



UNGA74

High-level event on

“Digital citizenship -

Crucial steps towards a universal and sustainable society”

September 30th, 3:00-4:30 pm, Conference Room 6

Digital transformation is bringing about major changes and improvements in every aspect of public, private and work life, facilitating the exchange of information and simplifying administrative procedures and access to services in areas such as education, health, social welfare. There is a growing consensus within the International Community on the need to ensure universal access to the Internet, as a key tool to foster economic and social progress, as well as sustainable development, and to promote the full enjoyment of human rights, including those related to political and democratic participation. With the July 2018 Resolution on “The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet”, the Human Rights Council “called upon all States to bridge the digital divides, including the gender digital divide, and to enhance the use of information and communications technology, in order to promote the full enjoyment of human rights for all”.

While promoting universal access to the Internet without discrimination, the International Community has to ensure that the same rights that are universally recognized to people as such are protected also on the Internet. Increasing concerns have been raised inter alia by online harassment and hate speech, in particular towards women, children and the most vulnerable people, including people with disabilities; by the growing use of information and communication technologies by terrorist groups by the necessity to protect personal data; by the dissemination of fake news. Special attention must be devoted to the protection of particularly vulnerable individuals, who are more exposed to harassment online.

A key element of "digital citizenship" is a human-centric vision of personal data where people should not be seen merely as customers or users of pre-defined services and applications. Rather, they should be considered free agents capable of setting and

pursuing their own goals, and having agency and initiative. Individuals should be empowered to not only know and control their personal data, but to use such data to their own ends; to share them securely under their own terms; and to claim their share of their benefits. They should be empowered to give, deny or revoke their consent to share data based on a clear understanding of why, how and for how long their data will be used. In addition, organizations that use a person's data should take responsibility for intended, as well as unintended, consequences of holding and using personal data, including, but not limited to, security incidents, and allow individuals to call them out on this responsibility.

Digital citizenship, understood as a set of rights and duties of citizens in the “digital environment”, is the instrument that empowers people to reap - in a safe and effective way - the benefits brought by the development and dissemination of digital technology and by the improvement of Internet connectivity. Digital inclusion and literacy are preconditions for the full enjoyment of such benefits.

More specifically digital citizenship, when declined as the right to have free access to the internet, the right to have digital identity and to be properly formed and informed about the set of rights and duties of citizens in the “digital environment”, becomes a fundamental tool of global growth and common prosperity.

The digitalization of finance and money is a case in point. Financial inclusion is understood as a pre-requisite for a more inclusive development. Digitalization creates new options for accelerating financial inclusion. Furthermore, digitalization can improve the tracking of financial flows and so be used to reduce illicit financial flows, and increase the tax base. More broadly, more, cheaper and faster data enables policy, impact and risk related aspects of sustainable development to be factored into financing decisions. At the same time, the digitalization of financing can create new risks, reinforcing patterns of exclusion and discrimination, undermining the rights to privacy, and providing new pathways for illicit financial flows.

The UN Secretary General’s Task Force on Digital Financing of the SDGs, co-Chaired and led by UNDP with support from UNCDF, is mandated to explore how best to harness the positive and mitigate the negative aspects of digitalization in accelerating financing of the SDGs. Now almost half way through its work, the co-Chairs have released a Progress Report on the occasion of the UN General Assembly, which illuminates many of the broader issues at the nexus of rights, digitalization and sustainable development.

On this background, and in line with other initiatives focused on challenges and opportunities of the digital revolution¹, the event on digital citizenship aims at contributing to the advancement of the international debate on this issue, by focusing on the role of the Internet as a tool of active participation of citizens in the social, cultural, and political life of their countries.

The event has been conceived thanks to the strong attention paid by public and private actors, with the aim to foster the crucial effort in promoting a cultural discussion on such a topic. In this light, the will to consolidate public and private cooperation toward challenges and opportunities of the digital revolution can be a key moment for the entire International Community.

¹ E.g. the Conference “Governing the game changer”, hosted last January in Helsinki by the then Finnish Presidency of the Council of Europe, on impacts of the artificial intelligence development on human rights, democracy and the rule of law; and the UNGA73 high-level side-event on “Internet connectivity for all: universal access for sustainable development”.