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Reflection on the 2025 European Dialogue on Internet Governance

Francesco Vecchi and Nadia Tjahja

Introduction

The European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG) is the European regional event of the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) that is held every year at a different location in Europe. At EuroDIG, European stakeholders are invited to jointly shape the agenda for discussion and exchange ideas on emerging issues and challenges concerning the future of the Internet. This year, EuroDIG took place from 12 to 14 May in Strasbourg, France, hosted by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Luxembourg Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with the overarching theme "Safeguarding human rights by balancing regulation and innovation". It brought together 900 people from 103 countries, of which a third joined remotely, to discuss an ambitious community-driven agenda.

In this Insight Brief, we will highlight prominent topics that were discussed during EuroDIG..

The Road to WSIS+20

The UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation submitted its report "The Age of Digital Interdependence" on Monday 10 June 2019. Since then, EuroDIG has organised events, discussions and consultations to contribute and provide recommendations to Digital

Highlights

EuroDIG 2025 underscored growing opportunities to shape Internet governance, inviting broader, ongoing participation ahead of WSIS+20 and the IGF in Norway.

WSIS+20 sessions highlighted the role of IGFs in aligning regional voices and localising digital cooperation goals through multistakeholder engagement.

AI was a major cross-cutting theme, with discussions on ethics, discrimination, education, and responsible deployment.

YOUthDIG 2025 advanced bold proposals, from AI literacy and privacy safeguards to digital wellbeing and youth inclusion.

Quantum computing sparked early governance debates, focusing on cryptographic threats and the need for international coordination.

Age verification raised complex trade-offs, calling for proportionate, rights-based systems that protect without excluding.

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Cooperation reports and processes leading up to WSIS+20 review, such as discussing findings of reports, organising surveys focused on IGF architectures, and multistakeholder consultations on the Global Digital Compact (GDC).

Their support allows for localising global principles and fostering inclusive dialogue that will drive capacity building and address regional digital divides

The WSIS+20 review will reflect on the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which was agreed in Tunis in 2005. Specifically, the WSIS action lines, which are the foundational principles that were outlined at the WSIS to guide the development of knowledge societies, and the institutions that the WSIS created, such as the IGF. The process will conclude with a high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on 16-17 December, where there will be a reflection on the progress of implementation of the original WSIS outcomes. It is expected that the outcomes of this event will set the course of global Internet governance and digital cooperation for the next decade.

This year there were three sessions held at EuroDIG which looked at Digital Cooperation:

- Main Topic 1: Why the WSIS+20 Review Matters and How National and Regional IGFs Can Enhance Stakeholder Participation
- Workshop 4: How can the national and regional IGFs contribute to the implementation of the UN Global Digital Compact?
- Workshop 11: São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines - The Way Forward in Multistakeholder and Multilateral Digital Processes

These sessions served as a platform for European stakeholders to align their perspectives on the WSIS objectives and deliver a unified message to the United Nations. The discussions explored practical ways for non-governmental actors to effectively engage in implementing WSIS commitments, examine how the WSIS objectives align with the GDC and how they should be implemented, how National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs) can contribute to both initiatives at their levels, and the importance of the São Paulo Multistakeholder Principles as a framework for meaningful digital policy-making.

Across the three sessions, the role of the National and Regional IGF Initiatives (NRIs) in fostering multistakeholder engagement in global governance was highlighted. NRIs facilitate local discussion on Internet governance; connect regional concerns with the global IGFs agenda and promote open, transparent and inclusive multistakeholder dialogue on Internet governance. The sessions emphasised the crucial role of NRIs bringing in diverse perspectives to the global dialogue as they understand local digital landscapes, cultural contexts and regulatory environments. Their support allows for localising global principles and fostering inclusive dialogue that will drive capacity building and address regional digital divides.

Discussing AI: A Multifaceted Dialogue

Revived by the momentum of the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in Paris, interest in AI was at the forefront of the EuroDIG 2025 agenda, where it emerged as a cross-cutting theme. The topic was explored through diverse lenses - from education and human rights to corporate use and cybersecurity - which testifies that the conference is able to bring together a wide array of stakeholders.

Spanning from youth-led educational empowerment to legal enforcement, these sessions delved deeper into the challenges and potentialities of Artificial Intelligence:

- IGF Youth Track: AI empowering education through dialogue to implementation - Follow-up to the AI Action Summit declaration from youth.
- Workshop 1: AI and non-discrimination in digital spaces: from prevention to redress.
- Workshop 6: Perception of AI Tools in Business Operations: Building Trustworthy and Rights-Respecting Technologies.
- Workshop 7: Generative AI and Freedom of Expression: mutual reinforcement or forced exclusion?
- Workshop 8: How AI impacts society and security: opportunities and vulnerabilities.
- Flash 6: AI, Robotics, and Health.

Dialogues highlighted how AI is reshaping education, with a strong emphasis on lifelong learning, critical thinking, and culturally contextualised curricula. Youth perspectives also helped frame AI as a tool for empowerment and inclusion, while several sessions focused on mitigating algorithmic

discrimination and ensuring AI systems uphold human rights through transparency, fairness, and accountability.

Concerns around generative AI (GenAI) were particularly prominent, especially regarding its potential to undermine freedom of expression and compromise journalism, while surveillance and cultural homogenisation risk being exacerbated. Besides, AI's dual nature - as both a tool for societal improvement and a vector for new digital threats - was a recurring theme, especially in security-related discussions.

Despite the plethora of topics and approaches, multistakeholder governance emerged as a central strategy for shaping ethical and inclusive AI frameworks, particularly in education, healthcare, and anti-discrimination. The importance of aligning AI deployment with existing legal protections (e.g., GDPR, UNCRC, DSA) was widely acknowledged, while responsible implementation was recommended through proposals such as algorithmic impact assessments and inclusive consultations.

Finally, digital inequality and the AI divide were flagged as critical risks, demanding investment in infrastructure, inclusive access, and digital literacy. For EuroDIG, ensuring that AI supports - not excludes - diverse communities is essential for building a just and rights-respecting digital future.

Youth participation in Internet Governance

As outlined in Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance: A Decade of Youth Participation, YOUthDIG has, since 2017, become a central platform for empowering young people across Europe to engage meaningfully in Internet governance. Run by former participants, the programme equips newcomers with the tools and knowledge to navigate digital policy spaces, culminating in youth-drafted messages presented at EuroDIG and the UN IGF. More than a preparatory event, YOUthDIG serves as a launchpad for long-term, inclusive leadership in shaping digital futures.

The YOUthDIG 2025 messages echoed several priorities of the EuroDIG consolidated programme - digital literacy, content governance, AI ethics, and privacy - yet stood out for their bold, action-driven proposals. They called for digital education in schools to build critical thinking and resilience against disinformation, and urged democratic, transparent approaches to content moderation, giving users control over their feeds. On AI, they pushed for systems that are ethical, practical, and accountable, supported by stronger AI literacy and pre-deployment risk assessments. Youth also demanded clear safeguards for data privacy, with firm accountability for both governments and tech companies - especially in the use of surveillance tools that threaten vulnerable groups.

Beyond these shared themes, YOUthDIG introduced fresh, forward-looking ideas to expand the Internet governance agenda. They called for youth inclusion beyond tokenism, prioritised mental health and digital wellbeing - including the right to disconnect - and advocated for a feminist, intersectional Internet. Environmental sustainability was positioned as a digital value, with calls to align infrastructure and usage patterns with climate goals. They also backed decentralised, public-interest platforms and proposed a European Innovation Hub - an interconnected network of sandboxes and shared resources, governed through inclusive, multistakeholder models. Finally, they urged smarter regulation: harmonised, innovation-friendly, and supported by legal and technical expertise.

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During the conference, younger participants could engage meaningfully with senior experts in Intergenerational Dialogues, sessions introduced in EuroDIG 2024 to foster cross-generational exchange on the future of Internet Governance. The first 2025 Dialogue, hosted a lively debate focused on YOUthDIG messages: youth brought lived experiences and a sharp focus on transparency and digital education, while senior voices praised their vision and stressed the need to preserve the Internet's open, interoperable character. Both sides agreed on the importance of inclusive, trust-based governance, and that no one should give the Internet for granted. Also, a final Dialogue closed the conference by calling for deeper youth integration - more visibility on main panels, broader access for underrepresented groups, and more interactive, goal-oriented exchanges to better fuel real dialogue and shared responsibility.

Quantum Computing

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the rise of quantum computing represents a potential leap in computational power with far-reaching implications. Although experts estimate that fully harnessing its capabilities will take another 5-10 years, discussions are already underway about its likely impact - particularly on encryption standards - and the need for international cooperation to manage the emerging risks.

This was the focus of WS3 - Quantum Computing: Global Challenges and Security Opportunities, which addressed growing concerns about quantum computers breaking existing cryptographic systems and the potential for their control to concentrate in the hands of a few states or corporations. YOUthDIG contributed to the conversation by inviting Stanimir Kondov, lead engineer at CESQ (Centre Européen des Sciences Quantiques - European Centre for Quantum Sciences), who provided a foundational overview of quantum physics and ongoing industrial and academic developments in the field. As complex as the topic is, the session underscored the urgency of proactive global dialogue - lest the world be caught unprepared, as it was with the sudden rise of generative AI in 2022.

Age verification

The discussion on age verification has repeatedly animated YOUthDIG and EuroDIG in the last few years, being oftentimes coupled with debates on child safety online. In 2025, the conference delved into the topic with the following sessions:

- YOUthDIG: What role should age-verification mechanisms play in a free and open Internet
- Pre 04 - Dynamic Coalition on data and trust: Stakeholders Speak - Perspectives on Age Verification
- Main Topic 5 - The Age Verification Dilemma: Balancing child protection and digital access rights

At YOUthDIG, participants reflected on age-verification in real life circumstances and whether this could also be applied online, and to what extent. Here participants applied cultural circumstances to determine the extent of opportunities and challenges.

The EuroDIG sessions explored how age assurance systems aim to protect children from online harm while simultaneously confronting the potential downsides related to privacy, exclusion, and overreach. Stakeholders, including youth, parents, civil society, and tech companies, debated how to navigate the ethical and technological tensions between child safety and digital rights.

debates highlighted the urgency of creating rights-based, transparent, and proportionate approaches to age assurance

Central to both conversations was the understanding that age verification is not a simple or universally effective solution, and that any implementation must consider diverse social and technical contexts. These include the need to balance child protection with privacy, freedom of expression, and digital inclusion, while preventing the overcollection of personal data and safeguarding human rights. Both sessions emphasized the importance of multistakeholder governance, context-aware solutions, and youth participation in policy design. They also called for systems that are age-aware rather than identity aware, to avoid reinforcing the digital divide or enabling surveillance. Overall, the debates highlighted the urgency of creating rights-based, transparent, and proportionate approaches to age assurance.

Opportunities to engage in Internet governance

As we move towards the conclusion of the WSIS+20 review process, there will be other opportunities to contribute to Internet governance discussions. In June, the IGF will be held in Norway under the theme "Building Digital Governance Together" focusing on four sub-themes: 1) [Building] Digital Trust and Resilience, 2) [Building] Sustainable and Responsible Innovation, 3) [Building] Universal Access and Digital Rights, and 4) [Building] Digital Cooperation. The IGF is a hybrid event and will accommodate participation on site as well as online. It is also still possible to participate in the WSIS+20 stakeholder consultations that will start early June and will be held in various locations and virtually until November.

EDITORIAL INFORMATION

About the Authors:
Francesco Vecchi is the coordinator of the EU Civic Artificial Intelligence campaign by Eumans, the Pan-European movement of popular initiative. Previously, he worked as a digital communication professional for international academic institutes, and as a BlueBook trainee in DG DIGIT.

Nadia Tjahja is the co-coordinator of the Digital Governance Cluster at UNU-CRIS, and a PhD Fellow at UNU-CRIS and the VUB, working on the project "The contribution of global and regional multistakeholder mechanisms in improving global governance (GREMLIN)".

Conflict of Interest statement:
Francesco Vecchi and Nadia Tjahja were former YOUthDIG participants and have been supporting the EuroDIG Secretariat since 2023 and 2019 respectively. In 2025, Tjahja was a member of the EuroDIG Secretariat and co-organiser the event, and Vecchi managed the remote moderation team. They were both members of the YOUthDIG Organising Team. The authors received travel, accommodation, meal grants and an honorarium for their participation at YOUthDIG and EuroDIG 2025.

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