B20 & T20 Statement on Digital Transformation in view of the
G20 Digital Ministers' Meeting
Trieste, 5 August 2021

Covid-19 has contributed to accelerating the digital transition and has multiplied its influence on our lives and societies. However, the benefits brought about by these changes are jeopardised by their own rapidity and by their corresponding inequalities. As estimated by the World Economic Forum, 3.7 billion people do not have access to the Internet. Due to this growing digital divide, at least one-third of the world's schoolchildren were unable to access remote learning last year.

Vulnerable groups, particularly women and low-skilled workers, are more likely to be excluded from the benefits of digital transformation. To date, less than 30% of the world's researchers are women, and 40% of workers with a lower secondary degree are in jobs with a high risk of automation.

Moreover, cybercrimes, the lack of a common regulatory framework incidents regarding the misuse of personal data, and the lack of a level playing field in digital markets further nurture mistrust in digital innovation and raise ethical concerns.

In light of these challenges, the Business20 (B20), the official G20 dialogue forum with the global business community, and the Think20 (T20), the engagement group of the G20, which brings together think-tanks, universities and other research centres, have worked together to produce practical policy-proposals for G20 decision-makers. Our Task Forces on Digital Transformation believe that the G20 has a crucial role in making digitalisation an opportunity for all and unleashing its full potential to foster economic growth and build fairer societies.

The B20 and the T20 jointly call G20 Ministers for technological innovation to take action with respect to the following proposals in respective policy areas:

Bridging the digital divide in all its forms

As a core enabler of digital transformation, connectivity worldwide should be further expanded by developing a G20 coordinated multilateral collaborative effort to stimulate innovation and ensure an investment-friendly environment .

At the same time, it is crucial to tackling the existing digital skills gap in the private and public sector by mapping current shortages and up/re-skilling individuals, in order to create a digital-ready population. Given this context, education curricula should be updated to include digital learning solutions capable of reaching the most marginalized through options that are usable offline and on affordable devices.

G20 countries should also recognize and address the existing gender divide in the digital economy. Time-bound targets and grant schemes for women in STEM, awareness campaigns against gender stereotypes and measures fostering gender-neutral parental leave-taking are some of the policy instruments suggested to tackle this issue.

Building trust and coordination in the digital economy

A fair and transparent regulatory environment must be guaranteed for markets and sectors to work and interact effectively. However, global coordination on regulatory principles is not keeping pace with the latest technological progress, creating imbalances across legislations, industries, and markets, negatively impacting the overall trust in the digital ecosystem.

We recommend G20 countries to harmonize regulatory principles to facilitate fair competition and efficient markets. In particular, the G20 should consider adopting a coordinated framework to discourage undesirable practices that may damage the trust of consumers.

In parallel, to create a comprehensive international governance architecture for big data, artificial intelligence and the digital platforms, the G20 should promote the development of multi-stakeholder entities that may coordinate and shape global standards and policies across the digital economy.

Regional certification schemes governing cross-border flows of personal data in APEC and EU countries should be opened up to outside countries and multilateralised, with the prospect of moving towards interoperability in the future. The G20 should as such avoid data protectionism, without however undermining states' rights to regulatory autonomy on data protection and privacy.

Guaranteeing security and privacy in the digital sphere

The number of global cyber-attacks increased by 12% compared to the previous year. Nevertheless, the uneven international regulation, including several grey areas within local jurisdictions, still weakens the global defence against cyber-attacks. G20 could promote more meaningful information-sharing about cyber threats. This approach would enable States to develop a more complete picture of the threat environment and provide better information to defenders to proactively address emerging threats.

To increase individual protection against online threats, the creation of specific schools' curricula may help young people identify these threats and provide them with the tools to evaluate misinformation and potential deceit, and to avoid cyberbullying.

In the area of data privacy, our proposal for the G20 is to incentivise transparency to consumers over their own data.

Conclusion

After the pandemic, many challenges are facing our society. The B20 and T20, through their Task Forces on Digital Transformation, calls G20 Ministers for technological innovation for a renewed commitment to address these challenges by designing and swiftly implementing policy measures aimed at reducing the digital divide, supporting women's inclusion in the digital economy, strengthening digital education and digital skills, introducing comprehensive international governance for the digital ecosystem, and giving people meaningful control of their own data.