

Contributions Taking Stock of IGF 2021 and Looking Forward to IGF 2022 Synthesis Paper

This paper summarizes inputs received from the IGF community in response to an [invitation](#) from the IGF Secretariat for stakeholders to submit written contributions taking stock of the IGF 2021 meeting (16th IGF) and looking forward to the IGF 2022 meeting (17th IGF). In addition to asking for feedback on the programme components, the Call also invited comments on the IGF's role within, and contributions to, the UN Secretary-General's *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* and the *Our Common Agenda* report.

This synthesis paper is intended to form input for the First Open Consultations and Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) Meeting (23-25 February 2022) in the preparatory process for IGF 2022. This paper is a summary of the ninety-five (95) [contributions](#) received by the IGF Secretariat, either through an online form or by email. Of the seventy-seven (77) contributions by online form, the highest number came from countries in the Western Europe and Others Group, followed by Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Intergovernmental Organizations unascribed to regions. The Private Sector and Civil Society stakeholder groups each submitted the highest number of inputs, followed by the Technical Community, Government, and Intergovernmental Organizations.

The synthesis document outlines feedback submitted on IGF 2021 and suggestions for improvements of IGF 2022, structured around the following components:

- *Preparatory process*
- *Intersessional work and NRIs*
- *Programme structure and content*
- *Technical matters, including hybrid features, and communications*
- *Other logistics and host country role*
- *Participation and stakeholder engagement, including with UN processes*

I. Preparatory Process

Comments on the IGF 2021 preparatory process were overwhelmingly positive. Many expressed appreciation at the work done by the MAG and Secretariat, especially their commitment to an established timeline while navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also appreciated were the increased opportunities to engage with the substance of the IGF 2021 programme, through capacity development and webinar sessions in the “Preparatory & Engagement” phase.

There was broad agreement that the preparatory process should begin as early as possible in the cycle, including: preparatory and engagement sessions, which had been somewhat

compressed in 2021, and timely announcement of the IGF 2022 dates. Further comments and suggestions for improvement were as follows:

1. It was felt that planning for the hybrid annual meeting was an important aspect of preparations this year and should be maintained, in part through a continuation of the MAG Working Group on Hybrid Meetings.
2. There were calls for more inclusivity in the preparatory process, namely by doing deeper outreach to youth and Global South stakeholders, including by encouraging organic communication of preparatory events within those communities, and ensuring relevant meetings are more conveniently scheduled for non-European time zones.
3. It was said that non-IGF regulars, especially those who might be organizing sessions for the first time, still risked being disoriented by the volume of information on IGF preparation and would require more direct, practical guidance. This could be the focus of future training sessions that follow a presentation rather than Q&A approach. They would also be helped by a simplification of some of the technical features they interact with, namely the presentation of information on the IGF website, and the annual meeting registration process.
4. Related to the above, firmer instructions could be given to session organizers at the proposal stage to avoid the couple of compliance issues raised: workshop proposals unaligned with the given thematic framework, and one workshop held in a language other than English (the standard language for workshops) without interpretation.
5. The organization of main sessions by the MAG was felt to be somewhat unclear procedurally and would have benefitted from better transparency with the community, particularly with those community members who wished to contribute.
6. As regards MAG working modalities, one suggestion was made to reduce the length of “plenary” MAG meetings by effectively splitting the advisory body early in the year into thematic working groups. These would carry out their responsibilities on the calls for thematic inputs and session proposals, as well as on organization of preparatory and main sessions, in focused meetings throughout the cycle.
7. A longer time frame was recommended for the MAG nomination process to secure appropriate diversity of candidates.
8. One input focused on potential division of labor between the MAG and future “IGF Leadership Panel” in the preparatory process, envisioning the MAG as continuing to have primary responsibility for programmatic organization, and the Panel advising strategically on main themes, speakers and “draft messages”.
9. Suggestions were made for general integration on two fronts: to have the calls for thematic inputs and session proposals “collapsed” into one process, where thematic interest would be

indicated directly by the submission of a proposal; and for thematic “draft messages” to be worked on before the annual meeting and presented for input at the meeting, including by high-level leaders.

II. Intersessional Work and NRIs

Feedback on intersessional work and NRIs largely praised the Secretariat’s efforts at coordinating these diverse activities throughout the year and at channeling them into engaging, community-led sessions at the annual meeting. Respondents directly involved in the activities felt that they were well-represented at the 16th IGF. Particularly welcome was the expansion of youth-focused sessions and engagement opportunities through recognized Youth IGF initiatives.

There were several comments that overarched the different intersessional and/or NRI groups, as well as others that referred to specific areas of intersessional or NRI work. These are as follows:

1. Repeated calls were made for greater cooperation among the different intersessional and NRI activities, both to exchange substantive expertise and share good practices on working modalities. In this regard, a “mid-year” intersessional session was suggested, perhaps on the margins of one of the MAG meetings.
2. Similarly consistent appeals were made for better integration of intersessional and NRI work into the agenda of the annual meeting and its planning. This would avoid duplication (for instance, on Universal Access, which had both a main and Policy Network session), clashes (of general NRI and youth-specific sessions), and inconsistency with the high-level themes of the meeting – while continuing to give the different groups visibility. A potential solution would be to increase the involvement of intersessional and NRI groups in the MAG’s issue teams and in the preparation of high-level sessions. At a more informal level, the groups should be given more networking opportunities in the lead-up to the meeting.
3. The work of BPFs, PNEs and DCs, which often entail calls for inputs and consultations, should be more widely publicized.
4. The outputs of intersessional work – BPF and PNE documents that have potential as decision-making inputs as well as relevant DC papers – should be more actively promoted and considered for inclusion in policy journals.
5. Special attention was advised as to the establishment of new intersessional work streams and the support they require from the small Secretariat, an issue particularly relevant for MAG-chartered BPFs and PNEs. Connected to this, older work streams should be “sunsetting” as appropriate. A request was made for greater clarification of the difference between “BPF” and “PNE”-type work.

6. Regarding DCs, it was suggested that the 90-minute length of their IGF sessions was insufficient for presenting a year's worth of work, and that more thought be put into an appropriate showcase. Inter-coalition collaborations, as well as more frequent meetings within coalitions themselves, were cited as steps for taking DC work forward.

7. On NRI and related youth initiative sessions, some respondents felt these could be longer to give a fuller picture of activities. Given the importance of youth voices, it was thought a "noticeable follow-up" or "broader recognition of findings", perhaps in the form of a visible culminating document or session, would have been fitting.

8. Maximizing NRI inclusion at the annual meeting was emphasized, by facilitating virtual and asynchronous participation to the greatest extent possible, and ensuring communications reach all initiatives in the network.

9. As for further collaborative NRI work, special projects focused on practical objectives, such as building digital literacy, could be identified. A common multi-year plan for NRIs should also be considered.

III. Programme Structure and Content

"Excellent" and "very good organization" were common in describing the structure and content of the 16th IGF programme. There was high satisfaction with its flow, and very positive remarks on the quality of speakers and discussions – confirming that emphasis on diversity and qualitative evaluations of sessions before the meeting continue to be strong suits of the IGF.

Respondents tended to identify the same or similar areas for improvement; further feedback also cited potential new or existing digital topics which could be given weight in the programme. These are synthesized as follows:

1. The number of themes in the programme, as well as the number of sessions, were felt to be too many. "Less is more" and "fewer sessions with deeper discussions" are comments that capture what many have said could be improved in the programme this year. There was acknowledgment that the IGF has made efforts at reducing overlaps and strengthening focus, but that 2021 was something of a step in the opposite direction, with an increased number of thematic tracks compared to 2019 and 2020. There should be no more than three or four tracks, which would make orienting them toward results easier, by way of: linking the tracks to actionable projects or best practices, and instituting a follow-up of the issues within the tracks.

2. Once tracks have been identified, sessions should be more consistently linked to their themes. This should also apply to Day 0, intersessional, and high-level sessions, which did not seem to necessarily fall under the tracks in 2021.

3. While overall themes and sessions should be reduced, the variety of session types should be maintained. The more ways there are for participants to engage, the better. The IGF should continue to be open to innovative session formats, so long as their proper implementation is

adhered to (“webinars”, for instance, not recognized as a format, have crept into the programme). Networking sessions were particularly welcome, although these should be avoided on the last day of the schedule.

4. It was said that continuity between IGFs should be fostered in terms of findings and outputs. The thematic outputs from the prior year should act as input for the subsequent year’s programme. Moreover, sessions focused on carrying forward thematic outcomes should be in central, dedicated parts of the programme, without competing sessions, so as to maximize participation.

5. Inputs on specific aspects of programme structure, content and presentation, suggested: better integration of ministerial and high-level participation into the rest of the programme; fewer repeat speakers, especially those who are already well-known in IGF circles; a bolstering of discussions with more case studies; essentializing session information in the public-facing programme; and, finally, more thoughtful representation of the private sector, often understood to stand in for “big tech” in multistakeholder sessions and neglecting SMEs with different interests and perspectives.

6. Topics highlighted for programmatic focus in 2022 were: encryption; Internet shutdowns; digital sovereignty; quantum computing; IoT; the environmental impact of mining for critical minerals used in the 4th Industrial Revolution; and human rights for digital governance and digital transformation, including the “dilemma of surveillance and contact tracing of citizens by governments for public health and security”.

IV. Technical Matters, including Hybrid Features, and Communications

Many felt the hybrid experience had been a successful one that “increased participation and it should be kept”, especially in view of ongoing uncertainties related to the pandemic. The facilitation of live transcription, IGF mobile app, and simultaneous livestreams on YouTube, were positively highlighted within the feedback. That the Secretariat had been continuously available to participants for technical and other support was also widely appreciated, indicating an organizational strength of the Secretariat team. At the same time, to take the hybrid approach from experiment to established practice in 2022, respondents made various suggestions for technical improvements.

While satisfaction was expressed with the IGF’s communications approach and advances noted, some suggestions for taking this forward were also made.

These are synthesized as follows:

1. Appropriate shoring up of the IGF website, the main portal for the meeting, was recommended to avoid a future crash, as had been the case throughout Day 0. It was understood that this was likely due to a server overload and unexpectedly high number of users; in this regard, the availability of YouTube livestreams was welcomed as a failsafe.

2. Similarly, the issue of “Zoom bombings”, though complex, would require advance security solutions.

3. A common message was that registration to participate online – and to some extent, onsite, as the first point of contact was the IGF website – should be easier and “one-click” (rather than involving multiple steps). Complexities surrounding the availability of sessions’ Zoom links should be eliminated, with the possibility of all being made available once registered, without having to select them in advance.

4. Some commented about the display of the schedule, which could have been more visually clear to make sessions easier to find, including the times displayed which did not necessarily convert correctly for Asia-Pacific users. Though user experience should still be improved to make critical information during the meeting more accessible, the new website’s easier navigation and visualization were acknowledged.

5. Other suggestions included: the development of applications to facilitate, respectively, participant-to-participant communication at the meeting, and throughout the year to help keep IGF community members up-to-date on programmatic developments; as well as the consideration of open source conferencing systems as alternatives to Zoom, which can be exclusionary or insufficiently secure in terms of privacy.

6. Though progress made on the IGF’s social media communications was noted, some expressed that a sizeable international media presence at the IGF was still lacking – a longstanding challenge – and would be needed to increase the meeting’s reach.

7. Recommendations were made for strengthening existing social media impacts during the meeting, in particular, to: equip participants with a more developed “social media toolbox”; display session-specific hashtags inside meeting rooms to encourage their synchronous use; and intensify promotion of sessions later in the IGF week, which risked being less well-attended.

V. Other Logistics and Host Country Role

Respondents were profuse in their congratulations to the host country, Poland, and related assistance from the Secretariat, for providing a safe, well-designed, physical space, and engaging social and cultural experiences at the 16th IGF. For those who were able to, the opportunity to attend the IGF in-person was highly valued and credited to the efforts of the host organizers. Inputs echoed that an IGF in 2022 should replicate the physical experience of 2021, drawing on many of its good practices, and retain the hybrid approach.

A wide variety of logistical issues were covered, containing practical suggestions for this year. These were on the IGF Village, the mechanics of session rollouts, travel, and many other aspects. A few comments also related to IGF 2022 host country arrangements.

Inputs are summarized as follows:

1. While there was near-unanimous agreement on the virtues of going hybrid, it was said that networking events do not work in a hybrid format, for organizational rather than technical reasons. Creative solutions would have to be found to make these sessions meaningful for online participants if they are to remain hybrid.
2. Several commented that for hybrid sessions to fully integrate, engage, and take into account the interventions of onsite participants, especially when session focal points are offsite, an onsite moderator or support person should be required. This would be from the session organizing team or provided to session organizers by the hosts.
3. To achieve even greater inclusion, many called for meeting times that align with the working hours of different time zones, especially those in Asia Pacific, which for several years has been at a remove from physical IGFs, as well as for expanded multilingualism. Interpretation into the six UN languages ought not to be limited to high-level and main (plenary) sessions; moreover, related IGF communications could also strive to be more multilingual. The addition for the first time in 2021 of sign language interpretation for plenary sessions was welcomed.
4. A number of respondents suggested participation certificates be made available for attendees.
5. The IGF Village was said to be well-organized, with particularly good support provided by onsite technicians in Katowice. Nevertheless, more could have been done to highlight the exhibition area onsite, whose positioning was not as ideal as its counterpart in Berlin in 2019, as well as to promote the 3-D IGF Village.
6. Comments on travel, visa, and matters related to COVID-19 requirements, cited some delays in visa issuance, and regrettable last-minute travel complications or cancellations due to the pandemic. These included travels organized by the Secretariat. An avoidable issue in future might be to inform those who have requested travel support of the status of their applications with more notice. Overall support of travel logistics by the Secretariat and host country, including the ready availability of COVID testing, were highly appreciated.
7. Other specific inputs suggested informing participants of which fellow attendees would be present onsite or online, so as to facilitate meetings among them, and to avoid delays, automating the approval of bilateral meeting room requests on the IGF's website.
8. A couple of remarks on the physical venue mentioned a greater need for power outlets.
9. Looking ahead to 2022, some expressed reservations with regard to the security situation in the host country, Ethiopia. It was urged that this be considered carefully.

VI. Participation and Stakeholder Engagement, including with UN Processes

Inputs largely recognized diverse participation at the 16th IGF, as well as its “record-breaking” attendance numbers. They also noted positively the inroads the IGF has made at expanding engagement with high-level and parliamentary stakeholders, and very specifically, with youth – the latter considered a vital contribution to the IGF’s growing ecosphere.

Just as these successes were celebrated, respondents also expressed ambitions to deepen and expand engagement with other stakeholders. Inputs explored, furthermore, how to broaden linkages with relevant UN policy-setting mechanisms. All are synthesized as follows:

1. There were strong calls for intensifying and creating further space for youth voices, picking up on the efforts made at the 2021 IGF. Youth themselves appealed for a greater role in the IGF’s intersessional work, in its future annual meetings, and in the upcoming “Multistakeholder High Level Body” or IGF Leadership Panel. Emphasis was placed on qualitative engagement of youth that avoids tokenism and integrates them in policy formation as a matter of course.

2. Gender inclusivity within the IGF was rated as middling by most respondents, although some remarked the gender balance of attendees had greatly improved over previous meetings. Nevertheless, taking the BPF on Gender’s work as one example, it was underlined that the IGF should do more to evolve past the “gender binary” and embrace gender diversity.

3. In part due to travel restrictions, stakeholders from the Asia Pacific and Latin America and Caribbean regions were under-represented at the 16th IGF, with inputs noting more should be done to encourage their physical participation. It was further noted that participation from the Middle East was particularly low, and that digital topics relevant to the region were sparse within the programme.

4. Respondents expressed the desire to see persons with disabilities, academics, and the business community better represented at the IGF. With regard to business, although the group was present in historically high numbers at the 16th IGF, a greater diversity of representation – from SMEs to big tech – would have been preferable.

5. Some inputs advocated for widening IGF participation to groups never-before present in its processes, but whose perspectives and contributions could be valuable to the digital policy discourse, namely of representatives of judiciaries, and children (mostly overlooked by the category “youth”).

6. A common proposition was to find mechanisms to include the views of “ordinary citizens”, especially from the Global South, and of those most affected by digital transformation. These would be along the lines of “citizens’ dialogues”, with the G1000 Citizens Summit in Brussels as one model.

7. Through their feedback, remote hubs at the IGF described a constructive and meaningful participation experience, confirming this practice should be continued and supported, especially when travel restrictions are in force.

8. High-level and parliamentary participation were regarded as effective, although stronger high-level onsite presence, as well as a more regionally diverse representation of ministers and parliamentarians would have been desirable – both issues that could be addressed in 2022. The presence of the UN Secretary-General at IGFs, moreover, should be “enshrined as permanent good practice” for the sake of enhancing the IGF’s visibility.

9. The 2022 IGF should play a central role in the upcoming work related to the Secretary-General’s envisioned “Global Digital Compact”, as well as implementation mechanisms related to the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. One input advocated for the placement of the IGF Secretariat under the Office of the UN Secretary-General and for closer ties to the UN General Assembly.

10. In addition to several proposals to increase the participation of intergovernmental and UN System entities in the IGF, it was suggested the next IGF contain dedicated segments tied to the upcoming WSIS+20 review.

11. The proposed IGF Leadership Panel was welcomed, under the expectation that it will help raise the profile of the IGF and strengthen its impacts. It was also expected it would work “hand in hand” with the MAG. In this regard, one input advised paying close attention to how responsibilities will be shared between the two bodies.

12. Recommendations were made to strengthen the IGF’s ties with existing Internet Governance observatories, such as the Geneva Internet Platform and IG schools. The IGF could act, in turn, as a gathering place – by hosting a webpage linking to IG initiatives underway, including those by intergovernmental organizations.