

As the host country, Poland is vocal about engaging the youth in the Internet governance dialogue. In the run-up to the IGF meeting in Katowice, they could participate in monthly (April-October) webinars devoted to specific issue areas. Also, an international competition called ‘My Internet of the Future’ was played out among 18-28-year olds. Entrants were supposed to express their visions of the Internet through creative works (categories: graphic work, short film, written story). The winning ones will be presented in Katowice. The summit will also feature, traditionally, the Youth IGF Summit will be held during the IGF 2021, along with many accompanying events.

7. Looking forward

The IGF pays attention not to leave any country or any stakeholder group outside the process. That said, it remains a project dominated by the like-minded and the Internet insiders, with those of different views and from outside the digital sphere underrepresented. Suffice it to take a glance at private sector participants: they come overwhelmingly from major global corporations and the supply side (Internet service providers), not from demand-side businesses that make use of it (whether big businesses or SMEs).

Developing countries are also underrepresented, both at the level of stakeholder communities and governments. A special effort should be made to get them engaged in the debate on Internet governance and help them build adequate capacities. In theory, this is already happening. Still, an organised framework (including financial assistance) should be put in place to nurture new skills with which developing countries could fully participate in existing and future Internet governance institutions and arrangements. Ultimately, the involvement of all stakeholders, from developed as well as developing countries, is necessary for advancing dynamic public policies in Internet governance.

Not only should the IGF be reaching out to new communities but, above all, we ought to find ways to engage them. It is one thing is to obtain a coherent output, it is another thing is to make a meaningful use of this output rather than simply archiving it. The same goes to NRIs (regional IGFs as mentioned above) whose voice is not heard enough globally. The intersessional framework should be enhanced to translate into specific results. Otherwise, participants risk losing vigour and motivation.

As the IGF 2021 host country, Poland hopes to inaugurate in Katowice the Multistakeholder High-Level Body (MHLB), proposed in the UN

Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. It would create a link between the decision world and the discussion world to leverage knowledge and networks of high-profile participants who are not always directly engaged in operational and technical discussions. To this end, we would welcome a greater involvement of individuals representing the past, present and future IGF host countries. This would be an added value as these countries have broad contacts and experience in gathering the IGF communities as well as other entities. Building on their expertise, an informal presidency of the MHLB could be set up in the troika format, with a special place reserved for the UN Tech Envoy. Moreover, the MHLB would have an overall supervision of the UN SG. The MHLB would be a permanent advisory panel composed of those who could play a prominent role in the IGF ecosystem but have not been part of it so far. Its scope should encompass governments, academia, private sector, NGOs, national regulatory authorities, heads of UN entities that deal with digitalisation, e.g. the International Telecommunication Union.

The IGF is one of the many Internet and digital venues. A pronounced promotion strategy is needed to make it a globally recognised brand and have its impact multiplied. But the fundamental question is whether the multistakeholder model proves sustainable in the long run. A purely deliberative format is IGF's strength as much as its weakness. Given that global problems are most effectively solved with binding rules, does it make sense, and is it even feasible, to transform it into a decision-making body? And if not, how should it align with the evolving digital executive ecosystem to avoid undermining its openness and freestyle? That is the question of the day.

In an opening address of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2020, UN Secretary General António Guterres warned of a 'great fracture', with the world's two largest global economies creating two separate and competing worlds, each with its own dominant currency, trade and financial rules, their own Internet, AI capacities, and its own zero-sum geopolitical and military strategies. He urged to pull all the stops to prevent the world from splitting in two and to maintain a universal system, governed by respect for international law and strong multilateral institutions.

It is our responsibility not to let these mounting particularisms erect a digital Iron Curtain.