



Swiss Internet Governance Forum

Swiss IGF 2021
Messages from Bern
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Session 1: Lessons for the digital state

The digital transformation poses various challenges for the state. Switzerland actually has all the prerequisites needed to be successful in the digital arena. Nevertheless, it is still positioned as average in country comparisons. In order to consider 'Switzerland of tomorrow', the state and state actors need **time and space**. Those who wish to embrace the digital transformation need to receive **support**. There are currently four key hurdles or challenges that need to be overcome:

- **Distrust** in government agencies;
- **Excessive political emotionalism**, playing on a mechanism whereby bad or negative news generates more publicity than good news;
- **Insufficient willingness to take risks**. The above-mentioned emotionalism and associated fear of public backlash prevents policymakers from taking a courageous stance on innovative and somewhat 'daring' projects;
- A **lack of self-confidence** on the part of the actors involved due to limited experience with and fear of becoming involved in innovative projects.

On the other hand, there are several success factors that should be encouraged among all of the actors involved to pave the way for innovative civil servants and projects:

- **Courage and resolve to change** combined with a certain **tolerance for mistakes**;
- Processes enabling citizens to become directly involved;
- Development of **new tools** to create real added value for society and policymaking;
- Measures to instil **trust and goodwill** towards innovative projects, which can be encouraged through rational goal-setting, standardisation and sharing of experiences.

Public-private or public-civic partnerships, i.e. the cooperation of public actors with private service providers or civil society institutions or organisations such as neighbourhood associations, foundations, etc. can produce good results. In particular, working with foundations can be a means of overcoming initial reluctance by government agencies to provide funding and get pilot projects off the ground. Likewise, before large-scale and cost-intensive government projects can be launched, cost-effective proof of concepts should first be developed to prove the effectiveness and added value of a project before the overall contract is awarded.

In the future, greater emphasis should be placed on the **exchanging of experiences** and, where possible, this should already be systematically included in the project strategy. Only knowledge transfer allows innovative actors throughout Switzerland to learn from and inspire one another.



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Session 2: Digitalisation for society – was the potential of digitalisation used during the corona period?

The digital tools were available, but there was a lack of both a basic understanding of digital tools and a solid infrastructure. It is not just a matter of adding tools, but of bringing the entire ecosystem forward.

Development of contact tracing apps and the URL-based COVID certificate made it possible to identify the principles underpinning the use of digital tools (e.g. decentralised approach, minimal use of data) and to anchor these principles in legislation. These principles constitute the new standard of quality.

In political debates, the concepts of 'data protection' and 'protection of privacy' are often used interchangeably. The two concepts are interrelated but are not equivalent.

In addition to a high-quality technical infrastructure, we also need data access management models. The challenge here is finding ways to control data and provide constant rights of access. If this challenge can be overcome, this will instil greater confidence.

Session 3: Digital governance - Inclusion and trade rules as opportunities for the digital future

Digital governance is more important than ever before, as digitalisation and technology increasingly become ubiquitous and touch every aspect of our lives.

For governance of the digital space, however, it is not enough to segment stakeholders - as has been the case so far - on the basis of countries, regions, companies or civil society groupings. Rather, digital governance must also encompass all generations. It must be oriented towards the future and must not leave anyone out. Also, with digital governance, people from different backgrounds, including people with impairments or those speaking different languages, must not be left behind or excluded. These groups have so far not had their say in the digital space, or far too little. As such, their concerns have not been adequately understood and no satisfactory solutions have yet been found for their active involvement.

However, the digital space, tools, services and apps must be accessible to all of us. This requires much more systemic thinking. Data must no longer be compartmentalised and free accessibility of data should no longer be a feature but a right.

Session 4: Cyber attacks and neutral Switzerland: what options are available to state and private actors?

In addition to the various opportunities, digitalisation also poses major challenges, especially for security policy and associated key concepts and tenets.



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The possible effects of this new technical reality on Switzerland's policy of neutrality are particularly important. Here it has become apparent that the debate is still in the very early stages with many questions remaining unanswered. At the same time, this creates space for a fundamental discussion about Switzerland's position on digital security policy.

In this session, several participants argued in favour of strengthening defensive capabilities and expanding ongoing international cooperation. This is the only way to establish the trust needed for a secure cyberspace. Session participants felt that both the private sector and the state share responsibility for securing cyberspace. Geneva has a strong international presence and the combination of previous commitments and an active community should make it possible for Switzerland to contribute to the international debate on digital security policy.

Session 5: A new role for media?

The Internet influences media on many different levels and also enables already familiar topics to be seen from many different angles. Internet tech companies have gained power while local media are fighting for paying subscribers and advertising revenue. Because of its important mediating role, media is a sector like no other. This is because the way that media is structured affects society as a whole. The internet and digitalisation offer wonderful opportunities for greater visibility: previously repressed population groups and stakeholders can thus gain media relevance. However, challenges arise, among other things, from the increasing interconnections between media supply and use. If the goal is to ensure that the media promotes democracy, then targeted support for independent, trustworthy platforms that enable good, even investigative journalism is paramount. This requires the necessary resources, but also the courage to experiment and innovate, for the good of our democratic system.

Messages from Bern

'Messages from Bern' provides a short, concise and unbiased summary of the main points covered during the plenary sessions and workshops at Swiss IGF 2021. They will be submitted to the global 'UN Internet Governance Forum' (IGF) and the 'European Dialogue on Internet Governance' (EuroDIG) so that they can be used to enrich discussions taking place in these forums.