



Swiss Internet Governance Forum

**Swiss IGF 2023
Messages from Bern
13 June 2023**

Session 1: Digital governance and the multistakeholder approach 2023: a new reality?

- Various issues in the field of digital governance - from microchips to data streams - are currently causing tensions. This raises the question of whether the multistakeholder approach is not simply a hollow promise.
- The tougher geopolitical winds are making cooperation more difficult and achievements that were thought to be safe, such as a global open internet, are in danger.
- Instead of harmonisation and coordination, we see regulatory fragmentation and a proliferation of new regimes. There is a lack of forums to conduct a constructive debate also involving the global South.
- The multi-stakeholder approach - as practised, for example, at the UN IGF and also at the Swiss IGF - should be maintained. Switzerland also wants to continue to advocate for an inclusive process.
- Civil society plays a valuable role. At the same time, however, it is a reality that it can often only be insufficiently involved due to a lack of resources.

Session 2: Fundamental rights and ethics in the digital age

- Digital technologies harbour both opportunities and risks. The rules of the game must be designed in such a way that no one has the opportunity to violate human rights with impunity.
- The right to inclusion must not be equated with the obligation to use digital means. Otherwise, new forms of discrimination threaten.
- Human rights must be respected by all actors as a minimum ethical standard.
- Not everything that is technically feasible necessarily has to be done (for example: nuclear weapons). As a society, we basically have the possibility to decide which digital technologies we want to use and for what purpose. The same applies to the collection, analysis and use of our data.
- An International Data Agency (IDA) could be entrusted with the concrete implementation and verification of the human rights compliance of digital products, services and data use.

Session 3: Data policy: Data as a common resource ("commons")

- Data develop their maximum value when we consider them as common property ("commons"). This is the aim of Motion 22.3890 "Framework law for the secondary use of data", which was adopted by Parliament on 12 June 2023.



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- The framework law is intended to regulate the re-use of both factual data and personal data from the public and private sectors. The scope thus goes beyond the Federal Statistics Act.
- To ensure security and data protection, reliable legal, technical and organisational measures are needed. This also includes control over one's own data and the possibility of opting out. Currently, Switzerland lacks a suitable infrastructure for this (e.g. so-called "data intermediaries").
- An important prerequisite for data exchange are data standards, interoperability and good medical data. The handling of business secrecy also needs to be clarified.

Session 4: Political Opinion Formation and Debate Culture in the Digital Space - How Resilient is the Digital Public Sphere in Switzerland in View of the Election Year 2023?

- The phenomena that shape communication in the digital age - including social media, disinformation, hate speech - call for a differentiated view, an appreciation of the diversity of opinions and sources of information, and responsible individual and societal engagement.
- Hate speech in particular is a phenomenon that can only be combated by joining forces: Both by people countering hate speech with counter-speech and showing civil courage, and with civil society and (new or old) state institutions as well as actors from academia and the private sector.
- A majority of commentators are respectful. There is no "one truth" that the traditional media have claimed for themselves. However, insights into their own problems - lacking or missing i) comprehensibility of information and ii) liability of the platforms and the actors acting on them - must flow into the development of measures.
- Inclusive communication and discourse on social issues should be target group and context specific.

Session 5: Artificial Intelligence: How to regulate?

- AI algorithms are tools, not a force of nature. They should be understood in the socio-technical context in which they are used.
- The Council of Europe's AI Convention has great potential. Switzerland should have the courage to build on it and go beyond it.
- AI applications that reproduce discrimination such as sexism or racism must now be legally addressed. The important role of training datasets should be noted, which should be checked for bias.
- Political dialogue is central. But faster feedback mechanisms are needed: We need to learn new ways of democratic decision-making because there is a discrepancy between the speed of AI development and the societal discussion that conditions it.



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- There is a need for greater awareness of digital issues in politics and among the population.
- As a high democratic good, trust is particularly worthy of protection, also against abusive AI applications such as deepfakes.

Session 6: Digital Currency, Digital Identity and Metaverse

- Digital currencies are linked to digital identities. They are in tension between the protection of privacy and legitimate regulatory interests.
- Technical solutions for digital money that protect the privacy of users already exist. By using zero-knowledge proofs, their use can even be restricted by age or amount limits, while the identity can remain secret.
- No one should be able to monopolise the technology. Openness of sources is central to the trust of the population. If excessive control is exercised, people are likely to switch to alternatives.
- The link between digital identity and digital currencies is essential. The generation of any number of currency accounts is problematic as it can circumvent regulatory efforts.
- For reasons of resilience, digital extensions are to be implemented as a complement to analogue procedures. The needs of people who want to live a purely analogue life must be taken into account.

Session 7: National platform regulation in a globalised world?

- Digital services enable and facilitate communication, interaction and transaction. At the same time, they raise new regulatory challenges. At the international level, there are several initiatives to regulate such services and platforms.
- From a civil society perspective, there are good reasons to also intensively address the challenges at the national level, especially with regard to new topics such as data access or rights of use or in the area of legal enforcement of existing regulation.
- Coordination with EU legislation also benefits the Swiss economy in order to create legal certainty and minimise the burden on SMEs.
- An internationally standardised set of rules seems rather unrealistic, as different nations have different objectives and international rules can be misused by authoritarian states for political purposes. Nevertheless, a certain degree of transnational harmonisation should be sought in order to prevent a costly regulatory patchwork.

Session 8: What impact does AI have on the quality of information and knowledge?

- Playing one artificial intelligence against another is not a long-term solution.



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- For the time being, we are exploring these solutions both in academic research and on the platforms, but in the long term, we need to find alternatives such as non-falsifiable metadata, traceability of origin on the blockchain or the use of labels.
- It is also possible to rely on traditional methods that have been used in libraries for a long time, such as relying on recognised editors and the transmission of informational skills.
- The exponential increase in artificial content raises questions about resources - particularly the number of reviewers - and this applies to all sources (newspapers, platforms, publishers, etc.).

Messages from Bern

The "Messages from Bern" summarise the main points of the plenary sessions and workshops of the [Swiss IGF 2023](#) in a short, concise and neutral way. They will be submitted to the global "UN Internet Governance Forum" (IGF) and the "European Dialogue on Internet Governance" (EuroDIG) so that they can feed into the discussions in these forums.