

Lebanon Internet Governance Forum 2018

REPORT

The first Lebanon Internet Governance Forum (LIGF 2018) was held on 28–29 November 2018 at the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture of the American University of Beirut under the theme **"Towards an Inclusive Digital Tomorrow."** The forum was organized by OGERO, serving as the Secretariat of the Lebanon IGF, in cooperation with the national Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG). The event was held under the patronage of the Prime Minister represented by Member of Parliament Dima Jamali.

Participation

LIGF 2018 successfully established the first national multistakeholder platform dedicated to Internet governance in Lebanon. The forum created a space for dialogue on key digital policy issues affecting the country and brought together representatives from government, academia, the technical community, civil society organizations, international organizations, the private sector, media, and university students. Representatives of several ministries, including Telecommunications, Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Health, Information, Administrative reform, Justice, and Displaced affairs, participated alongside stakeholders from across the Lebanese digital ecosystem.

The discussions highlighted the importance of inclusive digital development, human rights online, cybersecurity, innovation, and emerging technologies. Participants also underscored the need for continued national engagement in regional and global Internet governance processes.

Opening Session

The opening ceremony highlighted the importance of establishing a national multistakeholder platform for Internet governance dialogue in Lebanon. Speakers emphasized the growing role of the Internet in economic and social development, the need for inclusive digital policies, and the value of strengthening cooperation among stakeholders.

During the opening session, the Lebanon IGF Secretariat presented the process leading to the establishment of the forum, including stakeholder consultations, the creation of the founding committee, the development of the forum identity and branding, the call for workshop proposals, and the selection process for sessions and workshops. The Secretariat also acknowledged the support of partners and sponsors who contributed to the successful launch of the initiative.

Representatives from international organizations, civil society, and the technical community stressed the importance of national Internet governance forums in promoting dialogue, capacity development, youth engagement, and inclusive participation in digital policy discussions.

Agenda

The forum featured one dedicated capacity-building session on Internet governance, four main thematic sessions, and seven workshops addressing a wide range of Internet Governance and digital policy issues. Topics discussed included smart cities, cybersecurity, innovation, emerging technologies, and digital rights.

Main Sessions

1. From Access to Emerging Technologies
2. Innovation and Technology for Development
3. Internet Governance and Human Rights
4. E-Transaction Law, Laws & Regulations, and Cybersecurity

Main Session 1: From Access to Emerging Technologies

Description

In today's world, Access to internet and use of new technologies are an essential part of development, similar to roads, electricity and other infrastructure. This session focused on the broadband and new technologies' role in serving the Lebanese community and how Internet, networks and concrete solutions are key can contribute to that. During the past few years, we have seen numerous initiatives aiming at deploying Broadband and providing meaningful access to the internet for digital inclusion. At the same time, the application of Artificial Intelligence technologies is considerably increasing and significantly modifying our way of life, and Sensors distributed to several objects collect and distribute a huge amount of data over the Cloud.

To make the most of what Internet has to offer an enabling environment, from investment to deployment and services roll-out, is needed.

Moderator: Ms. Salam Yamout, ISOC Regional Manager

Speakers:

Mr Imad Kreidieh, Chairman – CEO OGERO

Mr Emre Gurkan (contacted), CEO Touch

Main Session 2: Innovation and Technology for Development

Description

With the goal of “leaving no one behind”, innovation and technology have been identified as essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was adopted in 2015. From eradicating poverty, increasing gender equality, growing the economy and protecting the environment, innovation and technology are considered as main drivers of productivity and job creation, inclusive economic growth, and social well-being. The impact of technology is notable in improving human welfare, industrial efficiency, and environmental protection. Innovation and technology have become key to finding solutions to the most pressing and persistent social, economic and environmental needs and challenges communities face today. Emerging technologies such as Big data, Internet of Things, smart cities, artificial intelligence, 3D printing, online education, digital economy, renewable and efficient energy..., are currently shaping the world. This plenary session discussed the links between technology, innovation and sustainable development from conceptual framework and explored the social and economic dimensions of technology and innovation for development, with the main focus on digital economy, education, youth, health, and social inclusion.

Moderator: Ms. Nada Hamzeh, Social Media Specialist

Speakers:

Mr. Nicolas Sehnaoui, Ex-Minister of Telecom

Mr. Omar Christidis, CEO & founder of Arabnet

Ms. Marianne Karam, Lebanon Country Director, Digital Opportunity Trust

Dr. Pierre Gedeon, Hadath Branch director, Lebanese Canadian University

Mr. Chafic Chaya, Regional Communications Manager, RIPE NCC

Main Session 3: Internet Governance and Human Rights

Description

The UN Human Rights Council adopted recently in 4 July 2018, a new resolution on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet, which highlights online freedom of expression. The Resolution re-affirms that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression. This session highlighted 2 main pillars that are considered the core of human rights dimension of Internet Governance: Freedom

of Expression Online and Access to Information. The discussion focused on the necessity of the Lebanese government and non-state actors to ensure respect, protection and fulfillment of these rights.

Moderator: Ms Layal Bahnam, Maharat Foundation, Program Manager, CS

Speakers:

Ms Dima Jamali, MP

Mr Ghassan Mkhaiber, Human Rights Expert

Ms Salwa Ghazwani, Article 19, MENA Director

Mr Tony Mekhael, Legal Expert

Mr Riad Kobeissy, Investigative Journalist

Main Session 4: E- transaction law, Laws & Regulations and Cybersecurity

Description

This session examined the legal, regulatory, and cybersecurity frameworks shaping Lebanon's digital environment. Discussions focused on the current regulatory landscape governing the provision and management of telecommunications services, as well as the mechanisms in place to address information security challenges and combat cybercrime. Participants explored the implications of international data protection frameworks, including the application of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to operators outside the European Union. The session also addressed issues related to privacy and freedom of expression online, considering how these rights are protected under existing legal frameworks. In addition, discussions highlighted the opportunities presented by the E-Transactions Law and the reforms needed to support the development of a comprehensive e-government model in Lebanon.

Moderator: Me. Charbel Chbeir Raporteur of ICT BBA

Speakers:

- HE Minister Inaya Izzedine

- Judge Hania el Helwe, Ministry of justice

- Colonel Albert khoury, Head of Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Bureau

- Mr. Jack Bakaev, ISOC Lebanon

- Mrs Zeina Aoun, Head of Cybersecurity at BDL

Key Messages

1. Affordable and meaningful Internet access is a prerequisite for digital inclusion and sustainable development, requiring continued investment in broadband infrastructure and connectivity across Lebanon.
2. Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, IoT, and cloud computing present significant opportunities for innovation and economic growth, provided that enabling policies and infrastructure are in place.
3. Collaboration among government, operators, the private sector, and the technical community is essential to create an environment that supports technology deployment, investment, and innovation.
4. Innovation and technology are key enablers of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and can contribute to economic growth, social inclusion, and improved quality of life.
5. Digital transformation should focus on people-centred development, ensuring that the benefits of technology reach youth, women, underserved communities, and vulnerable groups.
6. Emerging technologies and the digital economy offer new opportunities for entrepreneurship, education, healthcare, and job creation, requiring investment in digital skills and innovation ecosystems.
7. The same human rights that apply offline must also be protected online, including freedom of expression and access to information.
8. Governments, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders share responsibility for promoting and protecting digital rights in the online environment.
9. An open, inclusive, and rights-based Internet is fundamental to democratic participation, transparency, and social development.
10. A modern and enabling legal and regulatory framework is necessary to support digital transformation, electronic transactions, and trust in the digital economy.
11. Strengthening cybersecurity and combating cybercrime require coordinated efforts among policymakers, law enforcement agencies, regulators, and the private sector.
12. Privacy, data protection, and online freedoms should be balanced with security considerations, while aligning national approaches with evolving international frameworks such as GDPR.

Looking Forward

At the conclusion of the forum, participants were invited to contribute to the sustainability and future development of the Lebanon IGF. The Secretariat also announced future consultations related to MAG membership renewal and preparations for the second Lebanon Internet Governance Forum.