

GDC RESOURCES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What is the Global Digital Compact?

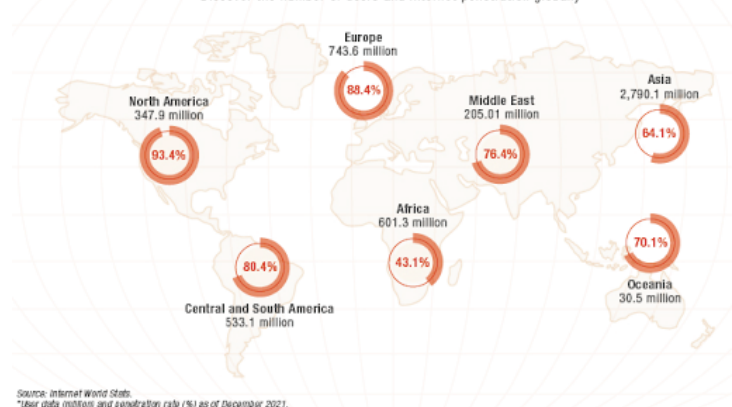
The Global Digital Compact (GDC) is an opportunity to bring together a broad range of stakeholders to agree on what kind of digital future we all desire and require. As well as the necessary measures to protect and empower users

Current Key Concerns:

- There is general consensus that digital legal protection lags behind what is needed due to the rapid pace of technological development and insufficient understanding from government bodies. Many activities take place online that would not be accepted offline and has also opened the threats of the 'dark web' where criminal activity is rife. What is more, different types of government have different priorities when approaching legislating the internet of the future - democratic ones where human rights are protected and authoritarian ones where the internet becomes a tool for state control and surveillance domestically and globally. This poses the threat of internet fragmentation.
- Government action to safeguard data privacy/security is growing, with 71% of countries now having active legislation to protect their population. In many regions, individuals are increasingly given autonomy over their data (e.g., the GDPR regulations passed by the EU). However, the extent of legislative protection differs significantly by region. Additionally, malicious attacks on data are difficult for governments to manage and prevent given the expertise required to uncover these crimes is often scarce, especially in the public sector.
- The internet and social media created platforms for anyone to share their views. While the initial hope was to create a democratic space for public discourse and free expression, they also gave individuals and other actors unprecedented reach to spread misinformation and disinformation to a wide audience. The difficulty of confirming what is and is not mis/disinformation in order to legislate against them is complicated by concerns regarding freedom of speech, limited assistance from social media companies, and government or state-sponsored disinformation campaigns.
- Despite impressive growth in internet access in the last few decades, resulting in 5.16 billion current users of the internet worldwide, a significant percentage of the global population still lacks access. Developing countries generally have worse internet access and slower internet speeds which means that making use of technology can be more challenging. It is widely accepted that the internet can now be considered a critical part of a state's infrastructure.

The Internet world map

Discover the number of users and Internet penetration globally*



Key Terms:

Misinformation/Disinformation - misinformation refers to false information, disinformation is misinformation that is spread with the knowledge of its falsehood, intended to deceive.

Deep/Dark Web - the deep web refers to any parts of the internet not accessible through standard web search engines including websites that gate their content behind paywalls, password-protected websites and even the contents of your email, whereas the dark web is one part of the deep web that uses further encryption and software to provide users with anonymity leading to an abundance of criminal activity.

Internet fragmentation - concerns that the internet could increasingly splinter, breaking up into smaller pools of connectivity and reducing the free flow of information across the globe.

GDC RESOURCES: WHAT TO THINK ABOUT

Recommendations to be discussed at GFF:



¹United Nations Conference on Trade and Customs, "Data Protection and Privacy Legislation Worldwide", December 14, 2021, Accessed March 7, 2023 URL-<https://unctad.org/page/data-protection-and-privacy-legislation-worldwide>

²DataReportal, "Number of internet and social media users worldwide as of January 2023", January 2023, Accessed March 7, 2023, URL-<https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/?locale=en>

- **Exploring the need for a UN Department and/or Commission** - How to best support the existing UN bodies such as the Tech Envoy to meaningfully incorporate diverse inputs into the Compact and then facilitate its implementation? How to determine the potential benefits and efficacy of establishing a new UN body to oversee the implementation of the Global Digital Compact with particular focus on more complicated matters, such as digital privacy, AI, etc.? These issues are clearly growing, extend beyond borders, and are relevant and applicable to every other area of the UN's work.
- **Empowering the individual and democratizing the global internet** - [Aligns with the Digital Commons and Data Protection theme] How to keep expanding the ability of individuals to access an open and secure internet in order to exercise their democratic freedoms, advance their economic livelihoods, and increasingly obtain public and private services directly through the internet, in order to reduce the role of intermediaries.
- **Protecting Human Rights Online** - [Aligns with the Human Rights Online theme] Participants proposed an online equivalent to “the rights of the people to a healthy environment” – which would take the form of a “the rights of the people to be protected in an open, secured, and inclusive cyber-environment.” It is also important to consider how to ensure that the states credibly commit not to abuse digital technologies?
- **Closing the digital divide in a mindful manner** -[Aligns with the Connecting People theme] By helping to bridge the digital divide and providing access to new markets and services, the internet can be a powerful tool for economic development. How to introduce innovative digital technologies into a society in such a way that it anticipates and avoids the potential risks and is beneficial economic development to all?

Other ideas:

Developing a Moral Code of Ethics Online - Since the internet has allowed anybody to publish content on the internet, pornography, human sex trafficking, and commercial exploitation of children has multiplied enormously. We must ask the question of how to regulate violent, sexual, and predatory content in digital media.

Green and Digital Transition - The Global Digital Compact should provide guidance to Member States on using digitalisation to promote evidence-based sustainable transition policy and identify opportunities for using big data and technological innovations.

Empowering the UN Institutions - The UN must better leverage existing mechanisms, such as the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology and the UN Internet Governance Forum to work towards consensus among Member States and take account of non-government stakeholders' views. If the existing mechanisms prove insufficient, there may be a need for a new entity such as a UN department or commission dedicated to supporting the UN Envoy on Technology in shaping and then implementing the Global Digital Compact.