Geneva Internet Platform
DigitalWatch
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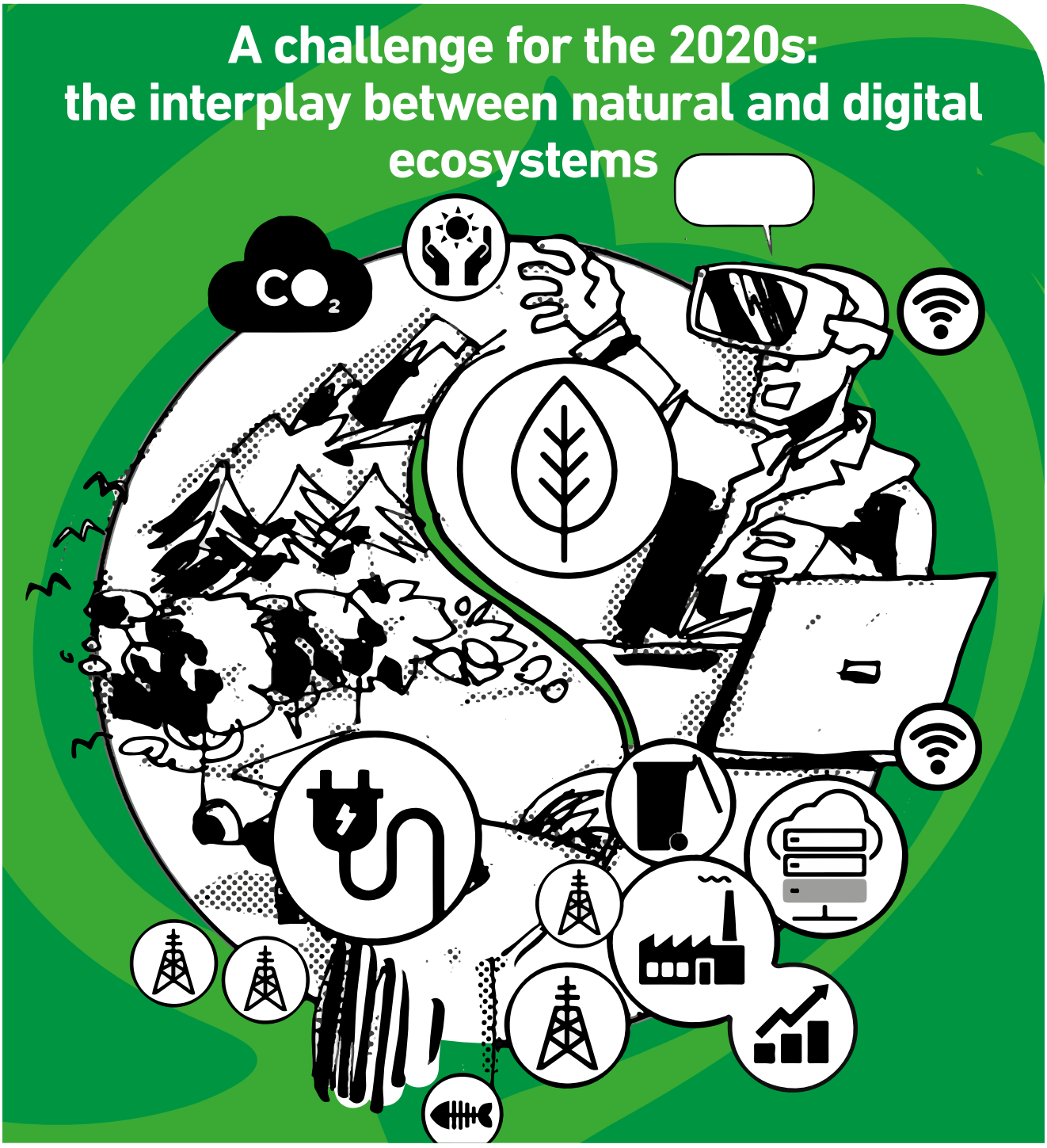
Newsletter

A challenge for the 2020s: the interplay between natural and digital ecosystems



TRENDS

January's notable trends involved the interplay between natural and digital ecosystems, approaches to cybercrime, and digital currencies.

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FROM THE OBSERVATORY

Sustainable development, security, digital rights, and new technologies were among the most prominent issues in January.

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.ORG IN A NUTSHELL

We look at the main issues involved in the planned sale of the .org registry and the controversy around it.

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DATA ANALYSIS

Which countries have banned Uber operations and what is the employment status of the company's drivers around the world?

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The top digital policy trends in January

Each month we analyse hundreds of unfolding developments to identify key trends in digital policy and the issues underlying them. These were the trends we observed in January.

1. The Decade of Action: optimising the interplay between natural and digital ecosystems

'Let us make the 2020s the Decade of Action and let us make 2020 the year of urgency.' In his remarks to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 22 January 2020, UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced the start of a Decade of Action to deliver the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030 and to 'achieve a fair globalization, boost economic growth, and prevent conflict'. He also called for solutions to four urgent challenges faced by humanity in the 21st century: geopolitical tension, the climate crisis, global mistrust, and the downsides of digital technologies.

Guterres' remarks here and at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos emphasised the interplay between natural and digital ecosystems: 'if one looks at global politics and geopolitical tensions, with the global economy, and the mega trends – climate change, the movement of people, digitalization – the truth is that they are more and more interlinked, interfering more and more with each other'. As the Decade of Action gathers momentum, we can expect this focus on interplay to increase. For example, more policies and initiatives will likely emerge aimed at leveraging the potential of digital technologies in achieving the SDGs.

We can also expect an increasing focus on the use of digital technologies in the fight against climate change and to ensure better environmental protection. Moreover, greater efforts will be made to limit the environmental impact of digital technologies themselves (e.g. the massive use of energy by data centres). And new online conferencing tools may help to reduce air-travel and ultimately the carbon footprint of global diplomacy.

A number of initiatives are already emerging at the natural/digital nexus. The UN Environment Programme has initiated a worldwide dialogue on the global digital ecosystem, and identified the 20 top priorities for 2020. The Geneva Internet Platform conducts research and training aimed at making online meetings more efficient and impactful, and the Geneva Engage Award recognises the most effective use of online meeting tools.

This year's Internet Governance Forum (IGF) will also explore the interplay between natural and digital, with environmental sustainability and climate change a possible thematic track for Katowice in November 2020 (pending confirmation from the community). Even before the IGF, this crucial issue will continue to be addressed by UN agencies, countries, and organisations around the world committed to accelerating global action towards sustainable development.

2. Cybercrime resolution: towards global cyber treaties?

In late December 2019, the UNGA passed *Resolution 74/247 – Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes*, which was initially proposed by Russia and 26 other countries. The resolution establishes an open-ended ad hoc intergovernmental committee of experts from all regions tasked with elaborating a comprehensive international convention to combat cybercrime. It builds on a draft convention on countering cybercrime proposed by Russia in 2017, which would replace the Council of Europe (CoE) Budapest Convention of 2001, the only currently existing international mechanism in this area.

Voting in the UNGA for this resolution was divided, with 79 votes in favour, 60 against, and 33 abstentions. Representatives of the USA and EU criticised the act, noting that the UN already has an intergovernmental expert group on cybercrime engaged in discussing the need for a new treaty; in response, Russian representatives underlined that the new committee would take into account the work of that expert group. In January, the EU issued a statement in support of the Budapest Convention, arguing that a new convention could lower standards for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Calls for a UN convention of cybercrime may have complex motivations, and raise a number of questions. The Budapest Convention was developed by CoE states without involving non-members in the drafting process, and is almost 20 years old. On the other hand, it is a widely used international instrument

signed by over 65 countries (more than 20 from outside the CoE), and work is ongoing on an additional protocol to keep it up-to-date with the changing digital world. Moreover, the Convention has served as the inspiration or blueprint for cybercrime legislation at a national level, and it also offers a framework in which countries can benefit from cybercrime-related training for their judicial institutions.

Another issue is that, although cyber issues are on the diplomatic agendas of an increasing number of countries, many governments (in particular those of developing nations) do not have a common national position in this regard and tend to vote according to other foreign policy interests (such as attracting investment by major economies). For example, six countries that ratified the Budapest Convention (including three CoE member states) also voted for the resolution that could trigger a UN cybercrime convention, and a dozen countries switched positions during the different stages of voting: it was 88-58 in the UNGA Third Committee but 79-60 in the GA itself.

Yet although this may indicate other interests in play, it is also possible that the voting signals the increasing appeal of a global cyber-treaty of some sort. Reasons for this may include countries' growing perception of the potential benefits of a regulated international cyber-environment, or that they see an international treaty as a way to strengthen their national sovereignty in cyberspace (with implications for data localisation, content censorship, and digital taxation, among other things).

In addition, the UN is slowly opening up its deliberations to other stakeholders, for example through the open consultations hosted by the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG). Might this mean we are seeing the emergence of a multistakeholder-friendly, multilateral route towards an international cyber-treaty?

3. Digital currencies of increasing interest to regulators and central banks

Digital currencies have been attracting the attention of financial regulators and institutions for some time now, with concerns ranging from their potential impact on financial stability to the possibility of their misuse for criminal purposes. Regulatory initiatives to address such concerns have started emerging around the world. Approaches have varied from country to country and include: complete bans on the use of digital currencies, the application to them of existing money laundering and counter-terrorism financing legislation, and the development of digital currency-friendly regulatory regimes as a way to attract investment.

In January 2020 the WEF launched a Global Consortium for Digital Currency Governance, an international, multistakeholder initiative which will seek to encourage 'innovative regulatory approaches to achieve efficiency, speed, interoperability, inclusivity, and transparency, and build trust'. The group is also expected to develop a set of guiding principles to support public and private actors in exploring the opportunities offered by digital currencies.

Those possible opportunities are significant. Several central banks (e.g. those of China, France, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) are looking into launching national digital currencies. A recent Bank of International Settlement (BIS) report indicates that some 10% of central banks are likely to issue central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) in the near future. This marks a significant shift from January 2019, when very few central banks saw the issuance of CBDCs as likely in the short to medium term. In line with this trend, the European Central Bank, five national central banks (Canada, England, Japan, Sweden, and Switzerland), and the BIS created a group to assess potential cases for CBDCs and to explore economic, functionality, and technical design issues.

We anticipate that throughout the year financial regulators and central banks will continue to explore regulatory issues surrounding digital currencies as well as how to maximise the beneficial interplay between financial systems and digital technologies. CBDCs are likely to be met with less apprehension than privately issued cryptocurrencies, but even so it will be necessary to explore potential risks and take measures to avoid unforeseen consequences at a global scale.



Digital policy developments in January

Digital policy is constantly evolving to keep pace with technological and geopolitical developments: the landscape is packed with new initiatives, evolving regulatory frameworks, and new legislation, court cases and judgments.

In the *Digital Watch* observatory – available at **dig.watch** – we decode, contextualise, and analyse these developments, offering a digestible yet authoritative update on the complex world of digital policy. The monthly barometer tracks and compares the issues to reveal new trends and to allow them to be understood relative to those of previous months. The following is a summarised version; read more about each one by clicking the blue icons, or by visiting the Updates section in the observatory.



increasing relevance

Global IG architecture

At the first preparatory meeting for IGF 2020, the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) identified three key themes: data, inclusion, and trust.

The Netherlands established the Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) Foundation.

Themes discussed by world leaders at the WEF in Davos included Tech for Good, Society & Future of Work, and Fairer Economies, among others.

Microsoft announced that it is opening an office in New York to 'deepen [its] support for' the UN.



increasing relevance

Sustainable development

The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development launched the Broadband Transforming Lives Campaign.

The UK committed £320m for financial inclusion initiatives and tackling poverty in Africa. Nigeria partnered with IBM on digital skills training. Uganda announced plans to develop a digital ID verification system for fintech.

Security

Large-scale cyber-attacks are among the main global risks in 2020, according to *The Global Risks Report* from the WEF. Microsoft released a patch for a Windows 10 cryptographic vulnerability.



increasing relevance

Hacker groups in Turkey and Greece engaged in cyber-attacks against domestic online resources. Austria's Foreign Ministry was targeted by a serious cyber-attack. Interpol completed an operation against cryptojacking in Southeast Asia. A ransomware attack on foreign exchange company Travelex affected UK banks' online foreign currency systems.

The EU has issued a statement in support of the CoE Cybercrime Convention. The USA and Estonia are planning to build a joint cyber threat intelligence platform. The US House of Representatives passed 5G-related bills. Belgium security services recommended stricter security measures during 5G deployment. The UK announced restrictions on the use of high-risk vendors in the roll-out of 5G networks but will allow Huawei to have a limited role.



increasing relevance

E-commerce & Internet economy

The USA and China signed the 'phase one' trade deal, expected to de-escalate their ongoing trade war. New EU rules on consumer protection in the digital economy came into force. Uber will cease operating in Colombia from 31 January. In California, the company made a number of changes to its app in response to a new law pertaining to the status of platform workers. Canada issued guidance for cryptocurrency exchanges.



increasing relevance

Digital rights

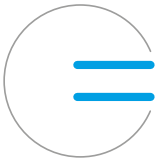
Facebook launched a new Privacy Checkup tool which will allow users to review who can see their profile information. Google reached a US$7.5 million settlement following Google+ data breaches. Verizon launched a new privacy-focused search engine, 'OneSearch'.

A study has found that most cookie-consent tools do not adhere to the EU's General Data Protection Regulation.

The *Global Cost of Internet Shutdown 2019* report revealed the high cost of global Internet shutdowns in 2019.

Egypt announced plans for a strategy for the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Facebook announced that it will not police political ads.



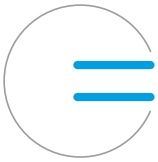
same relevance

Jurisdiction & legal issues

The FBI has sought help from Apple in accessing iPhones in a Florida investigation.

A US court ordered Facebook to disclose information about apps that may have misused consumer data.

India's Supreme Court ruled that the indefinite suspension of Internet services in Kashmir is illegal.



same relevance

Infrastructure

Damage to undersea cables disrupted Internet services across parts of Africa and the Middle East.

The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) proposed a fund to bridge the rural digital divide.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the California Attorney General asked for additional time to review the .org sale proposal.



decreasing relevance

Net neutrality

India's telecom regulator issued a consultation paper on Internet traffic management, among other things.



increasing relevance

New technologies (IoT, AI, etc.)

In the USA, the White House proposed 10 principles for AI regulation. Google's CEO called for sensible AI regulation that does not limit the tech's potential benefits.

The EU could temporarily ban the use of facial recognition technology (FRT) in public places. The London police is preparing to deploy FRT amid privacy concerns.

The UK government published security requirements for IoT devices, while the US Senate has passed the Developing and Growing the Internet of Things (DIGIT) Act. Amazon's Ring products were in the spotlight over privacy and security concerns.

The .org controversy in a nutshell

In November 2019, the Internet Society (ISOC) announced its intention to sell Public Interest Registry (PIR) – the registry for the .org top-level domain – to investment firm Ethos Capital for US$1.135 billion. The announcement has generated considerable controversy.

Setting the scene

In 2002, ICANN issued a request for proposals for the reassignment of .org to a new registry. The selection criteria stipulated that the registry be managed in a way responsive to the needs, concerns, and views of the community using it for non-commercial purposes. It was the association of .org with nonprofit interests that attracted many civil society entities to register .org domain names in the first place.

ISOC won the 2002 bid, through its nonprofit subsidiary PIR, in significant part because of its commitment to non-commercial interests. As a nonprofit, PIR has allocated any surplus revenues from the operation of .org to ISOC.

According to the .org registry agreement, ICANN has to approve any transaction that would result in a reassignment of the registry, and on 14 November 2019 PIR submitted formal notification to ICANN of the proposed .org sale.

Details of the deal

The .org sale was initially surrounded by secrecy, but over time some key details became public, for instance via a redacted version of the information provided by ISOC, PIR, and Ethos to ICANN and via answers they gave to questions from members of the US Congress:

- PIR is to become a for-profit entity, but Ethos has committed to 'anchoring PIR in a Public Benefit LLC structure prior to completing the transaction'.
- The buyer of .org is an acquisition company called Purpose Domains Direct (created in October 2019), which in turn is owned by Purpose Domains Holdings (created at the same time); both are controlled by Ethos. Among the five directors only Jon Nevett, current CEO of PIR, has been named.
- ISOC has created a charity, the Connected Giving Foundation, which will take ownership of PIR immediately before the sale and then manage the funds generated by the transaction.
- Ethos will finance the deal in part through a loan which PIR will subsequently have to pay back.
- Ethos proposes to establish a Stewardship Council for PIR, 'an independent and transparent body' to provide policy guidance to PIR and oversee a new Community Enablement Fund to support initiatives serving .org users.

Main arguments

One main concern (raised by six members of the US Congress, for example) is that a commercially-driven PIR would be less motivated to act in the public interest and may for instance introduce unreasonable rises in .org domain prices. But ISOC and its supporters argue that a for-profit PIR would be better able to reinvest in itself and stay up-to-date with the changing marketplace. Regarding .org prices, Ethos has stated that it will 'limit any potential increase [...] to no more than 10% per year on average'.

In response to criticisms that it was surrendering its core funding source, ISOC claimed the sale as a win: Instead of relying on yearly contributions from PIR and being exposed to potential fluctuations in the domain name market, the organisation would have long-term financial stability.

But the fundamental issues that have been of most concern to the global community are the lack of a guarantee that under new ownership the registry will continue to abide by ICANN's 2002 stipulation that special consideration be given to the needs of non-commercial registrants, and the lack of transparency and inclusiveness during discussions of the sale. Since transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability are principles integral to the multistakeholder model of ICANN and ISOC, critics warn that the failure to adhere to them during the .org sale may seriously erode the organisations' credibility.

How the story will unfold remains to be seen. Following requests from the California Attorney General, who is investigating the proposed sale, ICANN has sought an extension until 20 April 2020 to review the .org reassignment submission. We are also likely to hear more from initiatives such as the Save .ORG campaign and the Cooperative Corporation for .ORG Registrants (CCOR) project, with the latter having requested that ICANN pass the .org registry to them instead of approving the sale to Ethos.

Follow the unfolding .org story on the dedicated Digital Watch trends page.

20 keywords for the digital 2020s

Clarity: this is where digital policy in the 2020s must begin. Since clarity of policy is impossible without clarity of thought and language, we have compiled a dictionary of keywords for the digital 2020s, focusing not on technology itself but on tech's broader ramifications and effects.

Interdependence will be the defining feature of the digital 2020s, as a result of the complex interplay between tech companies, governments, and users, and the way in which this interplay shapes digital governance.

Sovereignty refers to the authority exercised primarily by governments (via court orders, legislation, etc.) over tech infrastructure, digital platforms, and data. In the 2020s countries will seek the optimal balance between digital sovereignty and the free flow of data across national borders.

Governance comprises the policies, laws, and processes that steer digital development. A key challenge in the coming years will be to provide citizens, companies, and countries with mechanisms to protect their rights and interests in the digital realm.

Diplomacy will be crucial in managing digital interdependence. In addition to governments, digital diplomacy will involve businesses, academia, and civil society. Engagement, compromise, and the ability to make trade-offs will be indispensable in negotiating the digital future in the 2020s and beyond.

Geopolitics in the digital realm is currently dominated by the USA and China, but the EU and other countries are pushing towards a more balanced and multilateral digital order.

Security debates on cyber issues centre around the applicability of international law in cyberspace, the accountability of states and businesses, and the question of potential international regulations (with possibilities ranging from soft laws to an international cyber treaty).

Standards are essential in directing digital developments, and have significant political, social, and economic implications. They are coming to be the main instrument for ensuring the ethical and human-centred development of AI and other emerging technologies.

Data is increasingly recognised as an important asset. Careful governance solutions are required to allow cross-border data flows and to manage data's cross-cutting impacts on the economy, human rights, and security.

Human impact is increasingly the 'measure of all things' in thinking about digital developments. The key priority is to ensure that the interests and core values of humanity are promoted by innovation and protected by law.

Ethics will direct the search for optimal AI governance solutions ranging from self-regulation by businesses to national laws and international treaties.

Identity: digital IDs are a powerful tool for economic and social inclusion, and discussions are expanding beyond questions of technical functionality to consider human rights, security, and consumer protection issues as well.

Trust is a core thread in any social fabric, whether offline or online. In the 2020s, to nurture trust we will need to begin with an understanding of why, how, whom, and what we trust online.

Content is on its way to becoming the primary focus of digital policymaking, with key areas of concern including online hate speech, violent extremism, and misinformation.

Sustainability, whether environmental, social, or economic, cannot be achieved without the effective deployment of digital technology. The question of how to achieve smart and effective interplay between sustainability and digitalisation will shape policy debates in the 2020s.

Inclusion is a pillar of sustainability, and priorities here range from ensuring universal access to digital networks, education and finance to encouraging participation in digital governance processes.

Commons: some view the Internet and certain digital artefacts (core protocols, critical infrastructures, some types of data, etc.) as public resources. In the 2020s, a priority will be to take practical legal, economic, and technical steps to identify and preserve digital commons.

Inequalities have been exacerbated by digital technology, and AI is likely to widen wealth and opportunity gaps even further along national, generational, and gender lines. An essential task in the 2020s will be to ensure that digital tech becomes a solution to the problem of inequality rather than a contributor to it.

Taxation will be an increasingly prominent issue as countries try to increase the revenues collected from the digital economy and tech giants in particular. In the 2020s the focus will be on finding international solutions in digital taxation.

Currencies will be a central issue in digital debates as new digital currency initiatives emerge, both private (e.g. Facebook's Libra) and public (e.g. central bank digital currencies). In the 2020s, policy solutions in the digital currency sphere need to facilitate financial innovation and inclusion while guarding against monetary instability and the misuse of new currencies.

Platform providers will face intense scrutiny in the 2020s on multiple policy issues, from privacy to consumer protection and market competition.

Explore the 20 keywords further in '20 Keywords for the Digital 2020s: A Digital Policy Prediction Dictionary' by Prof. Jovan Kurbalija. Then turn to page 12 to test your knowledge with our crossword.

Uber: status is everything?

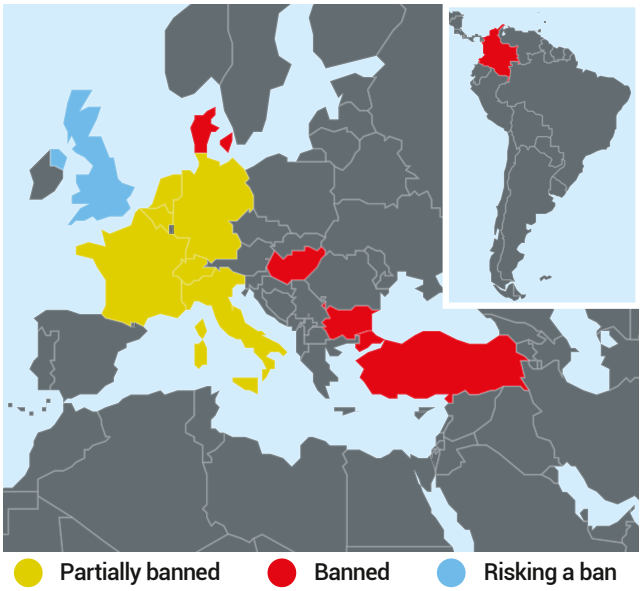
What started as a simple idea in 2009 – *Wouldn't it be great to be able to order a prompt, cheap ride with one click on your phone?* – a decade later has led to unprecedented challenges and questions in a range of spheres. Can an IT company provide transportation services? Which legislative frameworks apply in this area? What is the status of such a company and its drivers?

These are just some of the questions that have surrounded the operations of Uber and similar ride-hailing companies over the past decade. While customers enjoy being only a few clicks away from their final destination, behind the scenes there is a profusion of regulatory issues on which authorities and courts around the world have taken different positions.

Hitting the breaks on Uber

Uber and similar services are subject to either partial or complete bans in countries including Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, and Turkey. Reasons for these prohibitions are various, ranging from alleged unfair competition to a lack of safety measures and problems with illicit dispatcher services.

In Germany, for instance, although Uber still operates in large cities such as Berlin, Munich, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt am Main, and Hamburg, a court in Cologne ruled recently that the app breaches a German law stipulating that taxis and similar services should be administered via a central dispatch office.



The status of Uber worldwide

In Turkey, a court ruled against Uber in a lawsuit filed by the Istanbul taxi drivers' association (arguing that the app represented unfair competition to taxi drivers) and instituted a national ban. The same reason has been cited for partial bans of Uber in Italy and the Netherlands.

Argentina is a particularly complex example. Although Uber is in legal limbo in the country, it continues to operate and says that Argentina is its fastest-growing market. Uber drivers there are faced not only with steep fines of up to US$5 000 but the danger of violent attacks from the so-called 'Caza Ubers' ('Uber hunters').

Other countries have introduced new regulations for 'alternative transport services'. In Romania, for example, an emergency ordinance adopted in 2019 established the conditions under which providers must operate there. These include a requirement that digital ride-hailing platforms obtain a technical authorisation and pay an annual tax of around EUR10 000, and that all drivers providing ride-hailing services are licensed as providers of transportation services.

Employee or contractor?

The employment-law status of Uber and its drivers has been a particular issue for the company, legislators, and drivers alike, exacerbated by the gig economy's rapid pace of development. The problems hinge on whether drivers are considered to be contractors, dependent contractors, or employees.

Uber contends that its drivers are contractors, and it is an argument that has achieved some support. In Belgium, for instance, government analysis concluded that drivers are 'self-employed and not working for Uber', and in Brazil the Superior Court ruled that they are 'independent from the ride-hailing firm'. Similarly, in Australia the Fair Work Ombudsman ruled that Uber drivers are independent contractors rather than employees, and confirmed that they are not entitled to the minimum wage, annual leave, or sick leave.

Other countries, including Germany and Canada, have adopted the intermediate classification 'dependent contractor' (i.e. a freelancer who primarily works for one business and therefore enjoys some of the rights afforded to employees) and ruled that it applies to Uber drivers.

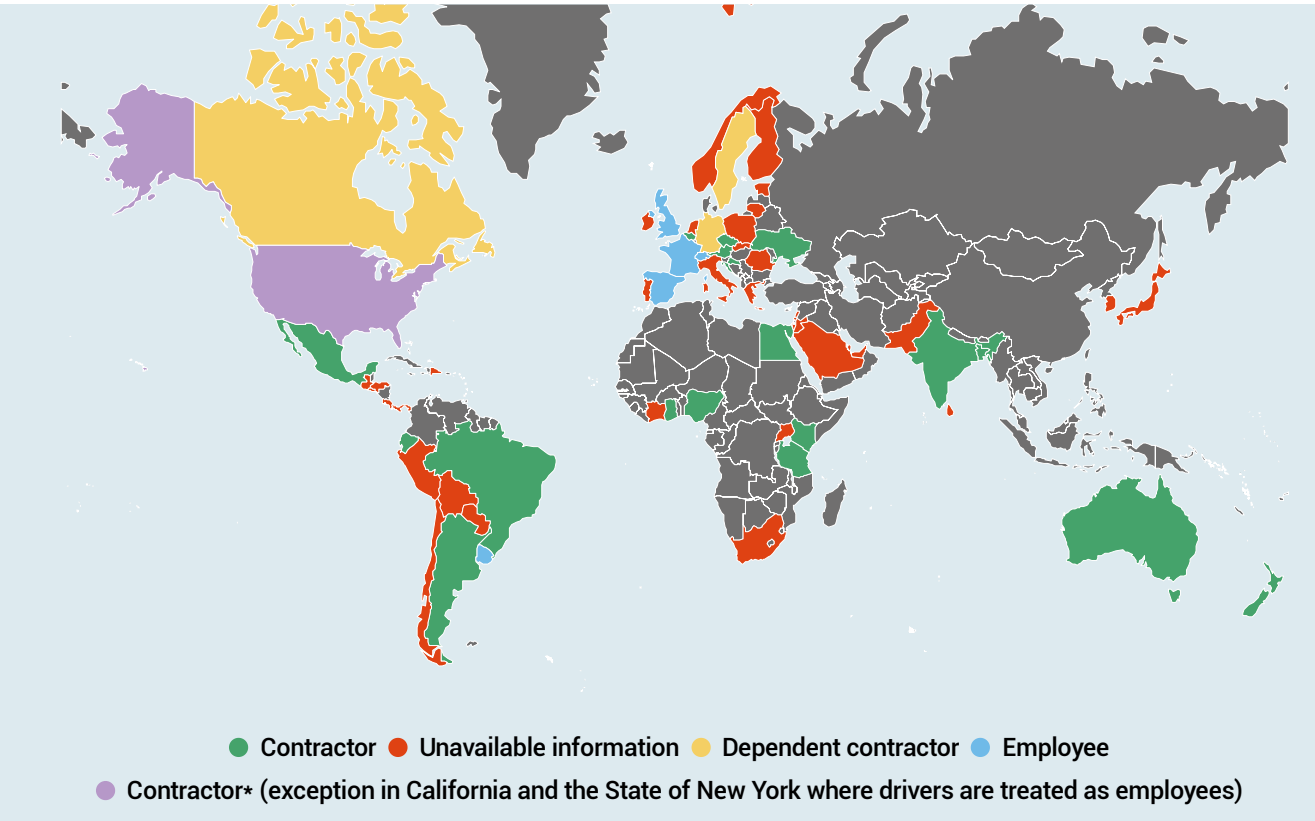
But courts elsewhere have ruled that Uber drivers are in fact employees. In Switzerland, this could ultimately result in the entitlement of all ride-hailing drivers to social security protection and notice in advance of termination, which Uber does not currently provide. In the UK, the Court of Appeal validated the ruling of the Employment Appeals Tribunal that Uber drivers are employees and thus entitled to holiday pay and the minimum wage, and a similar decision was made in Uruguay. Legal action is also ongoing in other countries including Nigeria, where drivers brought a case before the National Industrial Court in Lagos arguing that 'they are not meant to be classified as independent contractors'.

The status of Uber drivers in the USA is ambiguous. Whereas they are deemed contractors under the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act, legislation in California and a decision by the New York Labor Review Board designates them employees.

Ride-hailing drivers have resorted to strike action in a number of jurisdictions to demand more favourable working conditions. Their demands have included job security, higher pay, and a cap on the amount that platforms are allowed to take from fares.

Uber in the headlines

Uber is rarely out of the headlines for long. Taxi drivers in cities such as Athens, Madrid, and Warsaw have taken to the streets to protest the company's competition and tax practices. Some fatal accidents and even a murder case have brought unwelcome attention as well. Uber is also at the centre of debates over autonomous vehicles, with driverless cars expected on the streets of Washington DC soon and perceived to be 'the real key to Uber owning the future of mobility'.



The status of Uber drivers

Policy discussions in Geneva

Each month Geneva hosts a diverse range of policy discussions in various forums. The following updates cover the main events in January. For event reports, visit the *Past Events section on the GIP Digital Watch observatory*.

IGF 2020 First Open Consultations and MAG Meeting | 14–16 January 2020

Discussions during the first round of open consultations and MAG meeting of the IGF 2020 cycle focused on issues related to the structure and programme of the 15th IGF meeting (to be held on 2–6 November 2020 in Katowice, Poland). Three thematic tracks were proposed for IGF 2020: data, inclusion, and trust, with the additional themes of environmental sustainability/ climate change and the digital economy also likely to be accommodated in the programme in one way or another. Other points on the agenda included the timeline for the traditional call for workshop proposals, the continuation of the 2019 best practice forums, and the further integration of national and regional IGF initiatives in the IGF 2020 programme.

Geneva Blockchain Congress | 20 January 2020

The second Geneva Blockchain Congress was titled 'From laboratory to market via ethics, regulation and governance'. It brought together international standard-setting bodies, governmental representatives, and private companies for a full day of discussions on issues such as blockchain applications in e-identity and e-voting, and the use of ledger technology in the fight against illicit trade and counterfeiting activities. Of particular interest were issues related to the governance of blockchain and the emerging trends related to stablecoins and CBDCs.

How to Govern Digital Interdependence - Geneva Day at the World Economic Forum 2020 in Davos 21 January 2020

Hosted by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Geneva Day featured a series of high-level events dedicated to connecting leaders in attendance at the WEF in Davos with Geneva-based global governance institutions. The panel 'How to Govern Digital Interdependence' addressed the interplay among governments, businesses, and the various professions in the digital realm. The session also saw discussion of the Digital Trust Label and the formal launch of the Swiss Digital Initiative Foundation.

5th Geneva Engage Awards | 29 January 2020

The annual Geneva Engage Awards recognise excellence in social media and online engagement activities in the International Geneva community. This year's winners were: the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (International Organisations category), The New Humanitarian (Non-governmental Organisations and Associations), and the Permanent Mission of Norway (Permanent Representations to the UN in Geneva). Also recognised was the IGF's innovative and effective use of digital technologies in conducting meetings.

Geneva Seminar: Joint Statement Initiative on Electronic Commerce | 29 January 2020

Organised by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and CUTS International, the seminar explored the history of and recent developments in the exploratory talks and subsequent negotiations among a group of 71 World Trade Organization (WTO) member states on electronic commerce (following two joint statements issued in December 2017 and January 2019). The event offered Geneva-based delegates from developing and least-developed nations an opportunity to discuss the implications of these talks and negotiations for their countries.

The main global digital policy events in February

Here we take a look ahead at the digital policy calendar to highlight the main discussions taking place in the next few weeks across the globe. For more detail and for the proceedings of some events – including reports from individual sessions and a final report summarising the discussions – please check in regularly to the *Digital Watch* observatory.

February

6–7 FEBRUARY
Freedom Online Conference (Accra, Ghana)

This year's Freedom Online Conference will be entitled 'Achieving a Common Vision for Internet Freedom'. Hosted and chaired by Ghana, the conference will focus on reviewing the current state of digital rights across Africa. The programme includes sessions on digital inclusion, securing the integrity of electoral processes, the role of human rights in the governance of AI, content policy, the interplay between cybersecurity and human rights, and data protection, among others.

10–14 FEBRUARY
Second substantive session of the UN OEWG (New York, USA)

The second substantive session of the UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on developments in the field of ICTs in the context of international security will be held on 10–14 February 2020. The OEWG's remit is to continue developing the rules, norms, and principles of responsible behaviour for states in cyberspace, to discuss ways of implementing them, and to explore the possibility of establishing regular open-ended institutional dialogue under the auspices of the UN. *Session reports from the event will be available on the Digital Watch observatory.*

11–12 FEBRUARY
11th Smart Cities Summit World Forum (Dubai, UAE)

The conference aims to give guidance to decision-makers on developing good practice frameworks for smart cities. The two-day programme will cover 19 topics, including Smart City Vertical Applications, blockchain, AI, and cybersecurity.

14–16 FEBRUARY
Munich Security Conference (Munich, Germany)

The 56th Munich Security Conference will as in previous years cover a wide range of security-related topics, including transatlantic and European issues as well as emerging challenges for the international community as a whole.

24 FEBRUARY – 20 MARCH
Human Rights Council – 43rd Regular Session (Geneva, Switzerland)

During its 43rd session the UN Human Rights Council will discuss issues related to the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. The right to freedom of expression, minority rights, violence against women, the right to education, and the right to freedom of assembly and association will feature on the agenda. The Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy will present his report, and there will also be discussions of the interplay between human rights and sustainable development.

25–26 FEBRUARY
UNLOCK Blockchain 2020 Forum (Abu Dhabi, UAE)

The UNLOCK Blockchain 2020 Forum will focus on digital currency success stories from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), as well as the tokenization movement and the rise of crypto exchanges. The event will also feature the first UNLOCK challenge, which will give startups the chance to present their solutions to investors and potential clients in the MENA region. The top three startups will also receive monetary prizes, ranging from US$5 000 to US$15 000.

March

Test your knowledge of key digital policy terms

On page 7 you will have seen a summarised version of our new dictionary of key terms for the digital 2020s. We now invite you to test your knowledge of these and other terms frequently used in digital policy with our crossword. (Bonus for our most diligent readers: Some clues can also be found in our 2019 review of top digital policy developments ...) Good luck!

Across

1 The growing patchwork of rules and regulations developed by individual states to deal with issues such as data governance could lead to a _____ of digital space. (13)

4 The application of existing human rights frameworks to the development and use of digital technologies is essential if we are to ensure that the technological future is ____-centric. (5)

5 Discussions are ongoing at the UN of how international ___ applies in cyberspace. (3)

7 Central _____ around the world are increasingly exploring the possibility of issuing national digital currencies. (5)

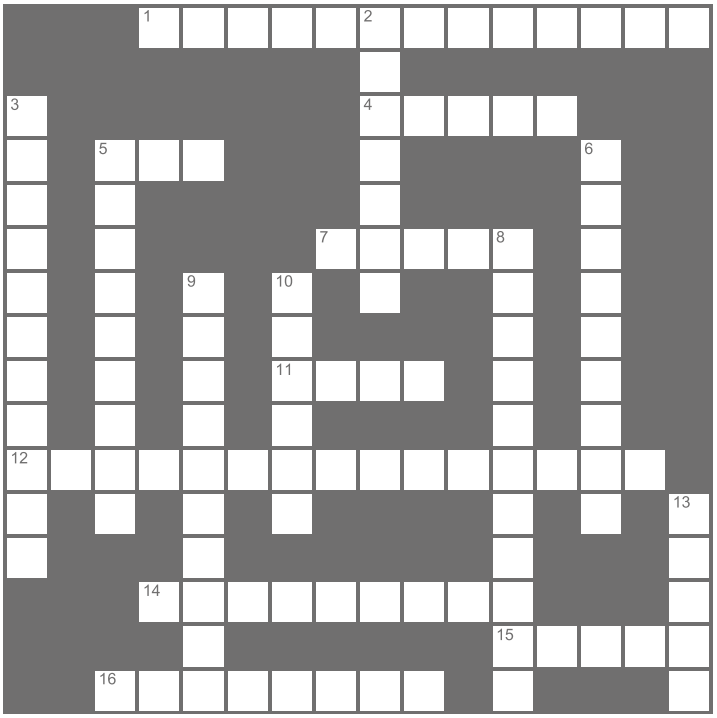
11 As metaphors such as the 'new oil' or 'lifeblood' of the 21st century suggest, countries are increasingly seeing ____ as a national asset. (4)

12 Titled 'The age of digital _____', the report of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation called for improved digital cooperation at the international level. (15)

14 Fostering digital _____ is a must if we are to fully exploit the potential of digital technologies to facilitate sustainable development. (9)

15 Austria, France, and Indonesia are among the countries that have introduced digital _____ targeted specifically at global tech giants. (5)

16 Digital _____ programmes are appearing around the world as part of governmental efforts to foster economic and social inclusion, but they also come with privacy and security risks for individuals. (8)



Down

2 _____ principles are likely to vary from culture to culture, which limits their usefulness in guiding behaviour in the digital realm, whether of businesses, policy leaders, or citizens. (7)

3 The market power of large Internet platforms has attracted intense scrutiny from _____ authorities worldwide. (11)

5 Countries are introducing intermediary _____ legislation to make Internet companies more accountable for harmful content on their platforms. (9)

6 Microsoft's decision to open an office in New York to help increase its engagement with the UN is only one sign among many of a growing appetite on the part of tech companies to enter the realm of _____. (9)

8 Laws, regulations, court orders, and technical measures such as Internet shutdowns are some of the tools used by states in the exercise of their digital _____. (11)

9 'Digital _____' refers to the policies, norms, laws, and processes that steer digital development with the aim of, among other things, protecting the rights, assets, and interests of citizens, companies, and governments. (10)

10 As digital standards become increasingly important, questions are arising regarding the legitimacy of standardisation _____ and the extent to which their processes reflect the full diversity of economic and political interests. (6)

13 Questions of _____ in the digital space revolve around issues such as the reliability of digital tools and confidence in tech companies and public institutions. (5)

Across: **1** Fragmentation, **4** Human, **5** Law, **7** Banks, **11** Data, **12** Interdependence, **14** Inclusion, **15** Taxes, **16** Identity.
Down: **2** Ethical, **3** Competition, **5** Liability, **6** Diplomacy, **8** Sovereignty, **9** Governance, **10** Bodies, **13** Trust.

About this issue
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A challenge for the 2020s: the interplay between natural and digital ecosystems. Credit: Vladimir Veljasević

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Geneva Internet Platform DigitalWatch

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