



SUMMARY OF THE IGF 2021 HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGE PANELS

1. Global economic recovery – where are we at?

Time: Monday, 6th December, 2021 (11:00 CET) - Monday, 6th December, 2021 (12:00 CET)

- The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of humans and accelerated the pace of digital transformation worldwide. The horizon for change in public policy is usually a matter of decades, but the pandemic has in just a few months resulted in a connectivity boost and uptake of digital services and transactions by people and businesses in fields such as health, education, commerce or civic participation.
- The pandemic emphasized the global digital divide. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), an estimated 37% of the world's population – or 2.9 billion people – have still never used the Internet.^[1] There are difficult pathways for countries in special situations to digital connectivity. The benefits of digitalization are spread unevenly. However, the pandemic has shown that in an interconnected world no community is isolated from the other and no one can be left behind. Vaccination means progress for global economic recovery. The World Health Organization (WHO) set out the target to vaccinate 40% of the population of all countries by the end-2021 and 70% by mid-2022. This target must be achieved for global recovery and pre-pandemic life.
- As traffic has moved from roads to the Internet, large investments in telecommunications infrastructure are needed. The Internet must be available, reliable, trustworthy and secure 24 hours a day to accommodate the online activity. In addition, investments into digital literacy, capacity development, education and lifelong learning are needed. Investment can be facilitated by public-private partnerships and financial incentives and solutions developed in one country can be replicated in another.
- A synergistic approach to data, platform-based services and disruptive technologies can pave the way for economic recovery and sustainable development. Ensuring data privacy, security, and rights will also be critical to the future of digital technologies, especially to meet the needs of developing countries.
- Leveraging resources from multistakeholder, international partnerships can help facilitate needed investments in digital infrastructure and capacity building. There is a need for enhanced international cooperation including public private sector partnerships. Rapid and flexible regulatory changes are also needed for a fast recovery.

2. Cities United: connected, green and inclusive

Time: Monday, 6th December, 2021 (12:15 CET) - Monday, 6th December, 2021 (13:15 CET)

- Large cities around the world face similar challenges, such as suburban sprawl,



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economic segregation, pollution, and waste disposal.

- The UN E-Government Survey 2020 shows that municipalities are behind their national governments when it comes to e-government development. One persistent challenge is affordable connectivity. Fair competition, sound spectrum and WiFi management and sharing and forward-looking thinking on how people and businesses will go online in 2030 are critical to address the connectivity challenge.
- Digitalization provides a high growth potential for cities and communities through innovative solutions with strategic intent such as digital twins. Data such as environmental and geographical and technology can among other things be used for automation and improvement in the agriculture (e.g. control of tractors), construction (e.g. metering, energy efficiency), manufacturing (e.g. quality control and ensuring labor safety) and advertising sectors. Strengthening trust in new technologies and awareness-raising are essential since some people are hesitant to use new technologies due to data and privacy concerns.
- It is essential to avoid path dependency and technological lock-in of specific smart city solutions. Human-centered design, constant feedback, agility, interoperability, use of open data and open software are fundamental design principles by which digital products and services can remain modular, compatible and replaceable in the future.
- Cities and regions should provide people with equal access to green areas to improve their quality of life. Digital environmental sustainability in cities and how digital technologies contribute to more sustainable lifestyles, products and behaviors, should be a core design value for the private sector.
- There are many cities in the early stages of implementing smart city solutions. There is often a lack of guidance and the international community including intergovernmental organizations can provide support. Engaging local companies in large urban investments has been cited as important in underdeveloped regions. Developing local startups is building an ecosystem and a growth opportunity for cities.

3. Creating sustainable value and inclusive society – the role of digital platforms

Monday, 6th December, 2021 (14:00 CET) - Monday, 6th December, 2021 (15:00 CET)

- Everyone has the right to live, work, study and play in a safe and friendly digital environment. Freedom of expression, privacy and security are human rights that also apply to the digital sphere.
- Digital platforms facilitate finding information, connecting with people and social campaigns. They are also used for spreading messages of hate, violence, extremism, cyberbullying and recruitment for illegal activities which – spurred by algorithms – can

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undermine democratic societies in the long term through increased polarization. Safeguards for protecting human rights and democracy on digital platforms are needed to ensure an independent, pluralistic, secure, inclusive and sustainable digital space.

- Regulation of digital platforms should not be “laissez-faire” but proportionate and human-centred. Over-regulation can provide governments with new roles and limit the freedom of expression of people. Rights and obligations should be properly tailored to each actor in the digital ecosystem as their services vary (e.g. social media, videoconferencing, ...).
- Anti-competitive practices can harm the ability of the digital ecosystem to protect user rights. It is particularly important for the private sector, social network operators, search engines, providers, online stores, fintechs, and other platforms to be more accountable with respect to user-centred practices to ensure effective mechanisms for users to exercise their rights and privacy.
- There is a need for good practices related to enforcing privacy and freedom of expression, censorship and harmful content online, and ensuring equal inclusive access to the Internet. Measures to prevent violence against children and illegal content are insufficient.
- In a historic global agreement on 25 November 2021, all 193 members of the United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) adopted the “Recommendation on the ethics of artificial intelligence”. While regulation in the field of new emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence is difficult, it is important that all stakeholders provide their inputs for global agreements as such.
- The private sector needs to be transparent about the use of personal data (storage, protection etc.) in order to maintain trust. They should not privilege their own services but rather make sure that everyone can participate in the market. Businesses need to be transparent about how they approach illegal content on platforms through content moderation, reporting mechanisms and transparency reports.

4. How to promote inclusive and diverse innovation, investment opportunities and corporate social responsibility in digital technologies?

Monday, 6th December, 2021 (15:15 CET) - Monday, 6th December, 2021 (16:15 CET)

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is important for the private sector to shoulder its digital responsibilities for the greater good. CSR contributes to ensuring a more transparent, sustainable and fair relationship with people. The private sector needs to be responsible and careful about how its digital behavior affects employees, customers and



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society at large.

- CSR should encompass private sector companies taking up responsible relations with developing countries. In this regard, developing countries should not merely be at the receiving end of technologies and online services but rather integrated into the global production and development chains.
- Drawing a line between what is good and what is not about a digital technology can start with questioning its impact on human rights. Facial recognition technology, often used by law enforcement authorities and with high impact on privacy, for example, could be regulated more strictly than an algorithm proposing a song over another on a music streaming platform.
- Every action has a consequence – positive and negative – and one can consider this thinking for regulation of digital technologies. While self-regulation by digital technology providers is a source of inspiration, it does not offer the desired full protection. More targeted regulation is needed. Jointly developed recommendations with all stakeholders provide positive examples of striking the right balance between accelerated and equitable, human-centred digital transformation.
- It is important to note that promotion of innovation and regulation work together and they must do so in the right direction. Innovation must be innovation for the good. For example, the tightly regulated medical industry is one of the most innovative.

5. Building equitable employment conditions and competences for the future of work

Monday, 6th December, 2021 (16:30 CET) - Monday, 6th December, 2021 (17:30 CET)

- Digital transformation is accompanied by freelance employment and transfer of human capacities towards more reflective and creative tasks. This global trend, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has important implications for policies on education, reskilling and lifelong learning – from early childhood to retirement age – income distribution and growth. Fair employment, contracts, pay and workers' participation are fundamental principles of work in the future.
- The future of the labor market is set to change: a shift away from office jobs, machine operators, and other occupations, toward ICT professionals; a shift from more stable employment relationships to independent, flexible, or freelance employment devoid of traditional social security benefits; the need to continually update skills to keep up with advances in technology; and a shift in capabilities to more creative and complex tasks rather than repetitive and labor-intensive ones.
- It is important for the development of developing countries to retain talent and competent ICT workers. There is a great need to hire people with technical expertise. Access to



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technology will usually be less of a challenge than finding a workforce capable of using it. Talent exodus is common in the digital sector.

- Governments need to be allies of the younger generation, nurturing talents and encouraging their education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects which is important for the ICT sector. They also need to create the necessary conditions for open research and development to effectively support industry (4.0) and agriculture.
- Alongside STEM education, it is equally important to teach young people to work in teams, skills, including manual skills, directly applicable to the real economy, to appreciate learning, and to see societal purpose in their rewarding jobs in a broader context. Learning is most effective if it is inclusive, exciting and interactive. Governments need to invest into the necessary infrastructure and upskill and certify teachers who teach young talents.
- As half of the world's population, particularly in Africa, is still offline, the concept of blended learning – learning online and offline – is relevant to the group of the unconnected. Governments need to ensure through universal access programs that the Internet, including technology to access it, is affordable and never shut down. National and local education institutions, the R&D community and others should participate in networks and education and access programs tailored to specific circumstances (e.g. language).

6. Investing in digital growth and enabling capacities – transnational and transcontinental synergies

Tuesday, 7th December, 2021 (12:20 CET) - Tuesday, 7th December, 2021 (13:20 CET)

- Digital transformation is a complex process that carries enormous potential for development and economic growth. The combination of factors influencing digital development includes funding opportunities for micro SMEs and appropriate regulatory framework, digitization of business and industrial processes, efficient and affordable infrastructure, continuous improvement of digital skills, management and integration of e-services.
- The private sector should invest in infrastructure, while governments should create the necessary enabling conditions for such investment through registrations of startups, setting up an innovation fund and attracting them to it, consideration of tax, customs and financial incentives for successful startups and sound policies on the access and use of data.
- Awareness-raising and training for potential entrepreneurs are important.

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Entrepreneurship is also about risk and the cost of failure may be too steep. In some countries, access to risk capital is easier than in others. Governments are usually not known as risk-takers and can be hesitant to fund companies that later on outsource operations to other countries. A little bit more risk-taking would be helpful to keep pace with the dynamic digital sector. Public-private cooperation is indispensable.

- Big data analytics - generated from myriad transactions, production and communication processes - accelerate the creation of knowledge and value in society. At the same time, data-driven innovation is needed for significant improvements to existing products, processes, organizational methods and market development, as is further investment in AI-related technologies.
- A key issue is financing in dealing with advanced technology since it is difficult to take full advantage of the growing demand for products and services. Therefore, it is necessary to develop co-investment models, which assume cooperation between national and foreign investors. This makes it possible to limit risk in case of negative impact on users' rights, to diversify investment portfolios and support new innovative business models. A couple of ingredients for helping small businesses grow faster are flexible legal solutions created by the public sector, and available e-services and facilities for SMEs, including support for SME employees in the field of e-competence.
- Many companies do not have enough resources to employ advisors and consultants on digital transformation. Policies that help them gain access to digital transformation expertise are needed. Digital audits in companies help learn about digital technologies and efficiency gains.

7. Governance models to promote inclusive and diverse business development – what stands in the way?

Tuesday, 7th December, 2021 (13:45 CET) - Tuesday, 7th December, 2021 (14:45 CET)

- The world is dependent on the Internet. Half our jobs worldwide will change due to the effect of digital transformation and more people work from home now. This raises questions about the skills needed in a knowledge-based, digital economy and on how to ensure equal access to the Internet and to leave nobody behind.
- To harness the creative potential and talent of developing regions, there is a need to break the centralized model where a few large global players control the market and absorb all regional SMEs, startups and talent. Governments need to adapt education, facilities, equipment and curricula by creative thinking from the early stages.
- Inclusion and access to the Internet have been tackled from a paternalistic point of view. Power is concentrated in a few companies, local players cannot compete on markets



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due to pricing, curricula are targeted at passive receivers and people are not critical about the technology they are using. Large investments into equal access and an enabling environment for creation by everyone are needed. Reconsidering public procurement rules can also get more people and businesses in the market for innovation. The role of regulation is to enable, not to control. The Internet is public and a common good. It is worth to consider specifically fair taxation and pro-competitive regulation.

- Inclusion cannot be addressed without confronting exclusion first. The digital divide is not changed without confronting poverty and gender equality, primarily on an economic basis, in the first place.
- Technology must reflect the values of society. People have to feel good and comfortable about using it, and be put at the centre. Governments, NGOs and the private sector need to partner, in their respective and appropriate roles, for multistakeholder solutions to connect people.
- Technically, the foundation of the Internet, that is networks, are working without regulation. There is no charge for going online. Problems are mainly caused by the content happening on top of it and by having different regulations in different locations, disrupting the functioning of the Internet, e.g. in the terms of cloud. Regulation tends to disconnect people from the Internet. Smart regulation, not over-regulation, can push market actors in the right way.