

PNIF webinar 2 - *Avoiding Internet Fragmentation, still a matter of concern in 2024 and beyond?*
9 October 2024

Summary of the discussion

Introduction

1. The IGF Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation (PNIF) was set up in 2022 to address the question of Internet Fragmentation, to raise awareness of actions and measures that risk fragmenting the Internet, and to facilitate discussion on what could be done to avoid such fragmentation. In 2022 and 2023, the PNIF developed its [PNIF Framework for discussing fragmentation](#).
2. In 2024 the PNIF is organising webinars to track the global discussion on fragmentation and explore ways to contribute to fostering holistic multistakeholder dialogue on fragmentation. At the first PNIF webinar ([summary](#)), stakeholders confirmed that internet fragmentation is still a matter of concern and stressed that it is important to focus on what one wants to achieve by avoiding fragmentation.

PNIF empirical inventory of actions and decisions and their impact on fragmentation

3. The PNIF is undertaking empirical work to document government and corporate actions and their (intended or unintended) impact on internet functionality to help decision makers understand and mitigate the effect of their decisions and improve future policy making. The PNIF is crowdsourcing examples via a [webform](#). Additionally, preliminary research is underway to explore the possibility of identifying indicators of fragmentation risk that could be used to monitor the internet and gather evidence.

Global Digital Compact commitment

4. In the [Global Digital Compact](#) UN Member States commit to 'Promote international cooperation among all stakeholders to prevent, identify and address risks of fragmentation of the Internet in a timely manner (SDG16)' (Objective 3, art 29, (c)).

Summary of the Discussion

Internet fragmentation, still a matter of concern following the Summit of the Future and the GDC? An exchange about what the GDC tells us and what comes next.

5. The GDC commitment is an acknowledgement by UN Member States of the risk of fragmentation. Having this commitment included in the GDC is a positive sign that despite the geopolitical context there is still an interest in remaining part of one global internet.

6. The commitment to '*promote international cooperation among stakeholders*' is open to interpretation and requires further clarification, specifically regarding who should be involved, where it will take place, and how it will be implemented (e.g., which stakeholders, through what mechanisms, and toward which desired outcomes?).
7. The envisaged coordination and follow-up for the GDC, as outlined in Article 72¹, have yet to be defined and clarified. Only the actions of governments and stakeholders will demonstrate if there is a genuine commitment behind the words in the GDC. Stakeholders should not take it for granted that the issue of internet fragmentation is being addressed; instead, they should continue to promote and have substantial conversations on the matter.
8. Various declarations, statements, and discussions on preventing internet fragmentation predate the GDC commitment (e.g., G77, ITU, the Declaration of the Future of the Internet , etc). However, there remains a significant lack of intergovernmental engagement and focussed dialogue on the issue. Governments have not been talking to each other about what is and what isn't fragmentation, and what should and shouldn't be done. Moreover, the term 'fragmentation' has become politicised, with countries using it to criticise each other's actions.

How can the PNIF effectively contribute to future holistic multistakeholder discussion on fragmentation? (as a follow up to the GDC, and including but not limited to the WSIS+20 review)

9. The PNIF should invite the Office of the Tech Envoy to clarify their interpretation of Article 29(c) and the context for its implementation. The IGF/PNIF can play a role in ensuring that commitments are taken and progress is made, but a clear understanding of direction and context is essential to be able to do so effectively.
10. Stakeholders should use the IGF/PNIF as an important platform to facilitate and encourage focused discussions on internet fragmentation, but not view IGF as the final step in this effort, as IGF discussions alone will not lead directly to focussed intergovernmental dialogue. IGF/PNIF efforts should aim to be instrumental for discussions within the context of, for example, the CSTD or WSIS+20 review.
11. The PNIF should help refine the broad political view that internet fragmentation should be avoided, breaking it down into specific angles, aspects, and subtopics for guided and focused intergovernmental dialogue. The multistakeholder community is well placed to assist in identifying these topics, and providing clear and simple explanations.
12. The PNIF can provide a solid starting point and foundation for such further discussions, for example by establishing a set of clearly identifiable cases that exemplify fragmentation, in

¹ 72. *We recognize that further strengthening of system-wide coordination is required to enable the United Nations to realize the inclusive platform for digital cooperation set out in this Compact. To this end, we request the Secretary-General, following consultations with Member States, to submit a proposal to the General Assembly during its seventy-ninth session for the establishment of an office, building on and incorporating the activities and resources of the existing Office of the Secretary - General's Envoy on Technology, to facilitate system-wide coordination, working closely with existing mechanisms. This proposal should include detailed information on operational functions, structure, location, mandate renewal, resources and staffing.*"

most people's understanding. While the PNIF initiative to create an inventory aligns with this approach, it should also build on existing work, for example, by the Internet Society.

13. It is important for the PNIF to continue its webinars to keep the issue of fragmentation on the agenda and, together with the multistakeholder community, apply pressure to promote greater clarity on implementation. The webinars and PNIF mailing list are a source of information for many stakeholders.
14. Specifically, the PNIF should consider establishing a reporting mechanism to support the operationalisation of the GDC commitment, covering activities of state actors, the IGF stakeholders, and work of other organisations and stakeholders. With this mechanism the PNIF should aim to:
 - contribute to the GDC coordination and follow-up process outlined in Article 72, which is expected to be defined by December 2024;
 - release its own report by September 2025 on aspects of fragmentation in the GDC and the developments in the first year following the Summit of the Future;
 - engage with the WSIS+20 process by providing timely updates on the issue of fragmentation to inform discussions leading up to July 2025.
15. The discussion on fragmentation could benefit from emphasizing the internet's economic and social advantages—benefits that risk being lost in the event of fragmentation. Additionally, practical inspiration could be drawn from stakeholder advocacy for Universal Acceptance, including the use of tools, metrics, and country reports.

Next Steps

16. The PNIF will organise a third webinar focused on operationalizing the GDC commitment outlined in Article 29(c), aiming to establish a foundation and framework for further discussion at the IGF meeting in Riyadh in December. The PNIF coordinators will reach out to the Tech Envoy's office to invite them to join the conversation, provide updates, and answer questions.

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