



DIGITALIZATION JOINT STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, April 29, 2020

As the world tries to find effective solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments and businesses are becoming increasingly reliant on digital technologies to support their communities and citizens. Digital systems have become a lifeline for all businesses as well as health services, and serve as an essential building block within a larger framework of measures to contain the spread of the virus.

We, the **B20** and **S20** welcome the commitment of the G20 Leaders at the Extraordinary Summit on 26 March, “to do whatever it takes and to use all available policy tools to minimize the economic and social damage from the pandemic, restore global growth, maintain market stability, and strengthen resilience”, and “to work together to increase research and development funding for vaccines and medicines, leverage digital technologies, and strengthen scientific international cooperation.”

While digital technologies can significantly aid in containing the pandemic and minimizing the social and economic impacts, with special reference to women and men who are frontline health workers, self-employed and carers, the unfolding crisis will have a bearing on the global economy and reinforce the significance of the digital economy.

This requires a swift and coordinated response on a number of important policy issues across the entire spectrum of the digital domain. In this context, we collectively call on the G20 Leaders to act on the following:

I. **Urgent Short-term Priorities**

- **Strengthen the digital infrastructure.** As citizens are forced to self-isolate or quarantine, and governments and businesses are shifting to remote working to mitigate the spread of the virus, there is an increased pressure on digital infrastructure. G20 Members must make efforts to strengthen an inclusive, resilient and interoperable digital infrastructure digital infrastructure in each of their economies in order to lower the economic and societal impact of the pandemic as well as prepare for post-pandemic citizens' lives, with special considerations for the digitally disadvantaged and financially vulnerable communities. Immediate measures should include mandating digital entertainment services to scale-down bandwidth use and addressing inter-country and intra-country roadblocks such as security concerns related to applications (e.g., video conferencing services) as well as infrastructure elements (e.g., 5G). Simultaneously, G20 Members must ensure that people have the tools (laptops, smart phones and/or tablets etc.) to access such infrastructure. Looking ahead, digital infrastructure and specifically 5G can also play a key role in the economic recovery and fundamentally change our ways of working and living our lives. We need high quality infrastructure that can support a multitude of innovative applications that support remote working, remote process controls as well as reliable detection of health.
- **Advance digital information technology especially in the field of digital health infrastructure.** As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads, digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence-assisted infection risk identification, 3D-printing, IoT, and e-commerce & smart logistics enabled global supply chain mechanism can be critical in supporting the fight against the disease and helping patients and healthcare workers. The G20 must collaborate with the private sector and research organizations in advancing digital information technologies that will aid prevention measures, while adhering to standards for good data stewardship. The G20 must also ensure that the extraordinary measures adopted to temporarily harness digital data, e.g., for monitoring those infected or suspected of COVID-19, are critically reviewed until the end of 2020 and withdrawn after the crisis has subsided. Personal privacy and citizen rights on digital data are essential and must be ensured.
- **Create a trustworthy mechanism for secure data processing.** Analysis of big data relating to citizens' movement, disease transmission patterns and health

monitoring is critically important, particularly in the context of epidemic forecasting and decision-making, and therefore, keeping the spread of the disease within reasonable limits. The G20 must create a trustworthy mechanism for nations to share data for the purpose of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, while protecting the privacy of data owners whether individuals, corporations, or governments. The G20 must also explore how such intended purpose oriented regulation of data can be used in the future to harness the potential of digital technologies in addressing or preventing potential future crisis as well as eliminating existing gender biases in data sets and algorithms to mitigate the risk of exacerbation of inequalities. Such privacy protected data should be accessible to all stakeholders for appropriate use, including long term research.

- **Advance food security.** As citizens are forced to self-isolate or quarantine, many vulnerable communities face hunger and food insecurity. Food insecurity has negative impact on vulnerable communities during normal times, which are worsened during pandemic times. The G20 must make efforts to partner with various stakeholders, including private sector and research organizations in order to reduce food insecurity. A part of such efforts is through efficiencies brought about by artificial intelligence, better information/data sharing and accessible digital infrastructure.

II. Significant Medium-term Priorities

- **Improve cyber-security to protect home and remote working.** With an increase in remote working and wider acceptance and use of digital technologies, the world has observed an increase in cyber-attacks, with malicious actors looking to take advantage of pandemic fears. The G20 must work with stakeholders from industry, civil society, scientific community, technology experts, and others interested to develop and promote a catalogue of minimum recommended mandatory cyber security standards as well as best practice guidance on cyber-safe remote working practices, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, that businesses of all sizes can implement.

- **Monitor cyber safety for children, women, and minors, and enhance digital citizenship and literacy.** A significant percentage of children have already been exposed to cyber-risks such as cyber-bullying, gaming disorders, unwanted sexual contact, and fake news. Because of school shutdowns, children are spending more time online, increasing their exposure to cyber-risks with less support. With the global nature of cyber safety and digital citizenship, the G20 must promote and coordinate global efforts to monitor and enhance online safety for children and women through recommended global standards of digital literacy, skills, and readiness.
- **Promote and coordinate inclusive digital skills development.** Despite large investments in technology and digital infrastructure for the ongoing digital transformation, there has been lack of global efforts and investment toward skilling/upskilling students, citizens, and the workforce to thrive in the digital economy. This gap will bring increasing inequality, slow down productivity and agility, and increase human-made cyber-security and safety issues. It is critical that the G20 quickly coordinates global efforts to enhance the level of digital skills training by adopting recommended global standards of digital literacy, skills, and readiness for training, monitoring, and certification.
- **Provide quality digital access to all.** Most countries are relying on technology-enabled working and learning arrangements to counter the health impacts on people and to help contain the pandemic. In order to prepare for the inevitable shift in technology integrated business operations and tech-advanced education delivery systems, G20 Members must, in their economies, make efforts to provide easy, usable digital access to all, with free provision for the digitally excluded. Indeed, the current crisis underlines the necessity to address the right to internet access.
- **Accelerate adoption of digital financial services.** As governments across the world are considering scaling up their social protection mechanisms and direct financial transfers to households and small businesses, countries with greater adoption of digital financial services (DFS) will find it relatively easier to ensure continued access to these services. Countries with advanced digital payment ecosystems can also take advantage of and reinforce digital economy developments such as tele-medicine, e-commerce and tech-advanced education delivery systems. While it may not be possible to create entirely new payment ecosystems, the G20 must fast-track regulatory changes that are already in the pipeline in areas such as interoperability and

mobile money adoption, the use of Digital Identities and DFS in general. In doing so, the G20 must ensure that the digitalization of payments adequately avoids security fraud and misuse as well as privacy violations, and that it does not exclude vulnerable populations, including women.

- **Accelerate the transition toward digital sobriety.** While digital technologies are vital to helping the economy become more resource efficient, the growing use of such technologies also creates a dramatic increase in energy demand, together with environmental impacts (that are often worse than expected because of rebound effects). This pleads for a digital sobriety that can be achieved by a) accelerating the awareness of the digital environmental impacts in corporations and public organizations among the general public and the research community, b) including environmental impacts as decision-making criteria when developing policies for the purchase and use of digital equipment, and c) enabling organizations to manage their digital transition in an environmentally responsible manner.

It is now the moment for countries to fast-track the digital transformation in an environmentally responsible manner. Only coordinated, collaborative and urgent efforts will minimize the social and economic impact of COVID-19, and shorten the time to revive the global economy in the post-pandemic phase.