

# VOICE

— UN DESA —

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## Don't let others write the rules of the Internet for you

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*The year's most important meeting on the future of Internet is gathering this month. Here is why you should take part.*

From the “Black Death” epidemics of old, to the Spanish Flu of the early 20th century, humanity has experienced several pandemics in the past. However, COVID-19 is the first global pandemic to visit our “global village” – a world interconnected by the Internet.

Anyone who has been able to video-call their loved ones in lockdown, keep their job while working from home or continue their studies from a different continent will appreciate just how much the Internet has changed the way we connect and interact with each other.

But the past two years have also exposed further the darker side of the global network. The spread of the infodemic, the scant access to basic services for the unconnected or those lacking digital skills, and the increasing polarization and digital violence have led

many befuddled Internet users to take to their social media with clarion calls for “somebody to do something about it.”

That somebody may be you and the best time to act is now. This month, over 3,000 people will convene – in person and virtually – in Katowice, Poland for the most important Internet discussion of the year, the 16th Internet Governance Forum (IGF). You could be one of them.

The beauty of the Internet lies in its decentralized nature, which means there is no single entity or organization that sets the rules. The Internet belongs to all of us, and we all have a say in how it is governed. The IGF is the place where your say can be heard and taken seriously.

Whether you are a minister in your government or a concerned denizen, at the IGF you will get a chance to share your point of view on some of the [most burning issues](#) for the Internet. Even your tweet or YouTube comment could end up in the final outcome of the Forum and inform the world’s future policies.

From urgently and meaningfully connecting the third of the global population that’s still locked out of the “global village” to mitigating the climate and environmental impacts of the Internet, and from protecting human rights and privacy online to preventing cybercrime and cyberbullying, your ideas could help to shape an open, free and secure digital future for all.

Take your digital fate in your own hands and sign up now for the Internet Governance Forum:

<https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2021-guide-to-issues-and-policy-questions>

Register here: <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2021-registration>



## EXPERT VOICES



### Shaping a future where everyone is included

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Around the world, 1 billion people live with some form of disability. How can we make sure that our societies embrace and empower everyone regardless of their abilities? Ahead of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we spoke with UN DESA’s Daniela Bas to find out and to learn more about celebrations happening worldwide to mark the day.

**Faced with increasing inequalities and political divides, how can the world shape a future that includes everyone?**

“Persons with disabilities, more than 15% of the world’s population, are more likely to live in poverty and have less access to education, health care, decent income, or opportunities to participate in decision-making within their communities. Delivering on the 2030

Agenda's promise to 'leave no one behind', in alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), is a matter of social justice, economic growth, as well as an essential investment in an inclusive present and common future for the wellbeing of all.

A more coordinated approach and a change of mindset from the international level down to the local communities are needed to overcome barriers that increase the gap of inequalities in the social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political dimensions of life that may prevent persons with disabilities to use their abilities to benefit all."

**What are the actions needed to empower the world's one billion people living with a disability? What role do the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) play in these efforts?**

"The most important action is to invest in the abilities of persons with disabilities and renew our focus on the inclusion of all people. This will be achieved by promoting accessibility through public outreach programmes and encouraging capacity building and educational programmes on disability issues.

The SDGs have the potential to reshape our world for the better if we all engage in promoting them no matter the age, ethnicity, gender and disability."

**Our world is witnessing fast technological progress, how are new innovations benefitting persons with disabilities? Are there any new assistive technologies to look out for?**

"New innovations and technologies play a vital role in nearly all aspects of our life, including education, work, health as well as culture, sports and recreational activities. They are even more beneficial for those persons with disabilities who may need assistive technologies.

Accessible and assistive technologies (AT) can help many persons with disabilities overcome daily obstacles in navigating difficulties in communicating and in accessing environments, in education, at work and living independently.

According to the [World Intellectual Property Organization's \(WIPO\) Technology Trends Report 2021](#): "New AT are emerging such as assistive robots, smart home applications, smart medication management, wearables for visually impaired and smart glasses as well as products like wheelchair seats or wheels adjusted for different terrains, environmental alarms and Braille-enabled devices".

**The International Day of Persons with Disabilities will be celebrated on 3 December this year. Can you tell us some more about the commemoration?**

"This year, the theme of the Day is "Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post-COVID-19 world" and it will be celebrated all over the world. Below are three examples:

1. At Expo Dubai, we will focus on sharing good practices for an inclusive future for all and empowering stories and innovative solutions of persons with disabilities from all over the world. It will also be the space to promote the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) showcasing the efforts of the international community to reduce the gap of inequalities (SDG 10) and promote full participation and inclusion leaving no one behind, as well exploring key issues like education (SDG 4), decent work (SDG 8), accessibility (SDG 11) , innovation/technology (SDG 9), and sport.

2. At the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, a virtual event will be held on "Reducing inequalities through technologies: A perspective on disability inclusive development" as part of the WSIS TalkX, co-organized by UN DESA, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The aim is to increase awareness of the importance of supporting innovation ecosystems to spur the development of new and improved assistive technologies.

3. The Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility is organizing a virtual event on “Leadership of the new generations: Children and adolescents with disabilities and their voices post COVID-19” with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations.”

Learn more about the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and events to commemorate the day: <http://bit.ly/UN-2021IDPD>



## THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



### 4 things you need to know about SDGs data

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We cannot achieve our goals and targets if we cannot measure our progress, yet many official national statistics producers remain under-resourced and ill-equipped for the historic task of measuring the world's progress across all Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) and beyond. The [Data For Now](#) initiative, launched in 2019 is working to change that.

#### 1. Countries need data relevant to them

The SDGs may be global goals, but each country faces its own challenges and answers with its own policy priorities. The Data For Now initiative encourages data producers to prioritize their work based on existing national plans and policy priorities in close consultation with policymakers in their countries. That way, they ensure they produce the data that is most urgently needed and relevant to the decision makers.

#### 2. Data innovation can fill the gaps

While official statistics rely on time-tested methods to ensure their accuracy and relevance, new data sources and technologies such as satellite data, citizen generated data or mobile phone use data, when paired with existing data sources and methods, can give us unprecedented insights, especially into the populations that were being left behind or the white spots on the world's data maps.

The Data For Now initiative aims at making these new data and approaches available to national statistical offices that would not otherwise have the necessary skills or resources to access and fully utilize them. Increased collaboration with partners from intergovernmental organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector also fosters innovation in data.

#### 3. Countries lead the way

Countries lead the Data For Now initiative by prioritizing which SDGs they want to work on, based on national policy priorities, current gaps in data, and availability of alternative

data sources, methods and tools to respond to those needs. As a result, the priorities and goals supported by the Data For Now initiative vary from country to country, as do the methods and tools applied.

#### 4. Sharing is caring

As the work evolves, training and guidance materials of the Data For Now initiative will be made available to all.

More information can be found on the Data For Now webpage:

<https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/data-for-now/>



## What if real life was more like the Internet?



**SDG BLOG**



Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, ASG  
Officer in Charge, of the Office of the  
UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology



# Building an open, free and secure digital future for all

*By Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Officer in Charge of the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology*

If you are reading this online, you are fortunate to be in the half of humanity that has access to Internet. 2.9 billion people, particularly in Least Developed Countries, are not as lucky and they are being left behind even further in our brave new digital world.

Last year, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres [predicted](#) the digital transformation to be, along with the climate crisis, one of the “two seismic shifts that will shape the 21st century.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated this tectonic change. I did not expect to witness, in this decade, the sci-fi-like images of world leaders meeting in virtual reality for an online UN General Assembly. And yet, today, we scarcely notice anything unusual about online or hybrid meetings, even becoming experts on strategically muting and unmuting ourselves.

Digital technologies have the power to narrow inequalities and drive progress towards each of the Sustainable Development Goals. They can help the microentrepreneur to connect to new markets, allow children on the move to access education and give vulnerable communities a voice. The rapid growth of telemedicine, which enables doctors to reach remote areas, is just one opportunity with potential for saving millions of lives.

Because many of these applications rely on Internet connectivity, bridging the digital divide is front and centre of the Secretary-General's two cornerstone global plans: the [Roadmap for Digital Cooperation](#), and [Our Common Agenda](#). A key building block of these efforts is the Giga initiative to bring every school in the world online.

At the same time, despite the tremendous potential of digital technologies for good, they also pose significant risks. Since the very beginning of this global pandemic, we saw mobile apps rolled out to assist in contact tracing in an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19. However, without proper safeguards and oversight, the ability to track a person's every step opens the risk for personal data to be accessed by unauthorized parties or used for other purposes than protecting public health.

Likewise, artificial intelligence opens up a world of new opportunities, but biases encoded in their algorithms or unethical use can turn these promises into a dystopia of exacerbated inequalities and human rights violations.

Not unlike the climate crisis, the digital transformation is a global issue and it calls for global solutions. Take social media platforms for example. Several billion people—over half the world's population—are now on social media, using them for everything from networking with classmates and advocating for causes or candidates to selling goods and, of course, sharing cat photos.

For people in some regions, social media sites “are the Internet.” But beyond the cute cats and memes, the social media platforms are also used to fuel genocide, spread disinformation, and exploit children, often by perpetrators based in different countries than the platform. Providing effective and timely oversight of social media platforms and other digital technologies is a defining challenge, both for tech companies as well as for governments.

As the world's largest and most representative international organization, the United Nations plays a vital role in supporting cooperation on technology, to optimize its potential benefits for sustainable development while mitigating its potential harms. Indeed, in global consultations on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, people ranked digital transformation as a priority and looked to the United Nations. The [General](#)

Assembly pledged to “improve digital cooperation” and agreed that “the United Nations can provide a platform for all stakeholders to participate in such deliberations.”

The Secretary-General has already taken steps in this direction. This year, he established the position of Envoy on Technology to guide the strategic approach to technology issues and serve as an advocate and focal point for digital cooperation. The [Office of the Envoy on Technology](#), which I currently lead in my personal capacity, has coordinated the implementation of recommendations from the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. And in his report “Our Common Agenda”, the Secretary-General calls for a Global Digital Compact, to outline the shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all.

The [Internet Governance Forum](#), which convenes this month in Katowice, Poland, is the preeminent multistakeholder venue for discussing key Internet policy issues. The Forum brings together thousands of participants from around the world, representing a range of stakeholder groups, with robust engagement of civil society.

This year’s Forum will include over 200 sessions, focusing especially on economic and social inclusion and human rights, and universal access and meaningful connectivity, in addition to four cross-cutting themes.

In November, the UN also issued a call for nominations for a new Leadership Panel, to be composed of high-level representatives from multiple stakeholder groups. The Panel will advise the Secretary-General, provide strategic input, support engagement, and exchange outputs from the Forum with other stakeholders and relevant fora.

The Panel will also be fundraising to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Forum. With the international community’s bold ambitions for the governance of the digital space, the Internet Governance Forum will need more resources to ensure that discussions on Internet governance lead to meaningful positive change for all.

As we gear up to address the digital transformation and look ahead to 2030 and beyond, I encourage everyone to be engaged. Join us for the Internet Governance Forum and share your ideas as we prepare for the Summit of the Future, where we hope to adopt history’s first Global Digital Compact. I am excited for the future we can build together.



## SDG 12 IN NUMBERS



**ELECTRONIC WASTE**  
CONTINUES TO PROLIFERATE  
AND IS NOT DISPOSED OF RESPONSIBLY

**EACH PERSON**

GENERATED ABOUT  
**7.3 KILOGRAMS**  
OF E-WASTE



BUT ONLY  
**1.7 KILOGRAMS**  
WAS RECYCLED



[2019]



- Connecting private investment to the SDGs
- Reversing the setback to global poverty – will a commodity super-cycle help?

## COMING UP



MORE EVENTS

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