

Digitalisation and NDICI Programming

Guidance Note

August 2020

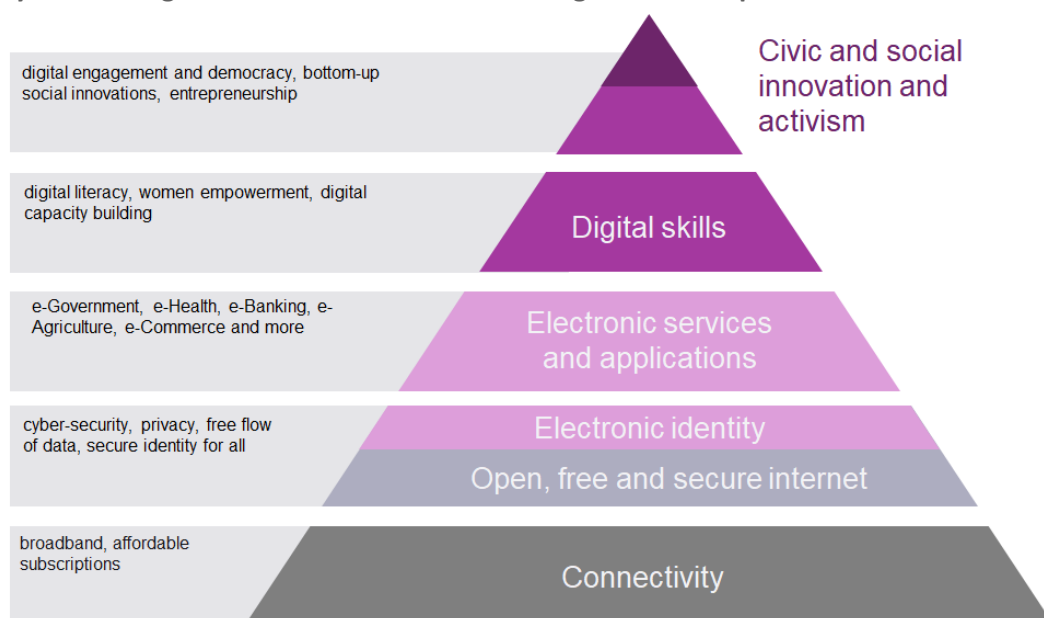
Introduction

The aim of this document is to provide practical guidance to CSOs participating in the consultation process of the programming of the new EU external single instrument - Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation (NDICI).

The rise of digitalisation¹ comes with contradictory opportunities and risks. Digital transformation however, is no longer optional: it is key to ensure that we all benefit from new technologies in equal measure. This is more relevant than ever, as the COVID-19 crisis has not only accelerated digital transformation, but also brought to light the stark inequalities in access and inclusiveness between people and countries. If used well, digitalisation has the power to create a fairer and more sustainable world for all people, but if left unchecked, digitalisation could exacerbate inequalities and threaten universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. From access to news, to medical support, to education, to online government services, the internet has become a necessity. Those who remain in the analog world risk being left behind.

A pyramid of digital needs facilitates understanding the different stages of digitalisation that have to be followed from building broadband technologies and ensuring open, safe and secure internet up to digital democratic processes such as voting.

Pyramid of digital needs - the framework for Digital 4 Development



Source: https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CONCORD_FOND_DevelopmentGoingDigital_Report_2018.pdf

¹ Definition of digitalisation is the process by which everyday human interactions and transactions — with the government, businesses, and fellow humans — and consumption of goods, services, information, and ideas are conducted using the Internet and Internet-based technologies and services. https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CONCORD_FOND_DevelopmentGoingDigital_Report_2018.pdf

As an underlying framework for an inclusive digital future, we can use the principles for digital development to ensure from the design stage a strong understanding of the barriers to digital inclusion (whether technical or social) in the partner country, in order to respond to these and create accessible, inclusive, participatory and efficient e-solutions.

1. Connectivity: Open, free and secure internet

Internet access in many countries is taken for granted. Mobile phones are the primary way in which people in low and middle-income countries access the internet. As such, when we talk about connectivity, access to mobile data is essential. However, around half of the world's population (4 billion people)² is still not connected, and affordability remains the biggest barrier. The internet has become a public utility like public schools, street-lights, roads and sidewalks, a responsibility of society to manage and maintain.

The Internet is a system designed to be 'open' by default and this quality of openness should be maintained. There are however inherent tensions. For example:

Governments are facing conflicting pressures: meet certain public policy objectives in ways that may make the internet less open, and reap the social and economic benefits that come with a more open Internet.³

How is the right balance struck between openness and security?

How do we address the fact that women and girls online tend to face even more harassment, violence, discrimination and hate speech, particularly when they are human rights defenders, journalists and politicians?

How will secure communication tools and encryption technologies ensure that the citizen's data is protected without impinging on their personal freedoms or rights?

EU development cooperation should:

- Support open, secure and affordable access to the internet (including mobile data) and also promote gender sensitive and inclusive digital infrastructure planning;
- Unequivocally condemn any internet shutdowns, as an infringement on the right to information and freedom of press and expression;
- Ensure Net neutrality⁴ by mandating Internet service providers supported by EU funds to treat all data on the Internet in the same way, and not to discriminate or charge different prices according to user, content, website, platform, application, type of attached equipment, or method of communication;
- Ensure that access to content on the internet is guaranteed to all citizens irrespective of their geographical location, income, education, gender and social status, and safeguarded from surveillance by governments or companies;
- Support equal access, use and creation of digital technology, with a view to bridging the digital divides including the digital gender and age gaps, and to include those who are disadvantaged or marginalised by the digital transformation;

² <https://www.gsma.com/subsaharanafrica/resources/2019-mobile-industry-report>

³ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5jlwqf2r97g5-en.pdf?expires=1594387160&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=E198571E4F089237122705A7B09E8ACB>

⁴ Net neutrality is a core principle of the internet; equal treatment of data traffic by internet service providers.

- Support the inclusion of girls and women in the creation of digital content and digital technologies. Girls and women are more likely to encounter social barriers to their access to digital technology and the internet, in addition to structural ones such as cost and infrastructure;
- Take into account the expertise of NGOs as they know the needs and realities of local partners and target groups and understand which approaches may be particularly useful;
- Support civil society in advocating on inclusive legislation and policies on digital technologies, focused on openness, freedom, equal access and net neutrality;
- Include civil society in multi-stakeholder policy dialogues and all relevant structures with private and public sector representatives;
- Support the expansion of operational and successful digital technologies playing a major role in socio-economic development and social cohesion, such as early detection and prevention of all forms of violence, peace-building mechanisms, reach out to vulnerable or people with disabilities, savings groups mechanisms, community training, improvement of health diagnostics and services to reduce child and maternal mortality
- Review its digitisation agenda through the lens of upholding its commitments to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;

2. Electronic identity

Anonymity is a core feature of the Internet that enables people, civil society and activists to obtain information, spread awareness, network and mobilise in even the most repressive circumstances. The digital space is often the only place where people in authoritarian regimes can practise their fundamental freedoms and organise politically. At the same time, the internet can also be a space where individual rights are realised, such as through access to public services including health, education and justice. To gain such access, people need to be able to prove they are who they claim to be. Governments therefore need to create secure, verifiable, digital ID systems for everyone, so that they can exercise their rights, access services and prosper online.

EU development cooperation should:

- Support civil society in monitoring and advocating on the development of digital ID systems, ensuring access to all population groups and safeguarding the right to privacy;
- Support civil society and parliaments in their role as watchdogs in order to ensure that digital ID systems do not result in excessive tracking and surveillance by governments. This point is especially important as the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the growth of technologies driven by data exploitation and digital surveillance, opening the door to unrestrained government surveillance.
- Technical assistance and knowledge exchange needs to be provided and facilitated between EU member states and partner countries on the roll-out and maintenance of effective digital ID systems.

3. Electronic services and applications

The right use of electronic services, such as decentralised, bottom-up ICT tools and e-government solutions, can foster participatory and evidence-based decision- and policy-making and lead to a better understanding of the views and needs of local communities. A crucial question is how governments, companies and online platforms store and use people's personal digital data in our massively

interconnected world. Personal data protection is a hallmark of good governance as legislation is established, its implementation enforced, and corrective measures taken in the interest of the digital citizen's right to freedom and privacy. Furthermore, the EU through its trade rules and regulations on surveillance technology should ensure that technologies being produced and sold by European companies are not be used by autocratic governments for monitoring purposes. Another key element for the development of participatory e-government tools (and other e-services) is to ensure these tools are accessible by all and enable an inclusive dialogue.

EU development cooperation should:

- Provision on technical support to governments to develop a rules definition for a fair, innovative and inclusive digital economy and on public sector capacity to deliver digital services (eID, eHealth, eGovernment etc);
- Promote good data governance and wise regulation policy so that data, like any resource, will be managed for the public good, and will ensure that the benefits flow to all people and not just the few;
- Foresee intergovernmental cooperation on legislation and frameworks that protect consumers and producers and that protect privacy and data ownership on the basis of the highest standards of existing legislation (e.g. GDPR);
- Facilitate experience and best practice sharing between European data protection authorities and those of partner countries, with the participation of privacy-focused civil society;
- Include algorithmic transparency as a necessary component to meeting the EU's commitments to human rights and democracy as more automated decision-making processes risk secret profiling and discrimination;
- Not provide surveillance technology for monitoring purposes of the autocratic regimes;
- Promote open government data, open contracting and freedom of information as crucial tools to improve the quality, efficiency and accountability of public services;
- Support the use of digital technology for more transparent and effective taxation in developing countries through the transfer of technology, building know how and development of laws and policies. Indeed, while well-designed international and national tax policies are key, tax authorities' capacity to enforce them also matters (e.g. digitalization of property registers has been considered a key step in stepping up property taxation).

4. Digital skills

Digital skills include the ability to use digital devices, applications and networks to access and manage information, to be able to create and share digital content, and communicate in a digital world. People without digital skills will be – and are being – excluded from the digital world.

In the digital economy, skills required range from the ability to make use of the functionality that comes with a mobile phone to advanced skills such as data analytics, network management, online marketing and app development. Bridging the digital skills divide is therefore much more than simply giving students tablets or teaching everyone to code.

Education plays an important role. The World Economic Forum in its 'The future of jobs 2016' report, estimates that 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely

new types of job that don't yet exist⁵. Education to at least secondary level is the biggest factor predicting whether people are able to be digitally literate and use the internet to increase their income and wellbeing, regardless of whether or not a curriculum specifically includes digital skills.

EU development cooperation should:

- Include digital literacy in school curricula so that a maximum number of young people can benefit from the knowledge and skills necessary to set them up for the future;
- Encourage girls and young women to take part in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) subjects, in order to equally enjoy and be key drivers of the digital transformation, including by addressing gender and occupational stereotypes in education curricula and training materials, in order to empower them as creators of technology and digital content;
- Support lifelong learning and re-qualification as it will become not only common practice but also a necessary requirement for working citizens given how rapidly technology develops;
- Support civil society and government authorities in the provision of digital literacy programmes, particularly around identifying dis- and misinformation around elections;
- Make digital environments safe through supporting civil society, partner governments and schools to provide workshops, teacher training, cyber security classes and similar initiatives to ensure everyone has the knowledge and skills needed to stay safe online.

5. Civic and social innovation and activism

Digital technology and the internet are great enablers for activism and freedom of expression. However, the digital space also creates risks, such as surveillance, dis- and misinformation, as well as cyberbullying, online violence, harassment and hate speech.

Girls and women as well as other marginalised groups - especially when politically active - are more likely to face abuse and harassment online, which silence their voices.

Cambridge Analytica tested its manipulation technologies in the global South before applying them in the United States and Europe, just like disinformation by Russia and China was widespread before reaching the European Union. Awareness of manipulation technologies and practices like disinformation campaigns, political microtargeting and inauthentic behaviour online is crucial for empowering people to participate safely in online public debate.

Many governments have passed cybersecurity and/or disinformation laws which are being used to crack down on journalists, academics and civil society.

A dual approach can be taken. Development cooperation can provide technical assistance at government level to benefit from sharing knowhow and learning while at the same time, creating an environment that actively encourages local innovation, enables local communities to find their own tailor-made solutions from the bottom up, and develop services to fit their specific needs.

⁵ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf

EU development cooperation should:

- Raise awareness on fundamental rights protection within the digital era;
- Ensure a balanced approach to cybersecurity and the fight against fake news and data-driven electoral manipulation, that does not enable the persecution or silencing of dissents;
- Strengthen the capacity of local civil society to understand, research, advocate and litigate on these issues, and ensure civil society has a seat at the policymaking table;
- Empower civil society and activists with digital security trainings, to enable them to make the most of the freedoms of the digital space while mitigating the risks (surveillance, cyberbullying and harassment, mis- and disinformation, etc.);
- Support the development of laws and policies regulating digital technology and online spaces and holding digital platform providers accountable;
- Strengthen privacy rights activism and stop the export or funding of mass surveillance technologies and biometric ID schemes particularly in countries where checks and balances on state power are weak. This will be all the more important in the wake of Covid-19 as many governments are introducing highly intrusive systems that may not go away after the pandemic ends;
- Support local SMEs and start-ups to deliver social innovation to real/identified development and political needs;
- Support organisations which push for transparent, open, participatory, inclusive and accountable governmental institutions and processes, including democratic and civic space, as the essential foundation for protecting rights in regulation on digital technologies.

Further reading:

- Oxfam → [Responsible Data Management](#)
- Alistiq for CONCORD Europe and FOND Romania → [Development is going Digital](#)
- ActionAid → [Taxing the digital economy](#)
- Venro → [Tech for Good: The possibilities and limits of using digital instruments in international development projects of non-governmental organisations](#)
- Plan International → [Digital Empowerment of Girls & Time for Change: COVID-19, Connectivity and Equality](#)

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