Wikimedia Foundation and Wikimedia Affiliate Statements: Informal Consultation and Thematic Deep Dive Consultations for Stakeholders on the Global Digital Compact (February–June 2023)

Member States of the United Nations are holding a consultative process open to all stakeholders—i.e., governments, the United Nations system, the private sector (including technology companies), civil society, grassroots organizations, academia, and individuals, including youth—to propose and agree on a Global Digital Compact, which will outline shared principles for "an open, free, and secure digital future for all."

The Wikimedia Foundation contributed to the process to ensure the views of the wider free and open knowledge movement would be considered, and to help to shape the deliberations on the Global Digital Compact, whose content will be agreed during the Summit of the Future to be held in September 2024.

The Foundation submitted its contribution in April 2023. On 2 May 2023, the co-facilitators shared the updated road map for the intergovernmental process, which presented additional opportunities for stakeholders to provide input during thematic deep dives.

The Foundation, along with Wikimedia affiliates, registered and prepared statements on the policy issues most relevant to our mission: i.e., to empower and engage people around the world to collect and develop educational content under a free license or in the public domain, and to disseminate it effectively and globally.

This document shares the statements that the Foundation and Wikimedia affiliates delivered throughout February–June 2023. We offer them to other interested

stakeholders, including Wikimedia volunteer communities, in order to: help clarify how our contribution informed our statements; and, provide an example of how to prepare these and continue to contribute toward shaping the intergovernmental consultative process on the Global Digital Compact in their regions and/or countries.

The Global Advocacy team at the Wikimedia Foundation,
July 2023

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Informal consultation with member states and stakeholders (10 February 2023)

Delivered by Costanza Sciubba Caniglia (Wikimedia Foundation)

Statement

Hello, and thank you for hosting these open consultations.

The Wikimedia Foundation is a nonprofit organization that hosts and promotes Wikipedia and other free knowledge projects. Our vision is to ensure that anyone, anywhere, can contribute to the sum of all knowledge. Our model is based on **community-organized information sharing and content moderation**. The community co-creates the content, which is shared under open copyright.

While such models have proven to be positive and effective, they need to be better understood by tech regulation, which sometimes risks involuntarily hurting them.

Community-organized models of information sharing and content moderation promote users' cooperation and data ownership. As such, they create content that can be accessed and used by all globally and has proven to be resilient against false and misleading information. Our model also protects users' privacy and data.

Tech regulation that does not address these models risks hurting them. For example, laws that seek to fight disinformation by increasing **platform liability** for user-generated content pose a direct threat to decentralized content moderation models.

Instead, **open copyright laws** must be promoted, as they enable the open sharing of factual, trustworthy information for non-commercial and public interest purposes, like Wikipedia's content.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that the right to freedom of opinion and expression must include the **freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers**.

When addressing **discrimination and misleading content** online, all stakeholders must also ensure that proposed legislation does not end up hurting freedom of expression and open commons models.

An **open, interoperable, resilient, and secure Internet** is essential to reinforce the exercise of people's human rights regardless of location or method of access.

We envision a public interest, community-governed internet that enables the effective realization of human rights and promotes trustworthy information online, in which **human rights protection** is a responsibility of both private and public legislation.

To this end, cooperation between governments and private and public sectors is essential, so once again, thank you for hosting and your time.

Thematic deep dive — Human rights online (8 May 2023)

Delivered by Richard Gaines (Wikimedia Foundation)

Questions

1. Digital technologies can greatly contribute to the protection of human rights. However, digital surveillance, censorship, algorithmic bias, online harassment, and other forms of abuse can suppress or violate human rights. How can women and girls, children, and persons in vulnerable situations such as persons with disabilities or persons belonging to linguistic minorities be supported in exercising their human rights online?

2. What are the gaps in terms of existing mechanisms for protection and promotion of human rights in the digital domain? How can accountability of digital platforms - public and private - be strengthened?

3. How can international organizations, Member States and other stakeholders work together to ensure human rights offline are protected online?

Statement

My name is Richard Gaines and I am representing the Wikimedia Foundation, which hosts Wikipedia and other free knowledge projects so that every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge.

Access to knowledge through freedom of expression empowers people to exercise many other rights, including the rights to education, economic development, and civic and political participation. To this end, we support a self-governing community of more than 300,000 volunteers around the world who contribute to Wikipedia's more than 55 million encyclopedic articles across 300 languages.

While there are certainly a number of women, children, and persons in vulnerable situations who count themselves these volunteers, we must acknowledge that these groups are under-represented. Negative online environments can impact participation and expression online, particularly from these historically marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Our 2020 human rights impact assessment notes that underrepresented communities experience the majority of harassment online, which disproportionately affects women and racial and ethnic minorities, exacerbates existing systemic barriers to accessing the internet, and is detrimental for individuals' safety and full enjoyment of their human rights.

Our own research reveals that women and people identifying outside of the gender binary reported higher rates than men in 10 out of 11 forms of harassment on our projects, and that more than half of those who report harassment decreased their participation on Wikipedia.

The retreat of underrepresented contributors from negative environments has resulted in measurable racial and linguistic gaps. The predominance of certain languages online perpetuates the structural inequities that prevent many underrepresented groups from full participation in online spaces and, thus, full enjoyment of their rights.

As a steward for one of the world's largest online platforms, the Wikimedia Foundation works closely with its global volunteer community to address these challenges.

We conduct human rights due diligence to understand the impacts our projects and activities can have on underrepresented and vulnerable groups, including a recent Child Rights Impact Assessment.

We continue to work to identify and fill knowledge gaps and provide grant funding to preserve local languages under threat, address gaps in representation, and establish spaces of cultural memory and heritage.

We also continue to work to foster a welcoming culture and engage newcomers. This includes a recently ratified Universal Code of Conduct (UCoC) and technical features to make contributing and translating knowledge more accessible.

The immense benefits of community-led platforms like ours are too often overlooked in policy debates, resulting in proposals that focus on top-down content moderation models that are inconsistent with community self-governance.

We urge international organizations, Member States, and civil society organizations to protect community-led models like Wikipedia through the guidelines, legislation, and

policy recommendations they produce so that our global communities of volunteers can continue to build a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge.

Thank you!

Thematic deep dive — Artificial Intelligence and other emerging technologies (25 May 2023)

Prepared by Franziska Putz (Wikimedia Foundation)

Questions:

1. How can we move from principles to practical measures that will help guide and lead the application of AI technologies in different contexts, and how can these be aligned?

2. How can regulators and innovators work together to promote the development and rollout of new emerging technologies while protecting human and planetary safety, human agency, and fundamental rights?

3. What measures can be taken to ensure that AI and other emerging technologies promote the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals?

Statement

My name is Franziska Putz. I'm here to represent the Wikimedia Foundation, the non-profit that hosts Wikipedia and other volunteer-governed projects. Our mission is to ensure that everyone, everywhere can freely share in the sum of all knowledge.

Wikipedia was started in 2001 as an experiment with emerging technologies, to see how these might help people crowd-source knowledge. Since then, it has grown into an essential resource that is read around **6000** times a second and exists across **300** languages.

In this way, Wikipedia directly supports the **human right to freedom of expression** and advances the Sustainable Development Goal **16.10** on ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms.

The Foundation develops most of the software and tools that Wikipedia's volunteer editors use to preserve high-quality content on the platform and the policies that these editors have set for themselves.

Since our founding day over 20 years ago, we have been committed to creating freely

accessible information through processes that are participatory, transparent, and open to everyone. **This commitment shapes how we think about emerging technologies like AI: as tools that must have peoples' interests and participation at their core**.

Wikipedia is also part of the global information ecosystem. Its contents are used to train **machine learning models for generative AI** such as chatbots. We have concerns about how such tools might misrepresent Wikipedia's content.

Technologies like AI support human rights, the SDGs, and the public interest when they support the work that humans do on our platforms, not replace it. Wikipedia volunteers have long used AI tools and bots to help scale their own activities, like detecting vandalism or translating content. When these tools are built by the Foundation, then we do so in consultation with the very people using them. They are our strongest partners in considering the context-specific effects of AI, such as on small language communities. To further empower our editing communities, any AI tools we develop are open source and transparent.

We urge those who build Large Language Models to work WITH affected communities and to be cautious of the implications that such technology can have on those who curate and verify knowledge in the public interest.

For this reason, the Foundation conducts **human rights due diligence** to understand the impacts that our projects and the tools used on them can have on underrepresented and vulnerable groups.

If governments, regulators, and innovators wish to ensure that AI promotes **agency, empowers people, and advances the SDGs**, then they must make efforts to understand the fragile ecosystem of collaboratively built human knowledge that so many around the world rely on. **AI should not be self-serving**. It should aid people in sharing and participating in knowledge. **Internet users and content creators** must be part of this conversation.

The Wikimedia Foundation and the global movement of volunteers on Wikipedia are ready to participate in these important conversations.

Thank you!

Thematic deep dive — Digital trust and safety (25 May 2023)

Delivered by Nathan Forrester (Wikimedia Foundation)

Questions

1. Digital spaces and online platforms can be exploited by actors for financial, criminal, social, political, or malicious goals - to spread falsehood, violent and extreme content, perpetrate scams and other crimes, and manipulate online behaviors. Which collaborative measures undertaken by Governments, the private sector and civil society have proved effective in tackling such misuse so far? How can global digital cooperation strengthen their implementation?

2. Different jurisdictions apply different norms to online behaviors. Different online platforms apply different policies to similar online behaviors. How can Member States, the private sector and relevant stakeholders engage to define common frameworks to address the challenges to online safety?

3. Regarding mis/disinformation and online harm, what policies, frameworks and measures can be adopted by governments and companies to protect the integrity of public information and preserve civic spaces for public debate?

4. What digital cooperation measures, for example trust labels, audits, and certification schemes, can stakeholders consider promoting trust and safety for consumer products and services, including AI models? How can we enhance digital literacy skills and training so that people are empowered to protect themselves?

Statement

Hello, and thank you for hosting these open consultations.

The Wikimedia Foundation is a nonprofit organization that hosts and promotes Wikipedia and other free knowledge projects. Our vision is to ensure that anyone, anywhere, can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. Our model is based on **community-organized information sharing and content moderation**. The community of volunteer editors co-creates the content, which is shared under open copyright.

In terms of policies, **our community of editors prioritize accuracy over speed,** particularly when it comes to current events. Editors are our indispensable volunteer partners in the pursuit of our shared journey. We can't deliver humankind's knowledge freely to every person on our own. That lens shapes our approach on all Foundation activities, including on trust and safety issues. **Editors identify their needs and obstacles tied to the creation of educational content, and we help them deal with those issues if they can't collectively resolve them within the community.**

Editorial guidelines set by the community are meant to give context to an article using the most accurate and trusted sources of information. Communities are updating their policies consistently and working with the Foundation to navigate gaps. The Foundation in turn provides meaningful engagement and support with the volunteer community, from providing in-depth research material on disinformation challenges to extending investigative support.

There are **cases where we don't think it is ethical or legal to rely on volunteers for appropriate handling.** For example, instances of CSAM or threats of imminent physical harm. Because our projects have a narrow purpose and are publicly viewable, these challenges are much rarer for us than for any other VLOP.

Even rarer, whole community projects might be captured by narrow interests, distorting the structure developed by our global community. This has happened once, with Croatian Wikipedia, and in response we published an in-depth report that detailed the unique factors of why this occurred and how it was to be remedied.

It is our resolve that **maintaining knowledge integrity is a collective and holistic effort. Our role is to provide resources and capacity building opportunities that allow our communities to self-govern and address challenges.** To this end, we urge you to take into consideration Wikimedia projects' community-led, open-source model as you draft the Global Digital Compact. This will promote trustworthy information sharing and bring us all closer to the realization of a human right declared over seventy years ago: the right to education.

Thematic deep dive — Global digital commons (14 June 2023)

Delivered by Dimitar Dimitrov (Wikimedia Europe)

Questions

1. Which challenges in the domain of digital transformation can be addressed by strengthening "global digital commons"? What could a "global digital commons" approach entail – in terms of possible principles, values, and ideas? How should these principles influence the creation of "global digital commons" and their governance?

2. Digital public goods (DPGs) and digital public infrastructures are increasingly part of countries' digital transformations, including by promoting digital inclusion, as well as supporting other sectors such as health, environment, and education. What are the main challenges with regards to digital public infrastructure? How can the GDC contribute to the safety and inclusivity of digital public infrastructure and mitigate potential harm? How can the GDC contribute to strengthening the global DPG ecosystem and increase local adoption of DPGs?

Statement

My name is Dimi Dimitrov, and I represent Wikimedia Europe, an affiliate of the Wikimedia free and open knowledge movement.

Wikimedia is a global movement whose mission is to bring free educational content to the world. Our most prominent project is Wikipedia.

The global digital commons are the spaces that we all use and govern together. They include a healthy and vibrant public domain and freely accessible knowledge that we all participate in.

The Wikimedia projects, with their freely licensed content, are part of the digital commons. For us, policies that support the public domain, open access, open government data, etcetera, are vital. However, such policies are not enough. An open, interoperable, resilient, and secure internet is further essential for our projects and the digital commons so that everyone, everywhere, can learn, engage and participate in public discourse.

To support the digital commons governments and international organizations should protect and support the right of communities to create and maintain online platforms dedicated to public information and other digital public goods.

Such support can, on the one hand, be provided by balancing intellectual property rights and platform liability regimes with the right to information, right to education and the right to freely participate in cultural life.

Such support can, on the other hand, also be provided by investing in digital public infrastructure. For instance:

- hardware,
- software,
- and, content moderation.

Today the world heavily relies on one dominant type of online service: for-profit and advertising driven. We believe that boosting the development of public interest services will help improve educational services, promote equality, and foster economic growth.

We need versatile and diverse models of operation of online services and their underlying infrastructure to make our societies more resilient to threats such as disinformation and to ensure a more equitable development globally.

Thematic deep dive — Accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (14 June 2023)

Delivered by Rachel Arinii Judhistari (Wikimedia Foundation)

Questions

1. Given existing experience, especially from the Global South, where and how is digital technology helping to deliver on the SDGs (eg health, water, jobs environment)? How can experiences be shared effectively? Are there any principles and approaches that could be generalized?

2. How can Member States, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, and individuals work together to design and apply digital technologies for the purpose of accelerating progress on the SDGs? What role could capacity-development of public officials and other development stakeholders play in this regard?

3. Which future challenges, for example with regards to environmental sustainability, could digital technologies create or help solve in relation to the SDG? What measures could support stakeholders in tackling these issues?

Statement

My name is Rachel Judhistari and I am representing the Wikimedia Foundation.

The Wikimedia Foundation is an UN ECOSOC-accredited, nonprofit organization that hosts and promotes Wikipedia and other free knowledge projects. Our vision is to ensure that anyone, anywhere, can contribute to the sum of all knowledge. We support a vibrant community of more than 300,000 volunteers around the world who collect and verify content on Wikipedia over 61 million articles across 300 languages, **all for free and without ads.**

The digital commons and access to free knowledge, such as Wikimedia projects, are essential to provide wide access to accurate information, which in turn is fundamental for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The community-governed free knowledge projects that we host constitute digital public goods that all can use. While free and reliable information sources like Wikipedia have proven positive and

effective, they need to be better understood by policymakers who sometimes risk involuntarily hurting them through regulation that targets profit-oriented social media platforms.

The community-led model of information sharing and content moderation promotes users' cooperation and joint decision-making about content. As such, the post-2025 SDGs framework should make sure to safeguard the diversity of the internet by ensuring liability protections for public goods platforms. Regulation of content moderation and platforms should support the diversity of the internet ecosystem to thrive and allow the creation of knowledge led by contributors from the global majority.

The Foundation is firmly committed to protecting the volunteer community-led governance model that makes Wikipedia so robust and resilient to disinformation. This commitment has helped make Wikipedia a reliable source of knowledge for billions of people in pursuit of better lives and a better world. In many ways, the work that volunteers contribute to collective projects like Wikipedia can build the cooperation and understanding, as well as the social and technological skills, which are crucial to the efforts needed toward achieving the SDGs. In fact, the right to freedom of expression directly contributes to achieving the SDGs by enabling the basic coordination and communication necessary to effectuate any of these goals. Strong technical and policy solutions by private sector entities and online platforms, including community-led platforms like Wikimedia projects, are necessary to protect their users' freedom of expression and privacy.

To this end, ensuring the protection of public goods platforms like Wikipedia is essential to fast-tracking the fulfillment of the objectives of the SDGs and transition to a just digitalization. The Wikimedia Foundation and the global movement of volunteers on Wikipedia and other Wikimedia projects are ready to participate in these important conversations that can lead us there.