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Policy Brief

Task Force 2: Digitalization of the Global Economy

Innovating Digital Infrastructure: G7 Champions Data Agency

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Key Points

The G7 countries can catalyze positive digital infrastructure innovation by:

- Rethinking the role of government as a market shaper for fair and inclusive digital infrastructure solutions:
    - Governments should invest in digital infrastructure solutions, use regulations and public markets to encourage adoption, but also develop technical standards that are globally coherent yet context-cognizant, and implement progressive procurement policies.
- Embedding data agency at the core of digital infrastructure:
    - Governments should mandate using open-source, interoperable, and decentralized protocols to foster trust and resilience in their digital infrastructure solutions.
- Mandating Interoperability to prevent digital fragmentation:
    - Governments should develop digital infrastructure solutions building upon the internet while adopting a context-based approach that ensures resilience, openness, and inclusivity.

Addressing Power Imbalances in Data-Driven Economies

Data drives economic and social power in the digital age, intertwining with personhood and influencing who benefits from technological progress. Recognizing data as power, governments must prioritize developing people-centered infrastructure to ensure equitable access, security, and accountability in the digital ecosystem.

Digital Infrastructure Solutions—spanning private, public, and civic systems—are essential enablers of connectivity, communication, and innovation across economies and societies. They include advanced digital identification systems, next-generation data architectures, and decentralized protocols. These systems—covering identity systems, payments, and data exchanges—can foster inclusive economic participation, broaden access to essential services, and unlock data-driven solutions for global challenges like inequality, health, and climate change.

However, growing market concentration among a few dominant tech platforms threatens fair competition, personal data control, and user agency. Global regulatory approaches underscore the need for frameworks that balance innovation, privacy, and equity (Willige 2023). To ensure inclusive growth, digital infrastructure must empower individuals while promoting transparency and sustainable development.

Legislations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), despite their groundbreaking approach, have not fully safeguarded data agency because consent-based frameworks cannot effectively challenge existing power dynamics (“Data Protection Day:

Only 1.3% of Cases before EU DPAs Result in a Fine" 2025; Degeling et al. 2019). The current global digital economy model fails to redistribute power and requires redesign. The challenge is to shift the discussion from mere technological fixes toward incentive structures that encourage decentralization and equitable outcomes. Initiatives like Google's "Privacy Sandbox," Apple's "App Tracking Transparency," and Meta's "End-to-End Encryption" in Messenger and WhatsApp are technological fixes that retain centralized control over user data within closed ecosystems. Simply enhancing algorithms or transparency does not resolve the underlying issue: current incentive structures favor power concentration, data extraction, and profit maximization.

The G7 countries are members of the G20, which now includes the African Union (AU) as well as the European Union (EU). Further, both groups adopt UN-led processes like the Global Digital Compact (GDC). Given the pace and scale of digital innovation, and differing contexts within the G20, global consensus-building on data governance standards cannot happen easily. Yet, as a group of industrialized AI hubs, the G7 can leverage collective influence to promote frameworks that strengthen data agency, establish continuous multistakeholder dialogue, set standards for seamless data exchange, encourage fair competition, and nurture open digital ecosystems to advance positive innovation.

Reclaiming Digital Infrastructure Solutions for a Fair Data Economy

Governments, as regulators and market shapers, are well-positioned to drive a fair digital economy by setting standards, investing in infrastructure, and releasing public data under robust governance. Such measures can catalyze innovation, build trust, and challenge monopolistic practices.

In Europe, public research and government funding have been instrumental in the development of foundational open-source technologies, including Arduino, Blender, and VLC–key building blocks of today's digital landscape – advancing from extractive models toward decentralized frameworks that prioritize transparency, inclusion, and sustainability.

Existing frameworks, namely the United Nations' GDC and the G20's Digital Public Infrastructure, G7's Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT), and G20's Framework for Systems of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) provide a foundation but fall short in harmonizing definitions, enabling interoperability, and aligning regional approaches. Most recently, the T7 Italy Communiqué (2024) also endorsed a shared criteria for digital infrastructure – including cloud computing, and DPI deployed via public cloud – to facilitate trust-based, cross-border data flows and promote interoperable data governance systems.

Going forward, clarifying taxonomies, distinguishing data types, and balancing digital sovereignty narratives with openness will be crucial. This is particularly urgent as artificial intelligence (AI) systems increasingly become a critical component of modern digital infrastructure. They can enhance functionality, efficiency, and scalability through various means, including predictive analytics models, scalable cloud and edge computing, smart networks that optimize traffic, and improved integration of API-driven architecture. To build

a digital ecosystem centered around people, governments must act with vision and commitment, employing digital infrastructures that empower underserved communities, enable transformative AI services, and ensure equitable value distribution across economies.

Moreover, the rapid and widespread evolution of advanced AI systems will impact different social groups unequally, making public engagement and momentum-building to safeguard data agency a cornerstone of ethical AI development. Since G7 members also sit within the G20 – representing 80% of the global population – collectively, they have a unique opportunity to advance a fairer digital economy at scale.

Digital Infrastructure and Governance Challenges amid Geopolitical Uncertainties

The three digital empires – the EU, US, and China (Bradford 2023) – take fundamentally different approaches to regulating data, reflecting distinct views on how citizens should own and manage their information in relation to the state and the private sector. Although the three see the digital ecosystem as a driver of economic progress and opportunity, their diverging views on privacy, security, and governance represents one of the most significant public policy challenges of our time. Nevertheless, governments must help citizens understand their data use's implications to reinforce societal resilience–an area where they have so far fallen short.

In an increasingly geopoliticized global tech arena, these divergent approaches offer a prime leadership opportunity to like-minded stakeholders to champion a unified vision for resilient digital infrastructure ecosystems, built on openness, human rights and redistribution of power. Meanwhile, inaction in addressing these challenges have profound consequences, including:

- Weakening democracy: The unchecked consolidation of digital platforms can undermine democratic processes by concentrating information and decision-making power in the hands of a few entities. This concentration may erode public trust, limiting diverse perspectives and diminishing public accountability–essential for a healthy democracy. This would amount to the state's inability to protect citizens' rights and interests in the digital realm.
- Reinforcing monopolies: Without proactive regulation and governments' acting as positive market shapers, dominant tech companies will further entrench their control and monopoly over entire markets, stifling competition and innovation.
- Deepening AI-driven inequalities: As artificial intelligence technologies become more efficient, accelerating demand for cloud services, a few tech giants (AWS, Google, Microsoft) continue to tighten their grip on digital infrastructure. With exclusive access to vast computing power and proprietary data, they continue to expand their AI market dominance, locking out smaller players and tightening their control over governance. The cloud market share of these three main monopolies have been reinforced by the AI boom. In 2018, competitors outside these three

controlled 50.1% of the global cloud market, but by 2024, their share had dwindled to just 36% (Głowicka and Málek 2024; "Global Cloud Infrastructure Market Share 2024).

Although embracing open-source protocols promises innovation and inclusivity, transitioning to these frameworks comes with upfront costs and scalability challenges. However, as with any major economic policy change, this transition will also require political and economic capital. The G7 and its working groups must therefore engage in focused discussions about the trade-offs to balance the benefits with practical implementation.

Future Policy Pathways

The G7 has played a pivotal role in shaping international frameworks on data governance and AI ethics, from endorsing UNESCO's Recommendations on the Ethics of AI and the OECD AI Principles to advancing initiatives such as Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT). A key example of its collective influence is the Hiroshima AI Process (HAIP), launched under Japan's G7 Presidency, which led to the development of the International Code of Conduct and the Reporting Framework for Organizations Developing Advanced AI Systems. Developed by the OECD through a multistakeholder consultation process, this voluntary reporting framework highlights the G7's capacity to drive global data governance standards and set norms for responsible AI development.

The following recommendations build on ongoing discussions on DPI and commitments to prevent Internet fragmentation at global fora including the G7, G20, and the UN GDC. They incorporate key insights from over thirty experts including policymakers, academics, and business leaders — gathered during a consultation on the sidelines of the Paris Peace Forum and on the road to the AI Action Summit in Paris on November 12, 2024 (Nicole et. al 2024).

Recommendation 1: Rethinking the Role of Government to Shape Markets for Fair and Inclusive Digital Infrastructure Solutions

Governments must move beyond traditional regulatory roles and become proactive market shapers. By creating the right incentives, they can foster the emergence, scalability, and sustainability of digital infrastructure solutions empowering individuals and promoting equitable access. It is crucial that these efforts be rooted in a multistakeholder model – where governments collaborate with industry, academia, and civil society – to ensure that decisions reflect diverse perspectives and serve the public interest. To achieve this, governments should:

- **Invest strategically in digital infrastructure:** Support initiatives that bridge the digital divide while encouraging innovation.
- **Develop globally coherent yet context-sensitive technical standards:** Create policies that enable interoperability and flexibility, ensuring local needs are met without compromising global integration.
- **Adopt progressive procurement policies:** Leverage public markets and regulatory tools to incentivize business models that offer viable alternatives to existing monopolies.

For example, in countries like France, where the public sector holds extensive data in health and education, opening up this data under robust governance frameworks could catalyze the creation of innovative AI-driven services – including adaptive learning tools in education and personalized healthcare solutions. For instance, the secure Estonia data exchange system "X-Road", saved over 1,885 years of working time in 2023, demonstrating how public investment in interoperability enhances efficiency and innovation ("X-Road Factsheet" 2024).

Additionally, public-sector involvement in innovation has helped nurture promising alternatives to dominant digital platforms. Initiatives like EU Next Generation Internet have supported projects namely Mastodon, a decentralized social media platform that empowers users with greater control over their data and online interactions. When governments invest in open, interoperable technologies, they foster competition, reduce dependence on monopolistic platforms, and create a more resilient digital ecosystem.

Recommendation 2: Prioritizing Data Agency by Placing Citizens' Control at the Core of Fair and Inclusive Digital Infrastructure Solutions

Data agency – the ability of citizens to have control over their personal data, including how it is used, shared and monetized, ensuring they have true voice, choice and stake – must be embedded in the shared vision of Digital Infrastructure Solutions across G7 and G20 countries. Indeed, concerns about personal data are particularly acute in India (93%) and Brazil (89%) – countries with high adoption rates in digital infrastructure solutions and often cited as models to follow (Bell and Theodule 2024).

To embed data agency as a core criterion for digital infrastructure solutions development, governments should mandate the use of open-source, interoperable, and decentralized protocols. Many technical protocols — namely Solid, Activity Pub Protocol, Decentralized Social Networking Protocol (DSNP) etc. – are already in use and can serve as models to foster trust and resilience. Such protocols could be leveraged to inform governments' digital infrastructure development as practical use cases. Embedding data agency in the design of digital infrastructure is not merely an issue of individual rights – it is essential for building trust in governments and public digital services. When citizens have meaningful control over their data, they are more likely to engage with digital services, adopt new technologies, and contribute to the digital economy. Conversely, a lack of agency fuels skepticism, hindering adoption and undermining the effectiveness of digital public infrastructure. When data governance frameworks prioritize user control, transparency, and accountability, governments can foster a digital ecosystem where trust is embedded in the infrastructure, thereby strengthening trust in democratic institutions and boosting public confidence in the digital transition.

Additionally, governments must rethink the regulatory paradigm, moving beyond reactive constraints on tech giants and toward proactively empowering citizens. This approach requires addressing shortcomings in current legislation – such as the EU's GDPR, which has failed to fully empower citizens or shift power dynamics away from monopolies (Abate, Bianco, and Casalini 2025) – and adopting an intersectional lens to approach data governance challenges. Moving beyond surface-level regulations that focus on individual consent mechanisms (e.g., cookie policies), governments must establish frameworks that

place citizens at the center of data governance – ensuring individuals can not only opt in or out but truly determine their data is used, shared, and monetized.

The Solid project, used by the government of Flanders and supported by the Open Data Institute, introduces a data trust model where individuals store their data in personal online data stores (Pods) and control access permissions, shifting power away from centralized platforms ("ODI and Solid: Building a Future Where Data Works for Everyone" 2024). Similarly, the EU-funded DECODE project has explored cooperative data governance models, enabling citizens in the cities of Amsterdam and Barcelona to collectively manage their data through decentralized and privacy-preserving frameworks ("DECODE – Decentralised Citizens Owned Data Ecosystem" 2016). These initiatives highlight practical pathways for ensuring individuals have a true stake in the digital economy.

Recommendation 3: Mandating Interoperability Between Digital Infrastructure Solutions to Avoid Fragmentation of the Digital Ecosystem

As governments develop new digital infrastructure solutions, it is crucial to recognize that isolated, non-interoperable systems will exacerbate existing inequalities and restrict access to essential digital resources, widening the digital divide. Instead, policies should prioritize open standards and protocols that enable seamless interaction across platforms, ensuring digital sovereignty efforts do not create a fragmented, inaccessible internet. Ensuring interoperability between digital infrastructure solutions is not just a technical preference – it is vital for maintaining an open, accessible, and competitive digital ecosystem.

India's Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) exemplifies how interoperability in digital infrastructure can drive competition, inclusivity, and accessibility while preventing the fragmentation of digital ecosystems. Unlike traditional e-commerce platforms that operate within closed, proprietary environments, ONDC establishes a decentralized, open protocol framework allowing buyers, sellers, and service providers to interact seamlessly across different platforms. By prioritizing open standards and API-driven interoperability, ONDC enables businesses of all sizes to participate without being locked into monopolistic ecosystems, fostering a more equitable and competitive digital marketplace. With over 274 network participants operating across over 616 cities as of January 2025, ONDC demonstrates how interoperability can drive economic growth, job creation, and broader access to digital commerce by boosting choice, and preventing silos ("Revolutionizing Digital Commerce: The ONDC Initiative" 2025).

Despite global competition and geopolitical fragmentation having escalated since its inception, the G7 DFFT working group remains committed to converging on measures that foster interoperable transfer tools to achieve a high level of robust data protection. However, there is potential for the group to take more tangible measures.

Interoperability has long been the backbone of an open internet, enabling seamless global connectivity, innovation, and competition. Fragmentation, on the other hand, risks creating isolated digital ecosystems that limit access, entrench monopolies, and undermine the fundamental openness that has allowed the internet to thrive. With our fragile digital ecosystem increasingly at risk of fragmentation in many international negotiations (Komaitis 2024), protecting an open, accessible internet is paramount and should not be taken for

granted. Many current discussions on digital infrastructure solutions are motivated by digital sovereignty arguments, leading many to be mistaken in seeking to reinvent the foundation of the internet rather than building upon it with a context-based approach that prioritizes resilience, openness, and inclusivity. This often stems from a limited understanding of the underlying infrastructure and internet stack.

Bridging this knowledge gap requires equipping policymakers with a deeper understanding of the technology stack to effectively and responsibly shape digital sovereignty initiatives. Currently, there is limited interface between those who build technologies (technologists, tech companies), those who set standards to govern them (policymakers at global, and regional fora), and those who they most impact (workers, CSOs, unions, and marginalized groups).

Ministers, elected officials, and public servants often have limited foundational knowledge of data governance and its implications—a gap that challenges the development of effective policies supporting citizens in managing their data. Initiatives like the Internet Society's (ISOC) collaboration with the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) to educate policymakers on internet functionality can help bridge this gap. However, expanding and institutionalizing these efforts is essential to enable more informed and effective decision-making in the digital age. The G7 Digital and Tech Ministers Meetings is an important platform to highlight existing knowledge gaps and facilitate capacity strengthening through meaningful multistakeholder interface. Through greater coordination across G7 working groups and interlinkages to promising policy pathways identified by relevant T7 task forces –such as frameworks for trustworthy AI, cross-border data governance, and digital infrastructure resilience –these meetings can drive more informed and effective policy making in the digital space.

By mapping existing systems, conducting rigorous research, and engaging with civil society and technological organizations, governments can identify promising practices and case studies that exemplify universal accessibility and collaborative potential. For instance, technical protocols like the DSNP demonstrate how public-interest interoperable solutions that prioritize user agency and collaboration can foster a more open and accessible internet ("Decentralized Social Networking Protocol (DSNP)" 2024).

Conclusion

To achieve an equitable digital future, citizens must have a voice, choice, and stake in their digital lives. The G7, with individual countries including the majority of the world's leading tech hubs, and collectively as an influential caucus within the G20, can prioritize data agency, ensure interoperability, and foster positive innovation to create a digital ecosystem where value is equitably distributed across economies.

As technology advances at an unprecedented pace, governments must make bold political and economic commitments to shape digital infrastructure that prioritizes data agency, a prerequisite to fostering fair competition, and sustainable growth. The future of digital economies – underpinned by multi-trillion-dollar markets – hinges on how governments choose to shape this infrastructure and distribute value across society.

Author Biographies

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Christian Kastrop is CEO and Partner at Global Solutions Initiative, Germany. Previously he was a State Secretary for Digital Society and Consumer Policy within the German Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection.

In his former role, he initiated many projects and initiatives that aimed to build an empowering and effective digital society, individually and collectively. He was responsible for the recent digital European and German regulation and took a leading role in shaping the debate around the EU Commission's AI regulation, the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act, The Data Governance Act and the German Network Enforcement Act. Before being appointed State Secretary, Christian Kastrop served as the European Director of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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Jeb has extensive experience in stakeholder relations, partnership-building, fundraising, and organizational management – all at a global scale. Formerly a Vice President at PwC, he is expert in international affairs and global trends, with a focus on using data to facilitate fact-based dialogue that opens minds and encourages enduring change.

Sarah Nicole, Manager Policy & Research, Project Liberty Institute, France

Sarah Nicole is a policy and technical governance specialist. Her experiences span working for major tech companies in Europe, leading a non-profit for a decade and advancing educational and social policies.

In her role at Project Liberty Institute, Sarah develops technical and academic governance frameworks and leads international advocacy efforts for a healthier tech ecosystem. She focuses on building the governance of the open-source Decentralized Social Networking Protocol (DSNP).

Her diverse international experience spans Paris, Washington D.C., Brussels, Geneva, Boston, and Shanghai. Sarah Nicole has published extensively on the governance of digital ecosystems as well as the geopolitics of emerging technologies (quantum computing, immersive environment, decentralized technologies, etc.).

Vidisha Mishra, Global Outreach & Policy. Global Solutions Initiative, Germany

Vidisha is a global policy professional with 11 years of progressively responsible work experience in policy advice, programme management and strategic engagement in Europe, South and Southeast Asia. Vidisha leads programmatic and policy engagement at GSI, focusing on partnerships with the G20, G7, and related multilateral groups. In previous roles, she has led strategic outreach and global partnerships with UN agencies, civil society and member state governments at the UN's think tank on global health (Kuala Lumpur); and led gender mainstreaming in research and programmes at ORF - one of Asia's most influential foreign policy think tanks (Delhi). She has a track record in the foreign policy arena through

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Mateo has experience contributing to initiatives that strengthen community engagement and foster partnerships. In his current position, he manages programs and projects, with a focus on digital topics and has written one publication. Mateo has played a key role in organizing and managing GSI's efforts related to digital transformation, including AI and data governance, and other areas of strategic priority, including events like the Global Solutions Summit, among others. Mateo holds a Master in International Affairs from the Hertie School and a Bachelor in Ethics, Politics and Social Thought from Bard College Berlin.

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