

# Proposal for an IGF 2022-2023 Policy Network

## 1. Title

Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation

## 2. Description

This 2022 Policy Network (PN) proposal was born out of a community initiative launched by a multistakeholder coalition of civil society, business and technical community organizations in 2021 to raise awareness of the technical, policy, legal and regulatory measures and actions that pose a risk to the open, interconnected and interoperable Internet. The joint statement<sup>1</sup> is supported by organizations and individuals from across regions and stakeholder groups.

The objective of the policy network would be to:

1. Offer a systematic and comprehensive framework to define Internet fragmentation, its intended and unintended causes, and its potential effects
2. Collect and analyze case studies to fine-tune and complement this framework
3. Establish shared principles, recommendations or codes of conduct that prevent fragmentation and preserve the open, interconnected and interoperable nature of the Internet

Given the IGF's global reach and convening power as the leading multistakeholder venue for open and inclusive policy discussions on Internet governance and digital policy matters, and in an effort to respond to the call of the UN Secretary-General in his Our Common Agenda report for a Global Digital Compact to address, among other things, "avoiding fragmentation of the Internet"<sup>2</sup>, we aim for this PN to become the institutional home for global policy research, debate and recommendations to prevent and reverse Internet fragmentation.

### A. The issue

In recent years, technical, legislative and policy developments have furthered the risk that the Internet fragments into siloed parts. These developments include bans or restrictions on international data flows, interference with free expression, privacy, and/or encryption; and Internet shutdowns. These developments pose a threat to the open, interconnected and interoperable Internet, along with its associated benefits to social and economic development, while also harming human rights.

Internet fragmentation can take place at various segments and functions of the Internet, any of which can prevent an open, interconnected and interoperable Internet. Therefore, we propose a three-layered framework through which to analyze actions and measures that can contribute to fragmentation in order to gain a holistic view of the issue and identify potential solutions:

1. Technical / backbone layer: whereby conditions in the underlying technical infrastructure impede the ability of systems to fully interoperate;
2. Network / access layer: whereby conditions at the physical, network, transport layers prevent proper functioning of the Internet and/or hinder meaningful connectivity;
3. Application / content layer: whereby policies and actions constrain or prevent certain uses of the Internet to create, distribute or access information.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gp-digital.org/an-open-interconnected-and-interoperable-internet-joint-letter/>

<sup>2</sup> Page 63, [https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common\\_Agenda\\_Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf)

## **B. Connection to the IGF and other IG processes**

Over the past years, the IGF has discussed various aspects of this framework, whether in sessions on the Internet's technical backbone and the impact of various policies on this architecture; conversations about inequalities in connectivity or Internet shutdowns; or conversations on freedom of speech, data localization or trust. In the past two years, there has also been a surge of interest on discussing Internet regulation and its impacts, culminating in a thematic track and main session on regulation at IGF 2021, for which Key Takeaway #1 was "Interoperability is key for everything that happens on the Internet and is key to enable data flows. We need rules and regulations that work, uniform and are globally interoperable as possible". This Policy Network aims to build on these previous discussions and the breadth of knowledge on this topic in the IGF community, and frame it into a systematic approach and framework that could be the base of focused conversations.

This work is also aimed to bring the IGF's multistakeholder community together in giving input to the implementation of Our Common Agenda, as outlined by UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres. The Secretary-General's report explicitly calls for the input and advice of the multistakeholder community on measures to avoid the fragmentation of the Internet (among others), with the view of incorporating such advice and input in a Global Digital Compact to be agreed at the Summit of the Future in 2023. The Policy Network would be the ideal forum to collect, analyze and share the community's input in this process.

## **C. Planned deliverables**

Over a two-year cycle, we propose the following deliverables:

- **A report to be presented at the IGF's 2022 Annual Meeting on Internet fragmentation risks:** the report would expand on the framework proposed above, bolstered by collected case studies and their analysis highlighting tangible impacts
- **Awareness-raising webinars:** a series of webinars for the IGF community, to raise awareness of the issue, foster discussion and encourage input
- **Principles and recommendations:** following the 2022 report, a second phase of the PN's work in 2023 will focus on collecting best practices to avoid or counter fragmentation, propose shared principles based on these practices and offer recommendations on implementing those principles, including feeding these into the UN's Global Digital Compact process

## **D. Engagement and outreach plan**

We propose to carry out this work in the following ways:

- **Encourage widespread participation from all stakeholder groups** through focused invitations at the outset of the process. This will focus on:
  - Creating a multistakeholder steering group, including representatives of the proposing organizations and other relevant organizations to form a balanced group based on stakeholder group, geography and gender.
  - Create a broad network of contributors including from the supporting organizations, their communities and partners; organizations from the IGF network who have previously worked / presented on these topics; as well as academics, researchers, think tanks who have published on these topics. This broader network would act as the primary community for input to the PN's work, but also as multipliers to the PN's outputs.
- Publish a **Call for Contributions** to collect case studies of measures and actions that have a high risk of fragmenting the Internet at either of the three layers noted above.

- Cooperate with **other actors and groups** invested in the same area and interests
- Leverage the extensive **network of NRIs** to increase participation from experts, especially in LDCs and SIDS
- Present progress of the work at key junctions of the IGF 2022 cycle and at the **2022 IGF annual meeting**;
- Share learnings and progress at relevant conferences and other thematic **events outside of the IGF such as the Freedom Online Conference and the Summit for Democracy.**

#### **4. Supporting organizations**

*Signatories of the “principles on an open, interconnected and interoperable Internet”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> As listed [here](#). Organisations: Amazon; Association for Progressive Communications (APC); Asociación Latinoamericana de Internet – ALAI; Centre for Democracy and Technology; CyberPeace Institute ; Derechos Digitales ; DigitalSENSE Africa [ITREALMS Media] ; Freedom House ; Free Expression Myanmar ; Global Partners Digital ; iamtheCODE ; ICC BASIS ; Internet Matters ; Internet Society ; Juniper Networks ; Meta ; Microsoft ; Paradigm Initiative ; SMEX ; TechSocietal ; TEDIC (Paraguay) ; Twitter ; Ubunteam ; U.S. Council for International Business; The World Wide Web Foundation via the Contract for the Web. Individuals :Vint Cerf, Internet Pioneer ; Konstantinos Komaitis