further emphasized, also in light of the need for the continuation of the mandate of the IGF.

Section 3: Commitments. Please provide comments and recommendations, if any

Having an unconditional commitment to Digital Public Infrastructures (DPI) would be a contradiction to the other Principles in the GDC. DPI without proper safeguards is an extremely dangerous development that risks harming the most vulnerable segments of society (elderly, less digital literate, poor, stateless persons, etc.). Any commitment to DPI needs to be accompanied by a.) the preconditions that have to be met in the country that aims at implementing this technology (such as the rule of law) and b.) the specific safeguards on a technological and regulatory level (privacy-by-design, security-by-design, ensuring system is inclusive, accessible and voluntary, putting limits on private sector use cases, etc.).

Programs that promote DPI implementation must follow the principle of subsidiarity, in order to empower local communities as much as possible. Global safeguards for this technology are still being developed and there is not yet sufficient experience to ensure that they are safe. The GDC should include a commitment that DPI can't be a precondition for development cooperation programs.

We collected such safeguards for DPI, that have been enshrined in EU law during the ongoing legislative term, in a recent report that helps to outline the safeguards we are talking about[3]

Section 4: Follow-up. Please provide comments and recommendations, if any

We recommend that monitoring of meaningful connectivity should differentiate between internet connections that allow access to the full internet and sub-internet connections that only provide access to a subset of the internet. These types of offers include zero-rating tariffs and come for example in the form of Facebooks Free Basics. Many pre-paid connection tariffs are also limited to the use of WhatsApp or other individual services. These types of offers don't allow the benefit of the internet to be realized. They impose limits on what people are able to see and do online. Such connections prevent fact checking or following links that are distributed on social media, whereby fake news can spread easily. Health and eGovernment services are often inaccessible with these types of products. Therefore we consider such connectivity as not meaningful and we recommend to not count it as such.

Any additional comments

The GDC should reiterate the commitment to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as an invaluable forum for the global community. In light of the expiration of the IGF mandate in 2026 such a commitment is an essential part of upholding the multi-stakeholder approach.

Kind regards,

epicenter.works – for digital rights

---

3   https://epicenter.works/en/content/analysis-of-privacy-by-design-eu-legislation-on-digital-public-infrastructures