Global Digital Compact:

Position paper on V3 of the Digital Global Compound

Fundación Multitudes
September, 2024.

Multitudes recognizes the global concern and the importance of creating a more inclusive and safe digital environment, particularly in addressing disinformation. Multitudes work has focused on the impact of disinformation on democracy, the challenges faced by Latin America in this regard, the defense of democracy and the protection of human rights in the digital space, and the integration of a gender framework within institutions and regulations.

Fundación Multitudes's efforts can be seen in the virtual consultations with stakeholders for Brief 8, where we proposed incorporating a gender perspective and including a dedicated gender principle for the recommendations. We advocated for a bottom-up approach to considering member states' diverse legal and cultural dimensions to actively work to bridge the technological gap. We emphasized the need for digital platforms to be held accountable like any other industry.

In addition to our recent publications, we have released an in-depth analysis of the OECD's report titled "Facts not Fakes." Our analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of combating disinformation, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that involves promoting media literacy and fostering active engagement from civil society. We underscore the crucial role of strengthening public institutions to empower them to effectively address the challenges brought about by disinformation in the digital sphere.

However, our analysis also highlights a notable omission in the OECD's report, specifically the absence of addressing the gender dimension in the context of combating disinformation. We believe that gender considerations are integral to understanding and addressing the multifaceted nature of disinformation, and we advocate for a more comprehensive approach that encompasses this crucial aspect.

In line with the work that Multitudes has already carried out, we now present a position towards the third revision of the Global Digital Compact (GDC). After a long discussion, the document is on the eve of its definitive presentation at the Summit of the Future. The GDC, presented as an annex of the Pact for the Future, aims to set objectives, principles, commitments, and actions to achieve "an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for all."

Although significant discussions have been conducted around the document, its third revision still has important issues that should be addressed. We specifically highlight three:

Information integrity

The concept of “information integrity,” widely spread and defended in different UN documents, especially in Policy Brief 8, remains vague. The term, supposedly a new framework to define a sain digital ecosystem, is only mentioned in a specific section related to Objective 3: Fostering an inclusive, open, safe, and secure digital space that respects, protects and promotes human rights.

Several Civil Society Organizations have highlighted the importance of linking the idea of information integrity to human rights principles, otherwise, it remains an isolated issue. Even if advances have been made along the different versions of the document, a more holistic idea of information integrity as a pillar for a democratic society remains missing.

Gender

As Fundación Multitudes has repeatedly expressed, gender disinformation is not merely a pressing issue related to information integrity, it is a manifestation of gender-based violence. In that sense, we join other civil society organizations on a joint brief highlighting that "the gender lens should not only be applied as a distinct and independent objective but also incorporated into all aspects of policy and program development."

Following the line of what was stated in the “Civil Society joint brief on the UN Global Digital Compact”, the major problem is that the discussion on gender is diluted in the text, in relation to a small group of themes. Instead, the document should adopt a holistic gender perspective that permeates

the entire document. In this sense, one can refer to how the expectations of civil society in this matter, for example in the “Charter od feminist demands from the Global South" of IT for Change” or in the “Feminist Principles for Including Gender in the GDC” of the Association for Progressive Communication could be better reflected in the text.

Specificities of the Global South

Lastly, we want to highlight the lack of measures to address inequalities in "the global distribution of risks and opportunities offered by existing and emerging technologies", as stated by the Global South Alliance in the Nairobi Civil Society Meeting.

All principles and measures towards a better digital future should take into account the existing disparities between different countries and regions, especially in an issue that is broadly dominated by Global North companies. Global South countries are physically and imaginatively far from the headquarters of Big Tech companies, which treat these countries and their citizens as less important. That requires specific measures. The idea of "sovereignty" does not even appear in the document.

Particularly when it comes to issues related to the digital economy, the document presents an uncritical view of North-South dynamics and assumes an assimilation of the countries of the global majority to the current paradigms, dominated by the countries of the North. This is clear, for example, with respect to the insistence on the need to encourage cross-border data flows; the lack of critical reflection on the extractivist logics that have currently shaped the data economy prevents us from seeing that insisting on them, without incentives or the availability of resources to imagine alternatives, prevents the emergence of alternative paradigms that allow economic development in the countries of the global South and that at the same time is fully respectful of human rights.

References

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About this paper

This paper was written by Nina Santos, with contributions by Luisa Monroy and Vladimir Garay. Fundación Multitudes is a Latin American non-profit organization focused on fostering co-responsibility between citizens and authorities, advocating for a more Open State, promoting transparent institutions and accountability to strengthen democracy.

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