

Digital Nations Ministerial Declaration: Better Data, Better Society

We, the Digital Nations Ministers, met in Lisbon, Portugal, on 14 November 2023, under the chairmanship of Mário Campolargo, Secretary of State for Digitalisation and Administrative Modernisation of Portugal, to discuss the digital government agenda in line with the theme of *'Better data, Better Society'*.

We recognize the transformative power of data in shaping our societies and driving progress across all sectors, and firmly believe that by harnessing the potential of data in an ethical, transparent, responsible, inclusive, and equitable manner, we can create a better society for all.

With this shared vision, we declare our commitment to the following 10 principles of "Better Data, Better Society" to guide our collective actions and endeavours:

1. **Ethical and Fair Data Use:** We acknowledge that data-driven decisions and algorithms can have profound impacts on individuals and society and that ethical considerations should inform our approach to using data for policy development or public service delivery. By adopting ethical frameworks and guidelines, we seek to minimize harm and maximize the benefits of data-driven approaches, ensuring ethical and fair data use, addressing biases, and avoiding discriminatory practices.

We will strive to promote fairness, accountability, and transparency in the design, deployment, and evaluation of digital systems.

2. **Data Privacy and Security:** We recognize privacy and security are fundamental rights in the digital age. We pledge to uphold the highest standards of data protection to safeguard data against unauthorised access and breaches while respecting individuals' rights to control their personal data. Individuals should also be given the tools to manage their digital footprints, by providing mechanisms to access and correct their data, and should have possibilities for redress in case of misuse.

We will work to promote responsible data usage practices to foster trust and confidence in the data ecosystem.

3. **Empowerment through Data:** We acknowledge that access to accurate, comprehensive, and timely data is essential for empowering individuals, communities, and organisations. It is fundamental to promote open data initiatives, ensure data transparency, and foster data literacy for all citizens.

We will make efforts to ensure improved data flows to guarantee communities and individuals have access to the data they need for decision-making, while fostering data literacy and capabilities for all citizens, using a proactive and personalised approach.

4. **Collaboration and Data Sharing:** We understand that collaboration and data sharing are crucial for addressing some of the current societal challenges. Governments should foster a culture of collaboration, breaking down silos, using a proactive and personalized approach and promoting interdisciplinary partnerships. By working together, we have a greater capacity to unlock the full potential of data for driving innovation, improving public services, and enhancing policy development while respecting data protection, intellectual property rights, privacy, and security considerations.

We will actively support national and international data-sharing initiatives, fostering collaboration among different government agencies and departments, as well as with trusted external partners.

5. **Inclusion and Equity:** We recognize that data should be inclusive and equitable, reflecting the diversity of our societies. It is crucial to address bias and data gaps that disproportionately affect vulnerable communities and thus impact the fair and just society we wish to live in. By overcoming digital divides, we wish to ensure equitable access to data and technology and its benefits.

We will foster diversity in data collection, analysis, and decision-making processes, aiming to build a fair and just society.

6. **Transparency and Accountability:** Governments should be transparent about their data usage practices and provide clear information to individuals about how their data is collected, used, and shared. Public policies should be developed in the open and with the active and meaningful participation of those impacted. Data about the effectiveness of public policies and programs needs to be made openly available to support the accountability of public institutions.

We will strive to promote transparency and openness regarding public policies and services.

7. **Responsible use of artificial intelligence systems:** Governments should act to promote the design, development and use of artificial intelligence systems in the public sector in a responsible and beneficial manner for all populations.

We will commit to the principles and values described in the Digital Nations Shared Approach to AI, and agree to continue cooperating to advance the responsible use of AI in the public sector.

8. **Sustainability:** We recognize the value of data in promoting environmental sustainability through well-informed decision-making and the adoption of practical solutions to environmental problems. As we do this, we will also work to ensure that

the environmental impact of data use is understood, and practices are put in place to ensure data is stored and managed sustainably.

We will work to build a greener, more sustainable future as data availability and analysis capabilities advance. Data will be used to promote sustainable practices by increasing awareness, encouraging sustainable behaviour, and coordinating economic activities with environmental objectives.

9. **Data-driven decision-making:** We recognize the importance of data-driven decision-making and data governance. In today's rapidly evolving environment, relying on intuition alone can be insufficient. Data has the potential to offer useful insights, considering trends and areas of opportunity or concern. Through effective data governance, we ensure the integrity, accuracy, and relevance of data, making certain that every decision made is based on reliable information.

We will aim to ensure that policymaking, government strategies and actions are timely, effective and based on data.

By endorsing this declaration, we the Digital Nations Ministers commit ourselves to the pursuit of increasingly better data practices, recognizing their significant potential to shape more inclusive, fair, and prosperous societies. We invite individuals, organizations, and governments worldwide to join us on this journey towards harnessing the power of data for the collective benefit of humanity.

Together, we can materialize the vision of a "Better Data, Better Society".
