

# auDA comments on “The Internet We Want” paper

1 March 2024

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Leadership Panel launched its paper *The Internet We Want*<sup>1</sup> (IWW) setting out a high-level vision for the future of the internet at the IGF in October 2023. It called for comments from the community by 1 March 2024.

The paper charts a reasonable course for the internet’s development, calling for one that is:

- *Whole and open*
- *Universal and inclusive*
- *Free-flowing and trustworthy*
- *Safe and secure*
- *Rights-respecting.*

Like auDA’s *Internet Governance Roadmap*<sup>2</sup>, IWW calls for goals to be set out in each of the five areas listed above – goals to orient the work of the internet community through the collaboration at events including the IGF. However, it does not itself propose such goals or set out what they might look like.

auDA offered brief comments below in response to the call for input, because the overall direction of the paper is acceptable and it is a chance to reiterate key themes we are speaking out about in other forums.

## 1. Whole and open

auDA supports the direction proposed by the Leadership Panel in this section. To avoid fragmentation of the internet, with all the negative consequences for users and innovation this would entail, requires a coherent governance structure, and governance fragmentation should not be allowed to occur.

Where stakeholders, including governments, see the need for new strands of coordination or cooperation, the first approach should be to ground these in existing mechanisms – primarily the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). This could

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<sup>1</sup> Online at: <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/the-internet-we-want>

<sup>2</sup> Online at <https://auda.org.au/IGroadmap>

include instigating new working methods within those mechanisms that can deliver on new needs, issues and concerns. Such an integrating approach supports coherence and ensures the diverse technologies and policy issues that have the internet at their core, or rely on the internet, will remain able to shape its evolution and be developed in ways more fully aware of the internet's realities.

If new areas of policy require different assemblies of stakeholders, we suggest applying the internet's multi-stakeholder approach, given its proven track record in the successful stewardship of the evolving and resilient internet. It is the genuine inclusion of stakeholders and consensus decision-making that has led to the internet's success. This successful approach can and should be applied more broadly.

In both current and new areas of internet governance, bolstering the participation of people from all around the world is vital. More participation from under-represented regions and communities is vital to ensure the system is shaped by everyone's needs and concerns.

As an overarching comment, we encourage the Leadership Panel to itself propose some specific goals for discussion in each area, to inform and challenge stakeholders. It is important that this discussion on internet governance focus on outcomes for users, not only organisational options.

auDA supports clear goals to guide the internet's development, having argued for them in its August 2023 *Internet Governance Roadmap* (online at <https://auda.org.au/IGroadmap>). The Leadership Panel's expertise and diversity, alongside its small scale, gives it a good opportunity to develop and propose some specific goals for community input. It should consider doing so as it assesses all the feedback received on this paper, and propose goals in time for community dialogue at the 2024 IGF.

## 2. Universal and inclusive

auDA supports the direction proposed by the Leadership Panel in this section. In our view, the primary goals should be:

- To ensure affordable connectivity to the internet is accessible to all people everywhere, through the diverse and increasingly resilient physical connectivity models now available.
- To ensure that all people everywhere have access to the training and support that would allow them to realise the internet's promise, and to be

equipped to deal with the risks that can come with internet access.

- To encourage widespread adoption of universal access principles so that all online services and systems accept input in all scripts, making the online world more fully multilingual.

The first goal is in sight, and would require stakeholders (particularly governments, given their role) to support infrastructure rollout and to engage in targeted support for disadvantaged people and communities.

The second goal is underway but is a multi-generational effort. All stakeholders could engage in supporting training and other initiatives that help people learn about the opportunities the internet offers and how to use it securely and confidently.

The third goal requires action by all stakeholders offering online services and should simply be factored in as an essential component of all system renewal efforts. It could be helpful for the Leadership Panel to propose a date after which all stakeholders publicly commit that any service or product launched will be characterised by universal accessibility.

### 3. Free-flowing and trustworthy

auDA supports the Leadership Panel's direction. The internet is a global network of networks. It was not designed to follow national boundaries and there is no public interest in shaping it, or the services that operate using the internet, in such a fashion.

Concerns around security and privacy of data are important, and should be dealt with through multi-stakeholder processes that would see rising standards, and thus rising trust and confidence in every corner of the internet and for all those offering services online.

Likewise, governments in particular could collaborate under IGF auspices to drive shared ideas and establish norms for consumer protection approaches. Doing so could drive compatible or somewhat harmonised regulatory and policy approaches. This is important to help make sure that national concerns and priorities can be achieved in a way that does not compromise a broadly free-flowing and trustworthy internet environment.

The alternative approach of increasingly national silos with specific regulation, lack of cross-border data flows and decreasing trust, would be a poor alternative

option. It would lead to fewer opportunities for people in any given place, and overall higher costs and less efficiency. That is a high price to pay, and it is a price we can choose not to pay if we work collectively to mitigate current privacy and security risks and concerns.

#### 4. Safe and secure

auDA broadly supports the Leadership Panel's direction. We propose adding two areas of focus:

- Embedding Secure-by-Design principles into the creation of all internet-connected devices, such that they are less likely to become security risks over time
- Generating momentum – particularly in the small business and small organisation sectors – towards more effective maintenance and management of software and services, so that for example, patching and updating key systems happens more often.

Both would be best achieved by effective and well-resourced multi-stakeholder forums that bring all the relevant expertise and perspectives together so that all stakeholders are informed and can share commitments to act. Trying this approach is justified given the failure of the current global approach to deliver the levels of security that are needed.

Secure-by-Design: <https://www.cyber.gov.au/resources-business-and-government/governance-and-user-education/secure-by-design#>

#### 5. Rights-respecting

auDA supports the Leadership Panel's contention that human rights apply offline and online. The human rights framework is substantially intergovernmental in character, given the nature of such frameworks are grounded in law and protected by the state (noting also the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights).

In many areas of life, it is the technology industry and the Standards Development Organisations (SDOs) that underpin the design and deployment of new and emerging technology. It is essential that, in pursuing innovation, human rights centered designs are the norm and appropriate human rights guardrails are included. Where they are not, new and emerging technologies can pose an increased risk to human rights.

It may be that internet governance and human rights stakeholders should be convened (under the auspices of the IGF) to consider the issue of how the internet governance system – not just SDOs but, the IGF processes, WSIS, and indeed all parts of the community – can better integrate human rights-supporting approaches in their work, and come to a common understanding of how the human rights framework can best be included and fully implemented online.

Given the rapid pace of change in technology, including those that rely on the internet, this may need to be an ongoing dialogue over time.