



International Organizations Consultative Group (IOCG) Outcome Statement

Universal Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Safeguards

We, the individual members of the International Organizations Consultative Group, recognize that there are multiple models of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) that countries are adopting for their economic development. We underline that these implementations have to identify and mitigate risks by human oversight of technology and societal interventions in ways that advance sustainable development and the full enjoyment of human rights. We, unanimously affirm that Universal DPI Safeguards - the 18 principles, both foundational and operational, are necessary to be adopted as appropriate to the countries' developmental context to ensure safe, responsible, inclusive and equitable DPI implementations that benefit the society, accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promote and protect human rights.

We recommend that humanitarian agencies, multilateral development banks and organizations actively collaborate, cooperate and coordinate to play a crucial role in the ecosystem:

- Continue to advocate for the implementation of safeguards across all DPI implementations.
- Continue to actively promote the adoption of the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework by enhancing capacity strengthening initiatives, advocacy building and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure effective implementation.
- Continue to support the evolution and further development of the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework through knowledge sharing and learning, including country case studies, and the curation of practices/processes that help bridge the digital divide within and between countries.

**Note on the Outcome Statement: This declaration is by IOCG members as a group and does not constitute the institutional endorsement of the organizations where the IOCG members work. This declaration is considered a starting point to build the coalition of international organizations to advocate for and support adoption of Universal DPI Safeguards Framework in country implementations across development and humanitarian systems.*

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTATIVE GROUP (IOCG)

The IOCG is part of the Universal DPI Safeguards Initiative, providing input and feedback during the conceptualization and design of the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework in 2024. It is composed of nominated representatives (listed below) from humanitarian agencies and multilateral development banks and organizations with the objective to promote the adoption of safeguards within international organizations. These organizations are involved in implementing and shaping digital public infrastructure globally, regionally and locally, at a country or a sub-national level by providing technical assistance, capacity building, and/or funding.

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ANNEX: SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS IN IOCG IN 2024

1. Urgent Need for Safeguards

This first Interim Report of the DPI Safeguards Initiative, derived from an extensive consultative process, presented early findings on the opportunities presented by DPI and notes the urgent need for guardrails. It presents that DPI can act as a potent lever to amplify and enable various existing and emergent pathways of inclusive and sustainable growth. Furthermore, it can accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and be employed to nurture safe and more inclusive societies. The actionable Framework provides principles and outcomes-based approaches for implementing in-country DPI-specific mechanisms that purposely avoids potential pitfalls.

The group recognizes that DPI presents significant opportunities and possibilities to deliver international organizations' mandates and strategic goals including the SDGs. Society-wide adoption of DPI cannot sustainably be achieved without the strategic prioritization of protection and inclusion of all members of society, especially the most vulnerable. Safeguards play a crucial role in protecting human rights, ensuring equitable access to services, protecting data, enhancing trust, bringing user centricity, preventing harm/abuse and finally removing redundancies while making systems interoperable.

The IOCG members have noted that extreme care should be taken to ensure safeguards are embedded throughout the DPI life cycle including future evolutions rather than being tacked on as an afterthought. Safeguards should precede or go hand in hand with the stage of the life cycle. DPI offers the potential to strengthen and bring efficiencies to humanitarian response and enable the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as refugees and other forcibly displaced people.

With appropriate safeguards in place, digital systems for humanitarian assistance can be configured to support protection sensitive and inclusive DPI development. The architecture of DPI and the surrounding process/rules/norms must be designed in such cases to support inclusivity, ensuring that marginalized populations are not further disenfranchised. Prioritization of equity and gender responsive safeguards is critical while accounting for intersecting factors that can be associated with increased risks of marginalization, exclusion and discrimination, (such as, age, ability, gender, sexual orientation, linguistic, geographical, race, ethnicity).

2. Discussion on the Role of International Organizations in Safeguards Adoption

International Organizations advise and support governments in DPI. As a result, they can play a key role to ensure adequate safeguarding in DPI implementation. Some of the challenges and the gaps/solutions that international organizations can bring in are detailed below:

- **Complexity and Maturity Disparities:** DPI is inherently complex, requiring multiple steps in designing, developing, rolling out and operating them. At the same time, countries are at different stages of maturity in their technological, legal and normative and data capabilities. Accordingly, the nature and scope of possible harms associated with DPI and the capacity to address them by implementing DPI safeguards may vary widely. International organizations could provide advice, technical support and funding needed for the implementation of safeguards.
- **Public Ownership vs Agency-Driven Agendas:** Effective DPI safeguards implementation requires strong public ownership and engagement from all stakeholders, including inhabitants, civil society organizations, and research community. Many times, DPI implementation efforts are concentrated on a few agencies and technology providers. A solution-neutral and multi stakeholder led transparent approach is crucial to ensure that solutions are chosen based on their suitability to the country and its context. International organizations can play the role of technical advisory to help countries make appropriate decisions objectively.

- **Coordination and Duplication Issues:** Lack of coordination among international organizations and the tendency for duplicative efforts or conflicting objectives can lead to inefficiencies and confusion in a country and its responsible authorities who need to implement safeguards. Ensuring a cohesive strategy and avoiding redundant initiatives are important to prevent undermining DPI safeguards efforts and ineffective use. Strengthened coordination between humanitarian entities and State authorities can enable the protection sensitive inclusion of crisis-affected communities DPI, particularly after the emergency response phase.

3. Seven Areas of Collaboration, Cooperation and Coordination

The group recognizes the need for collaborative and coordinated efforts and details seven points of influence that international organizations can provide in adoption of safeguards in the ecosystem:

1. **Technical Assistance:** International organizations, based on their mandate, can play a pivotal role in supporting the implementation of safeguards for DPI by embedding contextual and relevant element of the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework into national strategies and in-country programming, including by providing assessment assistance, benchmarking, sharing practices, technical standards, and legal, regulatory and governance guidelines to ensure a holistic approach, which is technically and financially sustainable and advances the SDGs and the enjoyment of human rights.

International organizations with particular technical and operational expertise, such as humanitarian organizations, can partner with governments to ensure that DPI safeguards are developed and implemented in situations of fragility and conflict and for vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as the forcibly displaced and stateless.

2. **Advocacy:** Adopting safeguards moves the conversation from just being about technical components to a holistic multifaceted one that also encompasses sociological, political, economic aspects, as well as skills and capacity. International organizations can play a critical role in advocacy and awareness efforts to clarify the why, how, and what of safeguards, ensuring that all stakeholders understand and engage with the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework framework effectively. International organizations should advocate for the adoption of safeguards not just as a good practice but as a necessary component for achieving long-term financial and operational benefits for their people/societies, contributing to the attainment of the SDGs and advancement of human rights.

Narrative building is crucial and international organizations could explore marrying their mandates, strategies on Digital development, digital transformation, DPI focussed products with safeguards from their unique contexts, experiences and point of advisory with states (such as advocate for and support the adoption of gender responsive policies across all DPI projects as all of them carry mandate for gender and marginalized communities).

3. **Capacity Strengthening and Funding:** The international organizations can support the implementation of safeguards through capacity-strengthening initiatives and funding and financing mechanisms. They often provide resources and training to help countries develop and maintain robust DPI systems with Safeguards, ensuring that they adhere to international standards. By doing so, they help mitigate disparities between nations, allowing all countries to benefit from secure and resilient digital infrastructures. Their involvement is crucial in promoting equitable access to technology and ensuring that safeguards are both effective and inclusive.
4. **Community Engagement:** Meaningful consultations with stakeholders across the country, including marginalized or underserved communities, enables empathy building and are an essential instrument for identifying problems DPI should address in a given context, and for recognizing possible adverse impacts of DPI projects on people and their rights, with a view to designing solutions to prevent and mitigate such impacts. International organizations are well-placed to both provide technical support to States and undertake such consultations on their behalf depending on their respective mandates.



- 5. Tools and Standards Creation:** International organizations can actively contribute and educate the DPI ecosystem by producing, creating and disseminating practical tools, frameworks, and practices that guide the implementation of DPI safeguards by states and other responsible authorities. This includes developing templates, frameworks, and best practice documents that can be adapted to various contexts. This continuous standard and norm setting is an integral part of international organizations operational strategy. Care should be taken that these tools and guidance are coherent and work to bring the ecosystem together. To that effect, the IOCG recognizes that the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework is being shaped as an unifying framework that is built on the work of the ecosystem via multi-stakeholder working groups, feedback and insights from convenings, country engagements and public consultations, and IOCG.
- 6. Knowledge Sharing:** International organizations can facilitate knowledge sharing such as South-South, North-South and South-North knowledge exchange, promoting inter-government coordination across ministries or states and multilateral cooperation within a country through coordinated efforts such as cross-border issues like data flow and digital identity. Collaboration among international organizations is key. For example, when an organization such as UNICEF encounters challenges outside its mandate, it should connect with other agencies such as UNDP or World Bank that can offer the necessary expertise. This ensures a holistic approach to DPI adoption and safeguards implementation.
- 7. Cooperation and Coordination:** To conclude, the members of the IOCG acknowledge that complexity of DPI's are manifold. There are many actors who form the DPI ecosystem such as public sector organizations, planners, legislators, regulators and adjudicators, industry organizations, private sector providers (of software, cybersecurity, cloud services, data and other products and services), maintainers of infrastructure, international and national standards bodies, international organizations, funders, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, community representatives, and individuals. No single group of stakeholders can develop, maintain or sustain DPI by themselves; a whole of society approach bringing the ecosystem listed above with clear roles and responsibilities can make these systems effective, safe and inclusive. International organizations play a key role in furthering cooperation and coordination within the ecosystem.